

Hobbes



Questions

- What justification is there for a state?
- Does the state have supreme authority?
- What limits are there upon the state?

Question

- When you accept a job, you sign a contract agreeing to certain things with your employer. You agree to perform certain duties and responsibilities, and you agree to adhere to the rules and guidelines established by the employer. Likewise, your employer agrees to pay you for your services and to provide the facilities necessary for you to do your job. Both you and your employer are free to sign the contract. Similarly, our relationship to the government is like our relationship with an employer. We consent to allow the government to have authority over us in exchange for certain benefits and protections and for the good of society.
- Is this arrangement adequate justification for government? Does this arrangement entail any limitations in the government's power and authority over us? Once we have signed the contract, can we change the contract?

Hobbes's view of human nature

- How do humans act in a state of nature?
- What is this state of nature like?
- Are all humans equal in a state of nature?
- What characteristic of each individual in a state of nature defines human interactions in that state?
- Is there right or wrong, justice or injustice in a state of nature?

Hobbes's Theory of Human Motivation

- Mechanistic view of psychology:
 - Mechanistic view says that everything in nature is produced by matter in motion
 - Human behaviors like walking and talking are produced by internal causes
 - These internal causes have their causes in our interactions with others resulting in related chains of cause and effect
 - All behavior is explainable in terms of laws established by God's will

Hobbes's Theory of Human Motivation

- Psychological Egoism: the theory that all human actions are motivated by self-interest
- Mechanistic theory implies that humans are mechanistically drawn to what they desire and repulsed by what they don't desire
- Universal claim: meant to cover all actions in all circumstances, in and out of society
- Under this conception, why does one get an education?

Hobbes's Theory of Human Motivation

- Rational beings: humans have the capacity to pursue their desires as efficiently as possible and to maximize those interests
- Rationality is instrumental--it serves a purpose but is not anything more than the purpose it serves
- Rationality serves as a means to fulfill one's self-interests

State of Nature

- Hypothetical state in which,
 - Humans are fundamentally self-interested
 - Humans are basically equal to one another
 - There are limited resources
 - There is no power to force humans to cooperate

Consequences

- Consequences of State of Nature
 - Everyone always lives in fear of losing life and property
 - No ability to guarantee long-term satisfaction of needs and desires
 - Ultimate distrust leads to lack of cooperation

Questions

- Why is this state of nature so bad? What do humans fear above all else that makes this state of nature unbearable and drives them to peace?
- Why does Hobbes think his view of nature supports the legitimacy of the state?
- If humans are really self-interested and rational, why will they want to live in a society and not a state of nature?

Three Laws of Nature

- The three laws of nature are key to the formation of government
 - Law 1: Seek Peace
 - Law 2: Give Up What is Necessary to Obtain Peace
 - Law 3: Justice

Law 1: Seek Peace

“And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of reason, that every man, ought to endeavour 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. The first branch of which rule, contains the first, and fundamental law of nature; which is, to seek peace, and follow it. The second, the sum of the right of nature; which is, by all means we can, to defend ourselves.”

- Seek peace even if it means going to war
- To obtain this first law, rational beings will enter a contract
- Entering a contract offers a better life than living in a State of Nature

Law 2: Give Up What is Necessary to Obtain Peace

“From this fundamental law of nature, by which men are commanded to endeavour peace, is derived this second law; that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth, as for peace, and defence 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.”

- Law 2 is one of two aspects of the Social Contract
- Upon entering into the contract, each member agrees to relinquish certain rights that were held in a State of Nature
- If members were to refuse to give up their State-of-Nature rights, then there could be no reason for anyone else to enter the contract

Law 3: Justice

“From that law of nature, by which we are obliged to transfer to another, such rights, as being retained, hinder the peace of mankind, there followeth a third; which is this, that men perform their covenants made; without which, covenants are in vain, and but empty words.... And in this law of nature, consists the fountain and origin of JUSTICE.”

- Law 3 is the second aspect of the Social Contract
- If there is to be a society, then someone has to give the power and authority to enforce the contract
- To escape the State of Nature, each person has to agree to live under enforceable laws
- It is in each person's self-interest to conform to the conventions of justice

Need for Authority--Who is to Judge?

- We need authority to help each individual decide upon competing claims
- In moral, legal, or property disputes, an authority is needed to decide matters between individuals or groups

Contract is Conventional

- Morality, politics, society et al. are conventions created to serve human's self-interests
- Prior to contract, there is no justice or injustice, good or bad
- After contract, justice serves to prevent a reversal into a State of Nature
- Social Contract is the foundation for all that is good and the basis for living well

Questions

- According to Hobbes, would a reasonable person ever return to the State of Nature?
- What does this mean for our obligation to the law?
- Does the fear of returning to a State of Nature entail absolute authority?
- Does Hobbes's Social Contract specify a certain type of government, e.g., monarchy, democracy, etc.?
- Why does the government have the authority and power to impose laws upon its citizens?
- According to Hobbes, what is natural and what is artificial?
- Is there a natural authority?

Nature of the Commonwealth

- Commonwealth successfully created only if subjects confer all their power and strength on the state
- Hobbes does not assume that the state has to be one form or another (monarchy, democracy, socialism), but he does prefer monarchy
- In entering a covenant, the subjects authorize all the actions and judgments of the state as if these judgments were one's own
- One entered, can the covenant be broken?
- Does it matter if one dissented before the covenant but still entered it voluntarily?

Powers of the Supreme Authority

- Authority has absolute power
 - Because one's passions can overwhelm reason, the authority must have absolute authority for the contract to be successful
- States powers cannot be divided or limited
 - If divided, then disagreements will prevent effective governance
 - If limited, then debates about one branch's powers over another will retard governance
 - Best to give a single body absolute power rather than dilute powers and prevent effective governance

Powers of the Supreme Authority

- Supreme Authority has the power to
 - establish all laws and customs
 - make war and peace
 - make judgments about what opinions and doctrines are averse and which conducive to peace
 - make judgments to settle disputes
 - to punish and reward

Absolute Powers of the Supreme Authority

- One is never justified in resisting the power of the supreme authority
 - Why? Because the absolute power of the authority is all that stands in the way of the State of Nature and we want to avoid the State of Nature at all costs
- Likewise, a divided or limited government will threaten the peace it was meant to secure
- What are the consequences of a government with absolute power?

Limits on Absolute Power?

- Sovereign has absolute power in almost all matters
 - A subject can be put to death by the sovereign without any concerns of acting justly; the sovereign can do no wrong
 - The sovereign is granted power by the subject, so the subject cannot question or undermine the power he granted
- Exceptions:
 - Sovereign cannot force a subject to accuse himself
 - Sovereign cannot force a subject to kill himself
 - Sovereign can demand one to kill another only if the command is in accordance with the ordained ends of the sovereign

Life Under the Sovereign

- Who decides the sovereign's power, limitations upon individual freedoms, and exercise of powers?
- Why obey the sovereign even if we have not explicitly entered into the contract?
- Even if we enter into a contract with the sovereign, does that mean that the sovereign's actions are above reproach?
- Is there room for civil disobedience in Hobbes's state?

Problems with Social Contract Theory

- We didn't enter the contract. Why are we bound by it?
- Is implicit agreement binding?
- What members of our society have explicitly entered into a contract with the government?
- What is the purpose and value of elections?

Hobbes's Pessimism

- Why can't one live in peace and harmony with others?
- Why can't one respect another's rights and property even in a State of Nature?
 - Two Reasons:
 - We have a right to protect ourselves and our self interests
 - We each have a right to determine what is necessary to protect ourselves and our self interests