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Thomas Hobbes Philosophy: The Modern Leviathan

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Abstract

While defining Thomas Hobbes and his philosophy, it would be useful to know his background history, as well as his lifetime experiences. The English Civil Wars between the years 1642-1651 have a fundamental place in shaping the mindset of Hobbes. His philosophical perspectives revolve around the concept of fear produced by the destructive atmosphere of the civil wars. Hobbes's reaction to these unwholesome circumstances for human life is his peremptory defence of authority while evaluating individualism and freedom as harmful concepts for society. Instead of democracy and equality, Hobbes proposes what he calls the Leviathan, whose governmental force is constructed upon fear and inequality by the contractual wills of the subjects giving Leviathan an endless ultimate authority. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the application of the Hobbesian philosophy into the modern world and the transformation from his theoretical state of nature to the ideal Commonwealth.

Keywords: Hobbes, Leviathan, Commonwealth, State of Nature.

1. Introduction

According to Hobbes, the life of a human being is governed by the emotional forces produced externally from nearby objects. These objects have a continuous sensual impact on our minds and are always dynamic with deciding our behaviours and decisions systematically: any motivation toward an object is called appetite or desire, while a dislike for it Hobbes calls aversion. The possession of the desired object causes pleasure, and the absence of it creates hatred thus, the notions of good and evil are used in relation to the person's relationship with

the objects. He explains this cause-effect relationship in *Leviathan*: “whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth good: and the object of his hate, and aversion, evil” (Hobbes, 1996, p. 35). Hobbes’ aim in sketching the human beings through exact mechanical conjectures is to delineate “what unconstrained human beings in fact are, and how they function” (Gaskin, 1996, p. xx). We are physically and psychologically responsive to the effects of objects, and this mechanical connection eliminates our free will when taking any action. Defunctioning the free will of the man plus nullifying the involvement of the soul and morality in the decision-making process, Hobbes pacifies all external agents other than the principle of motion. In His thought system, “determinism governs all aspects of being from the act of sense (moving bodies impinging on the human subject) to the instinct for self-preservation itself” (Sarasohn, 1985, p. 365). This determinism renders the Hobbesian man the sole receiver of motion from the objects and an automaton for the next move.

2. The State of Nature

In the previous section, Hobbes, while defining the universal man in his natural environment before the artificial formation of the Commonwealth lays the foundation of his new artificial state, proving the devastating effects of men in the state of nature, which Hobbes thinks justifies the establishment of single “unlimited authority of the sovereign, and his subjects' unlimited obligation to obey” (Pitkin, 1964, p. 329). He comes to this conclusion by enumerating the natural features of the state of nature in that men have no other security and power than their own strength, no continuation of civilization when there is no certainty, and “which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1996, p. 84). Hobbes refuses any natural solution offered by man because every attempt the Hobbesian man asserts above all is corrupted at the core due to the incompatibility of the private self-seeking nature of man with the common good of society. Hobbes’ resolution implementing artificial powerful authority reflects his historical background in which England was troubled by the nature of man. He ignores the experienced guidelines of history by reason that its perishable and disoriented nature can not exist through time. With him, “not only did history as a whole lack coherence and meaning but even attention to the past as a quarry of knowledge and experience was called into question” (Gunnell, 1968, p. 247). In this regard, Hobbes, with his denial of the past, combined with the scientific method his philosophy grounds upon, “saw Aristotle's philosophy as a significant impediment to the progress of knowledge, and believed that progress could only begin once the edifice of

Aristotle's system had been razed and philosophy could rebuild on new foundations” (Rutherford, 2003, p. 396). The state of nature and the harmful elements it carries into society are “the product[s] of the inherent tendency of men’s natures, which underlines all social life, and which would break out in unrestrained form were if it not held in check by the devices of a commonwealth” (Charvet, 1981, p. 41). For this degenerating tendency of men, Hobbes advocates authoritarianism,, namely taking away the possible application of man's individual rights and power in society. Manifesting an authority, he doesn't imply any religious policy because Hobbes presumes that the rules of God are disagreeing with his mechanical philosophy of mankind. In the Hobbesian mind frame, any notion beyond the apprehension of the mind is evaluated as insignificant, and if the main source of an idea goes beyond the materialistic world, Hobbes declines it, finding it unadaptable to the real working world. His materialism reduces human beings from a religiously sanctified position down to a secular world where individual behavior is manipulated by irreligious factors. He even attributes life to the motion of this mechanical world: “life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within” (Hobbes, 1996, p. 7), which “yields the result that human beings are ensnared in realm of finitude, in the material realm, and that God, the infinite, is beyond the purview of humankind” (Mitchell, 1993, p. 82). The human intelligence is immune to any relatable idea of God, because Hobbes is “deeply skeptical about the accessibility of eternal things to the human mind. His oft-repeated insistence that human beings are incapable of knowing anything whatsoever about substantive attributes of God” (Johnston, 1990, p. 44). Hobbes’ attempt to undermine the religion is his ”critique is a principal part of his psychology of Enlightenment, whose immediate goal is to teach men to forget about the salvation of their souls and to care only about their worldly goods, particularly those of the body” (Blits, 1989, p. 146). The actions of human beings are conceivable in the cause-and-effect relation; their desire, sensations, and behaviors materialism-based. Their nature is unfamiliar to acknowledge any spiritual realm thus, the existence of God is refuted by Hobbes: “God acts without restraint, ... and his will knows no impediment ... because reason cannot grasp that which is without reason, ... Individual things have no inherent connections and whatever order they do disclose is a conditional construction born of will and artifice” (Baim, 2020, p. 136). Hobbesian man rejects theological God but Hobbes only “shuts the door on the prophetic kingdom of God at present, he shows the way to the natural kingdom of God. This kingdom is governed by the laws of nature, which anyone with reason can learn” (Jones, 2018, p. 18). Unless the Leviathan power is active, the man in the state of nature can not achieve peace, and to maintain it, Hobbes aims

to protect people from their original nature. According to Hobbes, men in the state of nature are equal in capacity of mind and strength of body, which balance creates nothing other than chaos. Instead of harmony and peace, this equality creates disorder by motivating Hobbesian man to be hopeful in realising the desired end, which is targeted by not one but a multitude of people at the same time. This negative equality in human nature arouses uncertainty occasioned by awareness of anxiety for being unable to possess the desired object which inevitably brings anguish. In this respect, the Hobbesian man is gnawed psychologically not for today but for the things tomorrow, as he has no control over the future time. This obscurity and the hysteria to save the future ignite aggression among men in the state of nature whose future vision by all means is fruitless. Hobbes resembles the inward suffering of mankind to that of Prometheus, who “devoured in the day, as much as was repayed in the night: So that man, which looks too far before him, in the care of future time, hath his heart all the day long, gnawed” (Hobbes, 1996, p. 72). In the life-threatening atmosphere of human beings, men, irregardless of violating public stability, just focus on acquiring the desired object, yet achieving that goal is not the ultimate aim in itself because their passions are linearly correlated with motion in that as long as one retains the bodily motion he naturally pursues passion after passion. The egoistic nature of Hobbes is interconnected with the motion one holds in nature, and stopping the desire means to stop the motion, which is the termination of life. The Hobbesian man can not exclude himself from this system of motion where “[n]othing without us but bodies in motion, nothing within us but organic motions” (Burt, 1925, p. 121). Hobbes's philosophy of motion encompasses every aspect of life, and his “vision of the human passions and their manner of operation is profoundly shaped by his basic paradigm of motion” (Spragens, 1973, p. 192). Thereby, men in the state of nature are drifted without any orientation by the whimsical operation of motion in the universe of Hobbes, with a rejection of attachment to any devotion other than me-ism. This self-centrism and the natural urge to continue the motion at all costs approximate the Hobbesian man to the Darwinian man, both in the struggle for survival and the materialistic operation of the body or society. In the area of Hobbesian Darwinism, the human “behavior, no matter how self-interested, remains unpredictable because it is guided partly by assessments of the future-assessments that, in turn, result from irrational traits of the mind ... not from the calculations of a rational maximizer” (Holmes, 1990 p. 123). The unpredictable self-egoistic natural cosmos of the Hobbesian man is “an emotionally turbulent universe where everything is possible. It is a condition reflecting a psychological limitlessness; it frightens because of an inevitable tendency to degenerate into a mindless, random exchange of energy” (Glass, 1980,

p. 335). To avoid this ruinous existence, the Hobbesian man establishes the Commonwealth. Against the chaotic universe of man, Hobbes' scientific method is undeniably regarded as a savior because his universe is "open and accessible to the methods of mathematics, appeared so undeniable to a mind like Hobbes that he boldly prepared to apply the same assumption to the political world" (Wolin, 2016, p. 217). Utilizing mathematical methods, man can construct a state of Commonwealth that is as exact and timeless as geometry.

3. The Modern Hobbesian Man

The penetration of the effects of the state of nature into the modern world is dominant in scientific activities, which testifies to the fear of future and the desire to control it. When unsure about tomorrow, the Hobbesian man invokes science to acquire as many objects as possible, and considering human nature, nothing can satisfy it. The nature of the physical object on earth is its finiteness, but the desire of human nature is infinite, so trying to appease the insatiable nature of the Hobbesian man with the limited number of objects brings anxiety, which makes man more aggressive towards others. In this hopeless situation, Hobbes "asserts that people are locked in inevitable conflict, as each seeks superiority in resources and reputation, and many are vain enough to think they can attain it" (Petit, 2008, p. 4). Of course today's conflicts are more dangerous and comprehensive than that of Hobbes', the desire of superiority can cost millions of lives. Another tenet of Hobbesian man is his falsely formed ideas, in which every man considers his opinion as right and paves the way for judgemental collisions, ending up with a clash of words. The source of these kinds of opinions is "in the minds of human beings, in the false opinions they hold, or receive from evil teachers, concerning what is just and unjust" (Bobbio, 1993, p. 31). The man in the Commonwealth doesn't need to believe in God; the Leviathan provides every necessary thing demanded by people, but modern man's prioritisation of religious opinions above others creates disagreement. In his Commonwealth, Hobbes clearly solves the problem of social dissolution arising from the ideal conflict.

4. The Commonwealth

In spite of the pessimistic nature of mankind, Hobbes believes the rationality of man, with the accumulation of experience of precarious life, can save himself from the state of nature and realise the only possible tract is that of the Commonwealth. As the value of life is the most valuable thing man possesses, he takes measures to protect it. This fact is observable through the historical background of Hobbes, and the anxiety of unstable life forces him "from the

beginning of his career, [to] use materialist philosophy and rhetoric to develop a system of coercive discourse for maintaining the status quo of the regulated commonwealth he feels is the best form of government” (Wildermuth, 1997, p. 69). Yet, attributing the existence of his theories to the historical event can be misleading, designing a philosophy after the occurrence of specific incidents can narrow it down to a specific time and prevent its efficiency in the future. Hobbes’ response is his supposition of mankind as being timeless and universal, not limited to any specific time and place, in this universality the “chief conceptual problem for Leviathan was to devise (or discover) a means of obliging people-specifically men-to obey the absolute political authority that could protect them from their own worst inclinations and behaviors” (Schochet, 1990, p. 57). What Hobbes sees in human nature is ever-present and he sees in himself the inherent logical deduction of humankind to avoid calamity and offers his recipe for the mutual goodness of society. In doing that, his goal is to instruct unitedly the natural men by exhibiting the marks of reason found in their questioning to abandon the state of nature. He presents the idea of reading the natural universal mankind in every individual because once observing the nature of man, the human notices the impossibility of natural solution. Instead of seeking any insidious transient advantage by reading the actions of others, Hobbes proposes an introspection to solve the problem from its roots permanently; Hobbes says: “[h]e that is to govern a whole nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but mankind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any language, or science” (Hobbes, 1996, p. 8). Moreover, Hobbes is a political revolutionist, and the “naturalistic metaphor of political ‘revolution’ lived on the assumption that historical time was itself of a uniform quality, contained within itself, and repeatable” (Koselleck, 1893, p. 46). The future anxiety of the Hobbesian man is an organic part of humankind, Hobbes takes this negative fear and handles it positively so that the fear of future can persuade man to create Commonwealth. For Hobbes, “one has anxiety about the future, not the present, and this induces one to search for causes. One searches for causes, an inquisitiveness that is peculiar to man, in order to order the present, or suppress the surprise the future promises” (Sokoloff, 2001, p. 4). In the realm of Commonwealth, once every need of man is provided, the future anguish terminates itself. It becomes ineffective in Commonwealth.

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