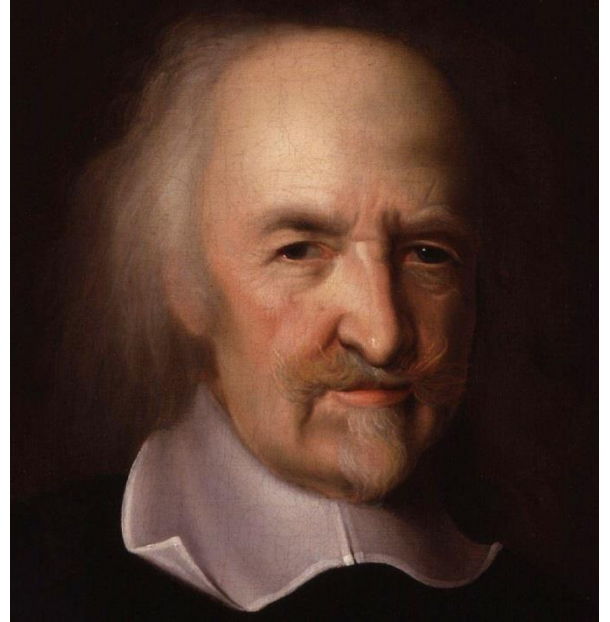


## THOMAS HOBBES

Thomas Hobbes famously said that in a "state of nature" human life would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". In the absence of political order and law, everyone would have unlimited natural freedoms, including the "right to all things" and thus the freedom to plunder, rape, and murder; there would be an endless "war of all against all". To avoid this, free men contract with each other to establish political community i.e. civil society through a social contract in which they all gain security in return for subjecting themselves to an absolute Sovereign, one man or an assembly of men. Though the Sovereign's edicts may well be arbitrary and tyrannical, Hobbes saw absolute government as the only alternative to the terrifying anarchy of a state of nature.



According to Hobbes (in whose view government is not a party to the original contract) citizens are not obligated to submit to the government when it is too weak to act effectively to suppress factionalism and civil unrest. (Recognize this is different than assertions from other social contract theorists, who argue that citizens can withdraw their obligation to obey or change the leadership, through elections or other means including, when necessary, violence, when the government fails to secure their natural rights [Locke] or satisfy the best interest of society [Rousseau]).

Hobbes offers a cosmological argument for the existence of God. However, he argues, the only thing we can know about God is that he, "first cause of all causes", exists. Our knowledge is limited in this way because our thoughts about God are limited: "we can have no conception or image of the Deity". So when we seem to attribute features to God, we cannot literally be describing God. We're either expressing our inability, as when we call God incomprehensible, or we're expressing our reverence, as when we call God omniscient and just. The same indeed is going on when we call God a spirit: this is not "a name of anything we conceive", but again a "signification of our reverence"

Hobbes: "Every man ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it, and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war"

Hobbes: "That a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth as for peace and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself"

In his early works he demonstrated three views on God — support for a cosmological argument, the belief that God is inconceivable by us, and the interpretation of apparent descriptions of God as not really descriptions. However, in later work, such as the appendix to the 1668 Latin edition of *Leviathan*, Hobbes proposes a different view. The older Hobbes thought that we could know God to have at least one feature, namely extension. In his *Answer to Bishop Bramhall*, Hobbes describes God as a "corporeal spirit". By this he means at least that God is extended. Indeed, Hobbes seems to think of God as a sort of extended thing that's mixed through the rest of the world, not being in every individual place in the world, but able to affect all the things in the world.

Hobbes: "During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that conditions called war; and such a war, as if of every man, against every man. To this war of every man against every man, this also in consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law, where no law, no injustice. Force, and fraud, are in war the cardinal virtues."

Hobbes: "In these four things – opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotions towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics – consist the natural seed of religion; which by reason of the different fancies, judgments, and passions of several men, hath grown up into ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another."

Hobbes maintained that the constant back-and-forth mediation between the emotion of fear and the emotion of hope is the defining principle of all human actions. Either fear or hope is present at all times in all people.

Hobbes: "I obtained two absolutely certain postulates of human nature," he says, "one, the postulate of human greed by which each man insists upon his own private use of common property; the other, the postulate of natural reason, by which each man strives to avoid violent death".

For Hobbes, it is only science, "the knowledge of consequences" (Leviathan, v.17), that offers reliable knowledge of the future and overcomes the frailties of human judgment

Hobbes has several reasons for thinking that human judgment is unreliable, and needs to be guided by science. Our judgments tend to be distorted by self-interest or by the pleasures and pains of the moment. We may share the same basic passions, but the various things of the world affect us all very differently; and we are inclined to use our feelings as measures for others. It becomes dogmatic through vanity and morality, as with "men vehemently in love with their own new opinions...and obstinately bent to maintain them, [who give] their opinions also that revered name of conscience" (Leviathan, vii.4). When we use words which lack any real objects of reference, or are unclear about the meaning of the words we use, the danger is not only that our thoughts will be meaningless, but also that we will fall into violent dispute. (Hobbes has scholastic philosophy in mind, but he also makes related points about the dangerous effects of faulty political ideas and ideologies.) We form beliefs about supernatural entities, fairies and spirits and so on, and fear follows where belief has gone, further distorting our judgment. Judgment can be swayed this way and that by rhetoric, that is, by the persuasive and "colored" speech of others, who can deliberately deceive us and may well have purposes that go against the common good or indeed our own good. Not least, much judgment is concerned with what we should do now, that is, with future events, "the future being but a fiction of the mind" (Leviathan, iii.7) and therefore not reliably known to us.

"To this war of every man against every man," he says, "this also is consequent [i.e., it follows]: that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place [in the state of nature]."

The problems of political life mean that a society should accept an unaccountable sovereign as its sole political authority.

Beginning from a mechanistic [things and complicated machines or artifacts, composed of parts lacking intrinsic relationship to each other] belief understanding of human beings, Hobbes postulates what life would be like without government, a condition which he calls the state of nature. In that state, each person would have a right, or license, to everything in the world. This, Hobbes argues, would lead to a "war of all against all". In such a state, people fear death, and lack both the things necessary to convenient living, and the hope of being able to toil to obtain them. So in order to avoid it people accede to a social contract and establish a civil society. According to Hobbes, society is a population beneath a sovereign authority, to whom all individuals in that society cede some rights for the sake of protection. Any abuses of power by this authority are to be accepted as the price of peace. There is no doctrine of separation of powers in Hobbes's discussion. According to Hobbes, the sovereign must control civil, military, judicial, and ecclesiastical powers.

Hobbes believed that in man's natural state, moral ideas do not exist. Thus, in speaking of human nature, he defines *good* simply as that which people desire and *evil* as that which they avoid, at least in the state of nature. Hobbes uses these definitions as bases for explaining a variety of emotions and behaviors. For example, *hope* is the prospect of attaining some apparent good, whereas *fear* is the recognition that some apparent good may not be attainable.

Hobbes at one point rules a good deal of religious discussion out of philosophy, because its topics are not susceptible to the full detailed causal explanation that is required for scientia, the best sort of knowledge. "Thus philosophy excludes from itself theology, as I call the doctrine about the nature and attributes of the eternal, ungenerable, and incomprehensible God, and in whom no composition and no division can be established and no generation can be understood". Also excluded are discussions of angels, of revelation, and of the proper worship of God.

Governments were created, according to Hobbes, to protect people from their own selfishness and evil

Hobbes believed that all phenomena in the universe, without exception, can be explained in terms of the motions and interactions of material bodies. He did not believe in the soul, or in the mind as separate from the body, or in any of the other incorporeal and metaphysical entities in which other writers have believed. Instead, he saw human beings as essentially machines, with even their thoughts and emotions operating according to physical laws and chains of cause and effect, action and reaction. As machines, human beings pursue their own self-interest relentlessly, mechanically avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure. Hobbes saw the commonwealth, or society, as a similar machine, larger than the human body and artificial but nevertheless operating according to the laws governing motion and collision.