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Human and Society in the Nature State and Civilized State from Hobbes Point of View

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Abstract

The Enlightenment philosophy, particularly the ideas of Thomas Hobbes and his concepts surrounding the State and Society, serves as a philosophical foundation for numerous subsequent discussions in the fields of social and political sciences. Hobbes' perspective on human nature and his portrayal of the natural state versus civilization are undeniably among the central tenets of modern thought. He characterizes humanity as the 'wolf-man' and underscores the necessity of a social contract-based civilized state to ensure security and safeguard collective interests. Hobbes is primarily concerned with peace, and his political framework, rooted in a modern scientific sense, is designed with the explicit goal of establishing and preserving peace.

In the natural state, where humanity exists in an uncivilized condition, each individual is self-interested and disconnected, resulting in a landscape fraught with danger and insecurity. However, a glimmer of hope arises from the fact that human awareness of this predicament serves as the very genesis of contemplation and thought directed towards salvation. The cornerstone of security in the natural state is the equality of all individuals within it. According to Hobbes, society does not represent the spontaneous formation of a fundamental condition for collective life but, rather, the conscious regulation of a potentially volatile state perpetually on the brink of conflict.

Through surveys, Hobbes asserts that a majority of people within a society willingly delegate their power and authority to an individual or a group, enabling them to consolidate the various wills into a unified collective will through a voting process. This article aims to explore a fundamental shift in ethics as we transition from classical ethics centered around 'good' to modern social ethics founded on 'security' and 'stability.'

Keywords: Community; Society; Politics; Political Philosophy; State of Nature; State of Civilization

Introduction

What we have today, as a legacy of science and philosophy, possesses a historical depth that warrants a thorough examination of the era itself as well as a consideration of its antecedents. One of the most pivotal and influential epochs in the history of intellectual thought is the Enlightenment. The timeframe I refer to in this article spans from René Descartes to Immanuel Kant. The Enlightenment era emerged as a post-Renaissance period and laid the intellectual groundwork for subsequent philosophers, including Hegel, ultimately giving birth to the concept of 'Modernity.'

The specific group of philosophers from the 17th and 18th centuries that is pertinent to this study hinges on the subject matter underpinning the forthcoming research.

This article primarily focuses on the realm of political philosophy. Therefore, the most prominent theorists of the Enlightenment, with relevance to this perspective, include Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Hugo Grotius. These philosophers, whose works served as the cornerstone of modern socio-political science, have been subjects of extensive study in numerous periods.

The historical connection between the Enlightenment and the trajectory of philosophical thought has been a matter of debate. Some contend that the Enlightenment should be viewed as an extension of its predecessors, while others argue that it represents a revolutionary departure from earlier philosophies. Thomas Hobbes delineated human society into two fundamental stages: the state of nature and the state of civilization.

Hobbes is part of a tradition that has articulated the concept of 'natural rights' as inherent to human beings. 'Natural law' is a concept that was initially introduced by Cicero and later extended into the Stoic-Christian tradition. 'Natural rights' exist prior to the establishment of any state or legislative body and, therefore, are considered inherently inviolable by any ruler. The concept of natural rights posits the equality of individuals in both rights and capabilities, forming the bedrock of what Thomas Hobbes termed the 'naturzustand' in German, or the 'state of nature' in English.

State of Nature

Thomas Hobbes' conception of the state of nature is famously described as "the war of all against all," characterized by his assertion that "man is wolf-man." According to Hobbes, every human possesses an innate inclination and desire for power, which persists until death intervenes. This inclination is driven not only by the pursuit of greater happiness and satisfaction beyond one's present state but also by an inherent need for acquiring more power. In Hobbes' view, safeguarding one's existing power, essential for well-being [1], necessitates steering clear of his pessimistic perspective on human nature.

Hobbes portrays humanity as inherently selfish, power-hungry beings prone to monopolistic tendencies, aggression, and transgression. These attributes are intrinsic to human nature and serve as the basis for his theory. Consequently, when a group of these individuals comes together in a society, these characteristics invariably become central to their actions and behaviours.

Hobbes holds that humanity is inherently corrupt and that the unbridled manifestation of this corruption poses a significant threat to political power and sovereignty. In the absence of authority capable of restraining and regulating the populace within a structured framework, society is prone to stagnation and decline. Individuals, driven by their self-interest and selfishness, engage in conflicts with one another, resulting in an environment rife with misunderstanding, contradictions, strife, and animosity [2].

One of the foundational assumptions underpinning Hobbes' theories is the general equality of human beings in terms of physical and intellectual capabilities [3]. Although he does not argue that all individuals possess identical abilities in every regard, he contends that, contrary to Plato's assertions in his Republic, there are no inherent and predictable differences in physical and mental strength among humans. Essentially, there are no predetermined qualifications that make some individuals naturally suited for governance while others possess traits more akin to a military or other roles. Instead, humans typically find themselves in comparable circumstances, forming the cornerstone of the social structure that Hobbes uses to establish his theory of society and the state. Consequently, equal and comparable individuals initially find themselves in an equal and competitive position concerning their interests.

This equality leads to constant competition among humans, akin to the competitive interactions observed in other species. Their competition arises not out of inherent enmity but as a means to secure their safety, alleviate their constant fear, and ensure their survival.

In this state, human beings are no longer motivated by affection for one another. Instead, they harbour feelings of unease and unhappiness because their interactions are characterized by a lack of mutual agreement. Their relations are marked by perpetual conflict of interests rooted in three primary causes: competition, fear, and the pursuit of honour and pride, corresponding to the desires for profit, security, and reputation, respectively [3]. In the natural state, humans employ any means necessary to satisfy their needs, resulting in a "war of all against all" [3]. This state of perpetual warfare is a constant fear, even during moments of temporary calm.

Hobbes' psychological view of humans portrays them as mechanistic beings whose actions and behaviours are governed by the concept of "motion" as a foundational principle. He categorizes living beings into two types of vital movements: involuntary movements such as blood circulation or respiration, and voluntary movements, including actions like walking and speaking. While the former type occurs automatically, the latter involves a level of "imagination" and an "action-oriented will," referred to as "effort." Hobbes' focus is primarily on these voluntary human movements, in which "desire" or "wish" and "hatred" or "disgust" serve as the stimuli. Desires represent what individuals seek, encompassing intellectual and immaterial pleasures, while

hatred signifies avoidance. Hobbes' first theorem states: "Humans are driven by desires and aversions" [1].

In the state of nature, humanity exists in an uncivilized state, characterized by individualism and a lack of social bonds. Every aspect of life is fraught with danger and insecurity. However, there is hope in the realization of this precarious condition, which prompts contemplation and thought as the first step toward salvation. The hallmark of the state of nature is the equality of all individuals within it, but this equality translates into a capacity for violence and mutual threat. Utilizing their equal potential for harm, humans exercise their right to self-preservation, resulting in the constant fear of violent death [4].

Humans in this natural state are driven by their desires and act out of self-interest, competition, suspicion, and the pursuit of profit, security, and reputation, which represent the fundamental motivations of all individuals [5]. Hobbes' psychological perspective presents human actions as mechanistic, primarily influenced by desires and aversions. Consequently, he identifies "movement" as the fundamental principle governing behaviour.

The state of nature, according to Hobbes, is not merely a state of battle in the conventional sense but a condition where competition becomes so intense that it culminates in overt conflict. This war of all against all is characterized by the perpetual possibility of violence, even during moments of apparent peace [3]. In such a state, human life lacks the comforts and advancements of civilization, including agriculture, trade, education, arts, literature, and science. Instead, it is marked by constant fear, danger, and brutishness [3].

In this state of nature, human desires and emotions are not inherently immoral or sinful, as there is no agreed-upon moral framework. Right and wrong, justice and injustice are meaningless concepts, and morality has yet to emerge. Instead, the absence of law and societal norms allows humans to exercise their freedom to its fullest extent. In this warlike environment, strength and cunning are regarded as virtues, and actions are shaped by competition, fear, and the pursuit of honour and pride [3].

It is essential to differentiate between the states of nature as a pre-socialization or pre-politicization condition. In Hobbes' view, this state predates the establishment of government and sets the stage for the natural law governing human behaviour and actions [6]. Hobbes theoretically accepts the concept of natural rights, but he narrows it down to the most critical and fundamental right: the right to self-preservation. Every individual has the right to employ their power to ensure their survival and to employ any means toward that end. This right encompasses the right to employ force, even at the expense of others' lives. Within this context, nothing is inherently wrong or unjust because no established notions of right and wrong or justice and injustice exist [7].

In summary, Thomas Hobbes' view of the state of nature is one characterized by inherent human equality, a constant struggle for self-preservation driven by desires and aversions, and the absence of moral values or societal norms. In this state, humans live in perpetual competition, fear, and conflict, resulting in a life that is "solitary, poor, nasty.

Civilized State

In their quest to escape the natural state, humans established a covenant, not with an all-powerful ruler, but with the Leviathan, a social contract rooted in the instinctual fear of citizens and their yearning for security, peace, and tranquillity [8]. It's worth noting that seventeenth-century theorists recognized two types of social contracts: one between individuals creating society and another between the people and their ruler, establishing a legitimate government. The former is a bilateral agreement where people unite and commit to each other to sustain society. This contract operates like a debt, contingent on party equality and involves promises stemming from society. Such a bond, formed through freely and honestly made promises, creates interdependence among individuals, forming the foundation for power.

Conversely, the social contract between the people and the ruler involves a hypothetical and primitive action by each member of society: the relinquishment of individual power and authority to establish a government. In this scenario, individuals not only fail to create new power beyond what they possessed but also forfeit their existing power, submitting to the government. This government's power derives from the collective strength of the people, monopolized by the government for the greater public good. Clearly, in a reciprocal promise system, individuals both gain and lose power by placing it solely in the hands of the ruler. Those who enter into this pact and collaborate escape isolation, whereas in the latter case, isolation persists [9].

In contrast to the state of nature, Thomas Hobbes describes the "State of Civilization" as a situation where political life perpetually clashes with nature. Two significant distinctions emerge between classical and modern interpretations of these concepts. First, "nature" no longer serves as the primary focus of modern political philosophy. Second, this modern "society," unlike its classical counterpart, is not conceptualized as innate to man; instead, it is a product of human construction. Thomas Hobbes believed that practical philosophy and previous discussions, particularly

in ethics, often remained limited to moral exhortations and advice. He aimed to establish a practical philosophy centered on understanding human character as the chief determinant of war and peace. According to him, classical practical and scholastic philosophies never thoroughly compared the natural and civilized states, making modern political philosophy significantly more pragmatic [3].

Similar to the transformation brought about by the rise of mathematics and the rejection of ultimate causality in Galilean physics, the essence of this science shifted from "discerning the truth of nature" to "understanding dynamics" – the relationships and proportions of forces. Thomas Hobbes envisioned a parallel mission for his newly established science, which bore resemblances to physics. However, the aim was not to uncover the truth about politics, society, and governance but to provide justification for these phenomena and their interrelations. This English philosopher viewed political philosophy's mission as the creation of a framework for human existence characterized by enduring peace and guaranteed security.

In pursuit of this goal, Thomas Hobbes approached sociology and politics not by dealing with real entities but through ideal and abstract constructs. Just as we discuss "circles and triangles" in geometry without necessarily believing in their existence in the physical world, Thomas Hobbes' exploration of man, government, and society in his new political philosophy revolves around idealistic and abstract concepts.

Finding real-world counterparts for these characteristics, as described by Thomas Hobbes, is often challenging.

It's essential to note that the social contract presented in Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan falls into the second category. As stated by Thomas Hobbes himself, the majority of people in a society, following a survey, transfer all their power and authority to an individual or a group. Through a majority vote, they merge their diverse wills into a single collective will. This implies that they designate an individual or assembly to represent them, and anyone who accepts all actions undertaken by this representative in matters of public peace and security, directly or indirectly, treats them as if they were the cause. In this way, individuals entrust their right to self-governance to this person or group, considering all their actions as just and permissible. This transcends mere consensus; it establishes a unity where each person essentially says to the other: "I entrust my right to self-government to this individual or assembly of individuals, and I deem all their actions just and permissible." This arrangement remains valid, whether or not individuals voted for the representative, and it is irrevocable. Rulers cannot reclaim their rights or reject monarchy to pledge allegiance to another [10].

Contrary to the belief that individuals in the state of nature are inherently belligerent (as natural humans primarily seek their own interests), Thomas Hobbes regards war as the root cause of all human suffering, particularly the internal conflicts within cities that result in poverty, barbarism, and the loss of all societal benefits. Thomas Hobbes' approach to political science focuses on studying peace and security and striving to ensure them. His theory introduces a new dimension to the discourse on the legitimacy of power and authority, positing that legitimacy arises from the consent of individuals who, in the pre-contractual state, possess natural and inherently equal rights without any imposed restrictions. In the context of the "social contract," individuals enforce their votes and authority, thereby legitimizing the dominant power in society [3].

Kymlicka argues that this form of political contract became obsolete during the nineteenth century due to two significant issues. Firstly, there is a lack of historical evidence for the existence of such a contract, and without a factual contract, neither citizens nor governments are obligated to adhere to these treaties. Consequently, all existing governments, regardless of their benevolence and justice, lack legitimacy under a social contract theory. Kymlicka also highlights the dilemma of natural political obligation – why should individuals obey rulers based on this natural obligation? This line of questioning cast doubts not only on political obligations but also on personal commitments. Hence, social contract theory emerged as a temporary response to the erosion of pre-Enlightenment morality, effectively replacing one contentious natural task with another [11].

Thomas Hobbes is often regarded as the pioneer of political philosophy rooted in the social contract. A central question in modern political philosophy revolves around the legitimacy of power. At the heart of contractualism lies the idea of reciprocal legitimacy and the imposition of rational limitations on individual interests, transitioning from the infinite and natural freedoms of individuals to legitimate and rational authority, where fulfilling one's duty to political obligations is attainable when moving from the state of nature to Thomas Hobbes' contractual theory [3].

He replaces the Aristotelian concept of a natural hierarchy with a shared objective [3]. In the absence of any governing systems, conflicts of interest among individuals escalate into public discord and ultimately, a state of war against everyone. This situation is equally unfavourable and intolerable for all parties involved. The loss of fundamental individual interests within a state of lawlessness necessitates the social contract and the establishment of political order.

The reconstruction of a civilized state requires mutual constraints on individual freedom. According to Thomas Hobbes, the only means of establishing a valid contract is through the guaranteed obedience to a singular, supreme power to which all individuals are bound. Without this obedience, any contracts and covenants, unsupported by force, remain mere words, unable to provide human security [3].

Thomas Hobbes attached great importance to peace, tranquillity, security, and the elimination of fear, war, and conflict in the realm of civil society. He contended that the desire for peace and the pursuit of sensory pleasures compel people to obey a power established through public choice. Individuals relinquish their personal efforts to secure their safety, relying on this collective power. Fear of death and harm coerces individuals into compliance with public authority [12].

Thomas Hobbes' initial definition of freedom is remarkably straightforward: every individual enjoys enough freedom when no external impediments hinder their pursuits. Complete freedom implies the ability to achieve one's desires fully. Perhaps the closest imaginable example of such complete freedom lies in the story of Adam and Eve. However, Thomas Hobbes' definition of freedom in civil society, as presented in the natural law theory, takes a different perspective. Here, laws are defined based on freedom, with natural laws prohibiting actions that may lead to destruction and ruin [13]. In Thomas Hobbes' discourse, power operates as a tool of state control, enabling the imposition of order on society. In this framework, the state represents the agent of power, and political structure and authority are predominantly exercised over the people. In Thomas Hobbes' theory, power is intrinsically linked to the institution of monarchy. This power within the monarch's person is organized and evolves into absolute, indivisible rule through a contract [14].

The shifting landscape of social values and relations, driven by the economization of society, necessitates a reconfiguration of culture, practical justification, and the establishment of a new foundation for the modern world centered around "man." Legislation supersedes the will of God and nature, placing the "rights of every individual" at its core. Only through such laws can individual freedom be curtailed in a space where all members enjoy equal and concurrent rights, based on a contractual framework. These concepts are intricately linked to the recognition of human rights. Consequently, Thomas Hobbes, within the framework of fundamental equality among individuals, systematically views the contract as a decisive actor [3].

Both government and society must transcend their roles and justify citizens' coexistence, underscoring their significance beyond mere collective existence. The state of nature gives way as individuals mutually enter into a contract, each person pursuing their freedom and interests under shared conditions. They prepare to appeal to the law by relying on the authority of absolute power. The modern state, wielding a monopoly on coercion, emerges from the need to safeguard human existence. It fosters a society where individuals collectively adhere to a set of rules for the sake of their own well-being in a public context. Freedom from natural constraints allows society to harness the potential benefits of individuals, enabling them to realize their fullest potential. The state becomes a legitimate instrument for achieving the individual's primary goal – self-preservation. According to Thomas Hobbes, the state is essentially a finite mechanism enabling the transition from the Aristotelian notion of community [3].

For Thomas Hobbes, the continued sharpness of swords and the perpetuation of wars are evidence of the futility of previous moral philosophies. He asserts that human conflict isn't driven by a "will to evil," greed, religious prejudices, social tensions, or unjust relations, but is a direct consequence of inadequacies in moral and political philosophy [3]. The tradition of intellectual ethics in philosophy prioritizes knowledge over goodwill. War and strife, in Thomas Hobbes' view, result from disordered and erroneous thinking. He seeks a rational framework for human peace, one that can be taught and achieved, with a singular focus on achieving peace. Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy, categorized as a methodological peace science, aims to establish the enduring conditions for peace, coexistence, and the path toward their realization. It strives to address conflicts and suffering, potentially reducing the human toll of wars. The features Thomas Hobbes introduces into modern society lay the groundwork for his novel social moral system. Peace, security, and stability, underpinned by a pragmatic social contract emphasizing expediency and interests rather than the doctrine of goodness or divine will, constitute the bedrock of this new moral system. The disagreement between Thomas Hobbes and [15] on these matters stems from their differing views on the relationship among God, humanity, and nature. In the modern era, God, once the immovable stimulus and metaphysical foundation, no longer serves as the basis for humanity. Additionally, classical philosophy depicted man as inherently social, while in the modern era, societal membership arises from necessity and self-interest, not innate sociality. According to Thomas Hobbes, society is not a fundamental prerequisite for collective existence but a deliberate response to a perpetual state of latent conflict. In Thomas Hobbes' thought, a legitimate state is one that individuals immediately recognize the necessity of. It acknowledges the need for a collective force capable of addressing the inherent insecurity

arising from human nature. The state's primary logic is that individuals are not inherently social beings but rather individuals whose personal interests do not inherently align with the public interest. Digging deeper, within the social contract, community life is subjected to direct votes by individuals, who retain their natural privileges unless they rationally calculate the best means to increase their private resources. The contract obligates individuals to each other, electing a political and governing body free from contractual constraints [5].

Conclusion

Thomas Hobbes' ideas about humanity and society indeed marked the birth of a new perspective that can be boldly characterized as the modern view in world order over past centuries. In his philosophical system, fundamental concepts such as morality, power, government, and law are all redefined within the context of politics. Understanding this viewpoint and deducing the rules governing relationships from this perspective reveals a different conception of human beings who, in pursuit of their own interests, accept the terms of the social contract. The social contract serves as the source of legitimacy for the civilized state and the modern state, and legitimacy is a hallmark of modernity. Consequently, Thomas Hobbes' philosophical thought exerted significant influence on the formation and description of prevailing ideas in contemporary societies today, as described in the article.

Thomas Hobbes' conception of humanity markedly diverges from the classical understanding, with his portrayal of society differing significantly from the classical model, as does his approach to politics in contrast to classical political thought. This transformation is analogous to the evolution from concept of the "household" to the "economy" as articulated by Adam Smith. This transformation represents a pivotal cornerstone of the contemporary world and merits an extensive discussion, including its philosophical underpinnings [16].

Morality in Thomas Hobbes' framework is predicated on principles of security and peace, constituting the morality of the civilized state. The normative system that arises from public interest and collective well-being in the state of civilization, as discussed by Thomas Hobbes, differs significantly from classical ethics, imparting distinct teachings and values. Understanding this foundational philosophical-moral-social system that shapes modernity can help society redefine its internal relationships, interactions with individuals, and its place within the global community [17-21]. The classical perspective of the modern moral system or the negation of morality within it reflects a rigid mind set and a failure to formulate theoretical and practical foundations.

Regarding natural rights, it should be noted that Thomas Hobbes theoretically acknowledged the existence of natural rights, but in his view, the most critical and fundamental natural right is the right to self-preservation. Every individual possesses the right to employ their power to preserve their own life and employ any means necessary to achieve this end. This right encompasses the authority to use whatever means are necessary to attain this goal. It appears that the more we engage in challenging, redefining, or even adhering to the modern socio-moral system, a comprehensive comprehension of its fundamentals, especially in comparison with classical traditions, provides a broader perspective on this crucial era in the history of thought and action—a requisite for any civilization.

To Thomas Hobbes, the significance of civil status lies in its ability to offer peace, tranquillity, security, and the cessation of fear, war, and conflict. According to his perspective, the desire for peace and the pursuit of sensory pleasures compel individuals to submit to a power chosen by the public. This desire for security leads people to relinquish their efforts to secure their own safety and instead rely on collective authority. Fear of death and harm further reinforces the compliance with public power.

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