

Thomas hobbes



Thomas Hobbes (born in April, 1588, died December, 1679) was an English philosopher, scientist and political theorist. He was the son of an Anglican clergyman. Hobbes entered Oxford University when he was fourteen to sixteen years old and received a bachelor's degree in 1608. He then became a tutor to the Cavendish family and traveled with them a number of times to the continent. After 1621 he translated a few of Francis Bacon's essays into Latin and in 1628 he published an English version of Thucydides works (Walthrust-Jones, 2008). Modern political theory originates with Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). In *Leviathan* and other works, Hobbes presented a bleak picture of violence and disorder as the inevitable condition of human in the state of nature. Peace the main concern of politics could be realized only by a strong sovereign established through a 'social contract'. People would have no rational grounds to challenge the rule of the sovereign so long as peace was maintained. Thomas Hobbes is best known as a philosopher of human nature. Also, he is famous for maintaining that the natural condition of people is one of war, in which life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. Hobbes was an early contract theorist. He believed that the state could be understood as the outcome of an agreement between free human beings to submit to government (Bunnin and Tsui-James, 2003). Hobbes saw peace and order as the basic needs of men but he regarded men as being essentially incapable of living together peaceably. Each man being an individualist whose conduct was determined by his need to satisfy his own desires. Since men differed and had incompatible desire, the natural consequence if they tried to live together in society would be conflict (Pickles Dorothy 1951). According to Hobbes, human beings are not naturally made for the political life. He states that we think too much of ourselves and put

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too much value on present gratification. Conflict can take root from this in forms of quarrelling and violence. If these are familiar patterns of 'bad' behavior when there is law and custom and good manner to restraint people, what would happen if there was no law to govern the 'human nature' when allowed to express itself (Bunnin and Tsui-James, 2003)? What would life be without law? (Thomas 1640: pt 1, ch. 14; 1642: ch 1; 1651: ch. 13) left to do what come naturally, human beings would quickly find themselves in a state of war. They would have to see their own survival and happiness, being not guided by a government sense of what was conducive to survival and happiness but to their own conflicting, fluctuating and irremediably diverse private judgment about what was best. Not being required to defer to anyone else's judgments but not being able either, to rely on others to seek the good co-operatively or benevolently, people would have rationally to expect the worst from one another and if they thought that their safety demanded it, take preemptive action. Thus even 'those who were not naturally greedy or violent might begin to see their own survival and well being in taking as much of what they wanted as they could, or in killing anyone who might be a potential enemy- which could mean anyone. As for those who were naturally violent and greedy and who were normally able to get away with it, they would fight and appropriate goods until stopped by people stronger than themselves. Whoever was a potential victim would have a reason to take action against them first. In this way life with no holds barred would quickly degenerate into fearful insecurity and a permanent struggle for survival. Life in the state of nature is war- the anti-social condition par excellence (Bunnin and Tsui-James, 2003). Hobbes' rules for avoiding civil war if a commonwealth exist and for ending war in the pre-

political state of nature, are called Laws of Nature. In the state of nature, the right that people have to give up in order to secure peace is the 'right of nature'.-he right to be one's own judge of what will make one safe and happy so long as each is his or her own judge of these things. There is no insurance against war. The right must therefore be given up (Bunnin and Tsui-James, 2003). If each person retains the right of nature, the result would be what Hobbes calls the state of nature, in which the life of man is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (Honderich, 2005). Hobbes was not thinking of a simple renunciation of this right. He had in mind a transfer of it (Hobbes 1640: pt1, ch. 15, i ii; 1642. ch. 2. iv 1651: ch: 14) by most in the state of nature to a few of to one in the state of nature, who would then decide for the many what would make each as safe and happy as possible. The one or the few would become a sovereign power and the many would become subjects of that power and be obligated to live in keeping with the sovereign's judgments about safety and well being (Bunnin and Tsui-James, 2003). One can see that Hobbes has both a secular conception of the state and one that tries to show that the existence of the state is reasonable and not arbitrary. There is no divine right of the sovereign to rule that obliges one to obey, nor yet is it a matter of the sovereign's simply being more powerful than one is oneself. The obedience springs from a transfer of right for the sake of peace. The state or absolute ruler is thus seen as a security or peace keeping device who existence is in the interest of the many rather than as a facsimile on earth of a divine ordering of things by nobility or rank or station (Bunnin and Tsui-James, 2003). In conclusion of how human nature is so constructed that we can only attain peace if we are governed by an absolute ruler Hobbes stated that, the basic motivation of humankind is " a <https://assignbuster.com/thomas-hobbes/>

perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death". Given the universality of this desire for power, life in the state of nature, before the imposition of civil laws backed by sovereign force, must be a perpetual struggle for possessions, supremacy and glory. In this state, the outcome of one's productive effects is always uncertain and life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. To avoid this intolerable situation, the law of nature, which dictates self-preservation, commands people to surrender their liberty to a single sovereign. Hobbes' account does not point inevitably to any single form of government. He allows that the sovereignty may reside in a single ruler (monarchy), a group (aristocracy) or the entire population (democracy). He does insist, however, that whatever form the sovereign body takes its power must be absolute. The reason for this is that the purpose of the original covenant is to create an authority strong enough to protect each member of the populace from the incursions of the others (Cahn 2006)