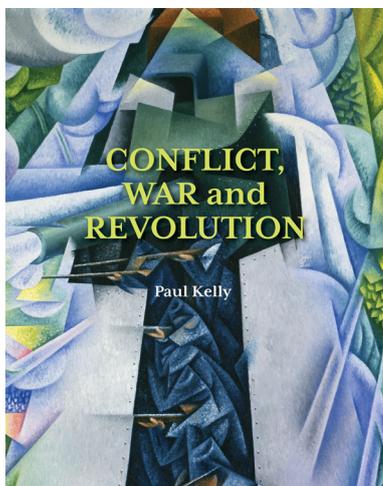


Hobbes – Solving the problem of conflict

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CHAPTER 5

Hobbes

Solving the problem of conflict

Thomas Hobbes is one of the first great theorists of the concept of sovereignty and of the modern state. This means that he is also one of the original theorists of the state system that lies at the heart of contemporary international relations. I explore Hobbes's theory of the sovereign state as set out in his book *Leviathan*, and its place in modern international relations theory, both of them shaped by his intellectual context and his wider materialist philosophy of man. Hobbes's account of human nature and the state of nature is important here, as well as his contractarian account of the origin of sovereign power. Hobbes offers an influential account of absolutism that motivates his rejection of international political society derived from early modern papalism. His alternative account of anarchic or sharply rivalrous international relations between sovereign states has greatly influenced contemporary international relations theory, which has absorbed him into the tradition of realism and interstate anarchy.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is a pivotal figure for both historians of political philosophy and those of international relations and international political theory. For political philosophers, he is the first recognisably modern theorist who developed a civil science based on a human psychology that clearly

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distinguishes humans as they are from an ideal or teleological account of humanity as they ought to be. For Hobbes, the idea of teleological politics is associated with Aristotelianism, and in rejecting it he becomes a modern theorist – standing in contrast to the classical thought of the ancient Greeks, which underpinned the medieval synthesis of Greek thought and Christianity. This modernist form of political science has been seen as either a cause for celebration, because of its liberation from the tyranny of ancient or religious ideas, or else a source of regret because it is an early sign of the decline or decadence of modernity that results in historicism, nihilism and ultimately the totalitarianism of the 20th-century European political experience (Strauss 1953).

As one of the first major theorists of the sovereign state, Hobbes is often located at the beginning of histories of modern political theory that trace the progressive development of the modern European state as a distinct and autonomous political entity. He contributed to the shaping of our contemporary political vocabulary, which sees politics primarily as a domestic matter, operating within a clearly defined political unit that recognises no higher authority or obligation beyond its borders. The sovereign state is the primary way of conceptualising the development of politics in Europe following the end of the European wars of religion, marked by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Attaining statehood is also the aspiration of peoples or nations who do not yet have full political recognition. The Wilsonian fragmentation of the central European empires following the end of World War I, or the continuation of that process in the postcolonial history of Africa, or the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, all exemplify the clamour of nations and peoples for political recognition as states with full Hobbesian sovereign powers.

The modernity of this process of emerging statehood is exemplified in Hobbes's accompanying naturalistic methodology of civil or political science, which makes no appeals to the ultimate authority of theological revelation, or to a normative or moralised conception of human nature. It builds and explains political institutions taking humanity as it is and the world as we find it. Hence, Hobbes's claim that the domain of politics and the state is an artificial construct, in the sense of being something that is made through human action and not an implication of our nature or of historical or divine purpose. This argument marks an important break with the medieval political theologies that had linked the development of political and legal concepts to theological concepts, and portrayed the development of political history as the history of humanity in the passing times between Christ's resurrection and the end of the world in his second coming. As we shall see, this claim that Hobbes's account stands aside from religious belief can be challenged, when one takes account of the importance of Parts III and IV of *Leviathan*. Yet, it has become a commonplace reading of Hobbes as a thinker indifferent to the claims of revealed religion in politics.

Even if one modifies the crude idea of Hobbes as a theorist indifferent to the claims of religion, his assertion of the priority of sovereignty undermines an important feature of theological politics in pre-modern Europe. It presents

conceptual arguments for the ultimate assault on the idea of Christendom as an international polity that took place in the early Enlightenment period. In so doing, his argument becomes an important source for the development of a distinctive state-based model of international relations that constitutes the 'Westphalian order', and which in turn provides the paradigmatic problems and challenges of modern international relations. Hobbes's views on international relations are sketchy and they are primarily implications of his theory of the sovereign state. But they expressly ruled out claims, central to Christendom, that some higher order and authority exists within which subsidiary political units or kingdoms operate. In whatever form international relations is presented, it is instead seen as a system or society of sovereign states that are politically irreducible to any other source of power, such as that of the Pope, or the emperor in the context of the Habsburg lands of central Europe and the Spanish Empire. In the absence of such a top power or authority, the international domain in which states find themselves is one of anarchy. Although I have shown in earlier chapters that intimations of this idea of anarchy are present in Thucydides' and Machiavelli's realisms (although not Augustine's), it is only with Hobbes that we find a clear model of anarchy as a system in the absence of any overarching power and authority. Whether it makes historical sense to impose categorical historical periods on the ideas of individual thinkers, it is indisputable that Hobbes's account of the sovereign state and the anarchical condition between states sets the agenda for subsequent international relations theory as a distinct subject of enquiry – a discipline with its own political theorists and problems challenging the hegemony of modern state-based politics.

Two lives of Thomas Hobbes

Hobbes lived in an extraordinary period of historical conflict and transition. Yet, it is important to refrain from crude causal claims about the relationship between Hobbes's theory and the world out of which it developed. After all, Hobbes had many contemporaries who neither developed statist theories of politics nor rejected Christendom, empire or the primacy of revelation over moral and legal claims. Because Hobbes's theory provides such an exemplary model for analysing and explaining features of the Westphalian order, there is also a particular danger of reifying his theory ('making a thing' of it) or assuming a causal necessity between events and a particular way of theorising them. Keeping this reminder in view, the intellectual context within which Hobbes developed and wrote nonetheless does provide an argument for the peculiar force and salience of his ideas.

Hobbes was born on Good Friday 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada. He studied at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, before becoming a scholar and tutor to the Cavendish family (the Dukes of Devonshire) for most of his subsequent life. This enabled him to travel to Europe and gave him recognition as a gentleman

of letters, unattached to a university and thus freed from the professional obligations of religious tests or service. Hobbes completed the first English translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1629), as well as rather less felicitous translations of Homer, but is best known for his account of civil science, which is developed primarily in the *Elements of Law* (1640) and *De Cive* (1642), culminating in *Leviathan* in 1651. The latter remains the greatest work of political philosophy in the English language. Hobbes also published works on optics and mathematics and an important history of the English Civil War, *Behemoth* (1688), posthumously published in 1681. Having lived through the English Civil War, he died during the period of the Exclusion Crisis that led up to the English Revolution of 1688. Whilst his life was that of a scholar and philosopher, it needs to be set against the extraordinary backdrop of European war and scientific revolution that in part explains the characterisation of Hobbes as a source of modernism.

The Thirty Years War and the English Civil War

Hobbes spent much of his early adult life visiting Europe as the companion and tutor to the Cavendish family, and as a refugee from domestic politics. Throughout that period he was simultaneously in close proximity to the Thirty Years War that raged throughout central Europe, Germany and the Dutch Republic, and culminated in a major struggle between the Habsburg Empire and the French. The war began in 1618 with the accession of Ferdinand II to the Habsburg throne of the Holy Roman Empire. Ferdinand was a devout Roman Catholic who sought to impose religious uniformity on all the populations of his lands, in contradiction of the Treaty of Augsburg of 1555, from which the idea of *cuius regio, eius religio* (who rules, their religion) emerged. This brought about conflict with the Protestant provinces of Bohemia. Following the defeat of the Bohemians under Frederick V at the battle of White Mountain, and the persecution of Protestant aristocrats, the war expanded into a full-scale European war with the intervention of the Swedes under King Gustavus Adolphus. The scale of violence, casualties and devastation of civilian life that ensued was not seen again until the last six months of World War II in Europe. Alongside the conflict in central Europe, the Spanish Habsburgs were also waging a major war in the Netherlands against the Dutch Republic. During this second phase of the war, it changed from a civil war within the Austrian Habsburg Empire into a full-scale confrontation between the Protestant and Catholic worlds. The protagonists were the northern European Protestant heartland led by Swedish Lutheranism and the Catholic world of central and southern Europe.

However, from 1630 that clear pattern changed again, with the increasing involvement of the French, allied to Sweden. France, under Cardinal Richelieu, was a Catholic monarchy and a ruthlessly Catholic state, as exemplified by its hostile treatment of its own Protestant Huguenot population. Yet, Richelieu

was also concerned about becoming surrounded to the north, south and east by the Habsburg powers of Spain and Austria. In this way, the initial ideological or religious confrontation between Protestantism and Catholicism gave way to a great power struggle between those states aspiring to be the dominant powers in Europe – France and the Habsburgs. Also involved was the weakening of Spain as a major European political land or sea power, because of the rise of the Dutch and subsequently the English maritime empires. From the 1640s, the tide of events turned away from the Spanish and in favour of the French, and then the rise of the Protestant Dutch Republic liberated from the burdens of war. The end of the Thirty Years War is conventionally marked by the famous Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. In fact, there were a number of treaties involved, none of which has a full list of the combatants as signatories. The Treaty of Westphalia represented a new order or a state-based system, with dominant powers vying to ensure the system's stability alongside the dominance of those same powers' long-term strategic interests. This is the political world that Hobbes experienced during his long exile in France before returning to England at the culmination of the English Civil War in 1651.

Compared to the scale and devastation of the Thirty Years War, the English Civil War was something of a sideshow, although it was not unrelated to the inter-dynastic conflicts on mainland Europe: English and especially Scottish armies played a notable part in the Thirty Years War (Wilson 2010). Whereas religious conflict, the assertion of state sovereignty and the emergence of the European state system are the direct legacies of the Thirty Years War, for Hobbes the English Civil War has a much more direct impact within his thought. The *Elements of Law*, *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* were all direct engagements with the war and its legacy. As with the Thirty Years War, the English Civil War has its seeds in post-Reformation disorder, and especially the succession to the English throne of the Scottish House of Stuart. James VI of Scotland was crowned James I of England and his son Charles succeeded him to the throne in 1625. Like his father, Charles I was jealous in the assertion of royal prerogatives and rights and frequently in conflict with Parliament, which had the right of voting money for the Crown or levying taxes. Following the impeachment and execution of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, a royal favourite but unsuccessful general, Charles dissolved Parliament and ruled independently from 1629 to 1640. This period of personal rule, coupled with Church reforms inspired by the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, and England and Scotland's withdrawal from the European wars through peace treaties with France and Spain, gave the impression of an increasingly authoritarian regime sympathetic to Catholicism and absolutism (as indeed Charles was).

However, a shortage of money compelled Charles to recall Parliament in 1640. During the following period, Hobbes published the *Elements of Law*, where his thesis of sovereign absolutism and the king's priority over Parliament was first advanced. Given the king's dissolution of the Short Parliament after only a few months, this argument was unpopular, and, fearing the consequences, Hobbes

left for France, where he spent the next 11 years until the publication of *Leviathan* and his engagement with the new Cromwellian Republic in 1651. In that intervening period, the Crown and Parliament descended into a civil war that culminated in the capture of Charles in 1646 and his execution (after a trial by the Rump Parliament) in 1649. Subsequently, Oliver Cromwell rose to become lord protector (dictator), following the resignation of Fairfax as commander of the Parliamentary forces, and the defeat of the Royalist forces in Ireland and Scotland. The English Civil War ended in 1651 with the defeat of Charles I's son Charles II at the battle of Worcester. Charles II escaped to France, where he waited for a collapse of the Cromwellian Protectorate. But, with this defeat and the king's patent inability to assert sovereign authority, Hobbes recognised that Charles II was no longer sovereign and that right had passed to Cromwell. In those circumstances, Hobbes returned to England, and with the publication of *Leviathan* in 1651 began his engagement with the new sovereign. Hobbes's consideration of the Civil War was not to end here, however. Despite the restoration of the Stuart line in 1660, he wrote his historical dialogue about the war's philosophical or ideological causes in 1668. *Behemoth* was to be his last major work, although it was not published until 1681, two years after his death and in a period of renewed conflict between the Stuarts and Parliament, which culminated in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

The birth of modern science and the science of humanity

The claim that Hobbes is the first modern political theorist is also closely connected with the second major context against which his civil science must be read: the birth of the modern natural sciences. Throughout his life Hobbes was associated with thinkers at the forefront of the development of empirical science, such as Francis Bacon (for whom he briefly served as a secretary), William Harvey, Robert Hooke, and Marin Mersenne's circle in Paris, through whom he was introduced to the ideas of Galileo and Rene Descartes. Whilst Hobbes emphasises the importance of empiricism and the lessons of experience, he was also interested in the rationalistic and deductivist philosophy of Rene Descartes, whom he met whilst exiled in Paris in the 1640s. Although we know Hobbes as a political theorist, it was these scientific explorations that were to be the major preoccupation of his time in Europe and they cast a shadow over his political writings such that he is seen as the father of modern political science.

Despite his empirical science interests, Hobbes was not an experimentalist. Instead, he combined the experimentalism of Bacon or Galileo with the rationalism of Descartes. He favoured the model of deductivism derived from Euclid's geometry that underpinned the emerging science of physics (as practised by Galileo, albeit in his case based on his own observations). However, the axioms from this deductivist methodology were rooted in experience; in this way, Hobbes combined the empiricism of Bacon with the rationalism of

Descartes to come up with his own new science. Like Descartes, Hobbes was concerned with securing certainty through logical deduction: something that could not be provided by naïve inductivism. Underpinning this approach was a materialist metaphysics that built on Galileo's insight that the world was comprised of matter in motion. This view of the centrality of motion was reinforced by William Harvey's discovery of the human circulatory system.

From these three sources (materialist metaphysics, empiricism and deductivist inference), Hobbes presents an approach that is known as the resolutive-compositive method. Complex phenomena are explained in terms of the interaction of their simpler elements. The task of scientific explanation proceeds by resolving complex phenomena into their most simple basic units and then logically combining these through a series of deductive inferences. It is important to remember that Hobbes's claim here is a methodological one (about how to understand phenomena) and not an ontological one (about what exists). The key elements are simplification and axiomatisation from which inferences could be made. Theory is then tested against experience. However, as is emphasised by modern positivist theorists, theory itself is not derived from experience – it is constructed (Waltz 1979, pp. 1–17). Carried to its most complete form, Hobbes's approach would reduce all the complex phenomena of the world into the interrelation of the most basic elements of matter in motion. This model has obviously attracted modern naturalistic political scientists, who would like the method and substance of political science to be linked to the more successful natural sciences, such as physics and chemistry. That said, Hobbes's practice is properly characterised as inference from empirically observed axioms (which is reductionist) but tends to proceed to political or civil science from psychology, rather than from physics (Malcolm 2002). Despite the subsequent success of his civil or political science, Hobbes's forays into natural science were both controversial and less successful. He wrote a treatise on optics, but his preoccupation with the geometric method nevertheless resulted in a long, acrimonious and fruitless dispute with John Pell about the possibility of squaring the circle – a mathematical impossibility!

The theory of human nature

In his early writings, Hobbes attempts to link civil philosophy to fundamental materialist metaphysics in a way that is analogous to the derivation of modern political science from physics. However, *Leviathan* begins with the science of human psychology as the fundamental source of his account of human motivation and obligation. This does not mean that he recants the idea that at some level his account of matter in motion can deductively lead to his account of natural law and right. However, for the purposes of Hobbes's civil science, the principles of an empirical psychology are a sufficient explanation and allow for the derivation of political conclusions. The fundamental premises of his

psychology are the origin of ideas and beliefs in experience and the origin of action in the motivation to satisfy desires: in short, reason and will.

This approach is solipsistic. Ultimately, mind is only aware of its own contents, namely ideas that are the result of externally caused impressions. Of those external causes the subject of experience (a person) can have no direct knowledge. Knowledge can only be about ideas that result from impressions on the mind, where Hobbes literally means physical marks made on the mind by the impact of things in the world. How these impressions are made must ultimately be a matter of speculation because there can be no direct experience of this relationship. Impressions give rise to ideas and these are the objects of thought and reason. Reasoning itself takes the form of the addition and subtraction of ideas, building from the simplest ideas to the most complex. This process is made public through the medium of language, which primarily consists of names attached to ideas and their relations. In this respect, Hobbes continues the tradition of 'nominalism' that can be traced back to the medieval philosopher William of Occam. One consequence of this nominalism is that it makes moral ideas objects of the mind, as opposed to things in the world, and it opens up the possibility of moral subjectivism and the risk of moral scepticism: Hobbes was not a sceptic and was content for his subjectivism to provide an adequate account of moral truth.

Alongside the account of belief based on experiential impressions, the other main part of Hobbes's psychology is the origin of motives in the will and in desire. All human action, for Hobbes, requires as its efficient cause a passion, which is an exercise of the will towards the thing that is desired. These passions are either appetites or aversions, that is, things liked or things disliked. Appetites tend to move the agent towards the things liked and aversions tend to move the agent away from the things disliked. All subsequent forms of action are merely complex variations of these two basic motivations. Moral ideas, such as the virtues, are therefore the names of tendencies amongst humans to value or be attracted towards certain things or actions, and the vices are the names of tendencies that we disvalue or avoid. Moral judgements are therefore reducible to these observable tendencies amongst human agents. At a fundamental level, ethics is an empirical science based on the tendencies for agents to value or disvalue character traits or modes of action. As we shall see with Hobbes's account of natural right and natural law, at a fundamental level human motivations are fairly constant, yet the contingent variation of circumstances and character allows for a huge variety of subjective desires, interests and wants. These variations in people's situations are also responsible for what Hobbes describes as the variation in manners that account for social and cultural differences (*Leviathan*, Chapter XI). This diversity is limitless because of context and circumstances, but also the fundamental insatiability of human nature. For Hobbes, desires are not few in number and easily satisfied but the heart of a continuous chain of action that accounts for the vitality of human life:

I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. [Chapter XI] (Hobbes 1991, p. 70)

Within this account of the springs of action, Hobbes places considerable emphasis on the idea of man as glory-seeking, and on the idea of vainglory as a source of dispute, and conflict as a feature of human nature. Central to the idea of man being glory-seeking is the way in which status, honour and standing are central to our conception of ourselves. It is an important part of human psychology to be valued by others and accorded status and respect, but Hobbes is also clear that in most cases our sense of our own value is permanently greater than that which others attribute to us. The desire for recognition and acknowledgement of our own merits in accordance with our own valuation of ourselves is an important and irreducible source of conflict and disagreement, as well as a source of motivation to overcome that denial of recognition and value. Glory-seeking is one of the fundamental reasons why there is no natural harmony or order between individuals, where each might intuit their own importance and role for society. In the idea of glory-seeking and the vice of vainglory, where individuals attach a disproportionate significance to their own status and value, Hobbes provides an explanation of why there is no natural order amongst human individuals, in contrast to animal species such as bees. This is also why Hobbes argues that Aristotle's political theory must be wrong because it assumes a natural order or harmony amongst individuals once they are brought together within a rightly ordered political community. For Aristotelians, discord or conflict always reveals a design flaw in a political constitution, whereas for Hobbes the conflict has a different origin. Indeed, conflict is not a flaw at all, but a natural consequence of human psychology in the absence of an artificially imposed order that is created by the sovereign. The remainder of Hobbes's *Leviathan* is an attempt to explain the origin and nature of that order.

The state of nature

The nature of humans is to be always in constant motion, conceived as following a succession of driving appetites or desires ceasing only in death, the ultimate termination of human motion. In Chapter X, Hobbes also provides an extended discussion of the human preoccupation with honour, status and glory. These elements of philosophical egoism are central to Hobbes's account of the natural condition of man and they are supplemented in Chapter XIII with three further dimensions that give rise to his classic account of the state

of nature as being a state of war. For Hobbes, political or civil society is not natural but artificial: it is something humans make in order to overcome the consequences of a natural condition without political or civil power. And, if it can be shown that the general features of the natural condition are such that we would always chose to leave it, or submit to political authority as a condition of avoiding it, then he will have provided a motive for a general duty of political obligation, even if the motive is not a sufficient juridical account of political obligation. So Chapter XIII commences with a discussion of equality as a basis for accounting for diffidence, but underpinning this discussion is the prior condition of scarcity.

Scarcity matters because human beings have limitless desires, in the sense of there being no natural limit to human wants. Even if we have enough of our basic needs (such as food and shelter) satisfied, glory and the desire for status, honour and differentiation will always add to our desires. Underlying this idea of scarcity is the finitude of the universe confronting the unlimited scope of human desires. Unless there is either a natural limit to our desires or unlimited material abundance, we will inevitably come into competition with each other for resources and space. Scarcity breeds competition amongst those who are forced to cohabit in relative proximity. Scarcity plus weak motivations to collaborate or cooperate mean that, even when there may be relative abundance elsewhere on the globe, rivalrous competition will arise because of the costs of moving to satisfy our desires. This condition of scarcity leading to competition has now become one of the most fundamental premises of modern economics, and means that humans always have to choose what resources and effort to put into different ends or purposes. If scarcity did not hold, then everyone could have all of the things that they wanted, all of the time, and therefore there would be no need for society or cooperation.

Equality might seem an unlikely next step for Hobbes. Surely, in circumstances of scarcity, some are strong and powerful enough to take what they need and exclude others. If this is true, then, whilst we may not end up with a universal condition of natural sociability, we might still end up with some sort of social order that is imposed naturally by the strongest. However, contrary to this chain of reasoning, Hobbes argues that in the natural condition humans are broadly speaking equal. Clearly, he does not mean that natural inequalities of power do not exist in nature. There will always be the equivalent of a Usain Bolt or Muhammad Ali who can outrun or outpunch others. But, equally, there will be the physically weaker individuals who are intellectually more subtle or sharp; they can use wit, intelligence or guile to overcome the physically strong. Hobbes is yet more radical still, because even the most ordinary individual can have equal power and advantage over the strong or the wise, so that they are never naturally subject. Everyone must sleep some of the time, and even the wise or the physically powerful can become vulnerable to the ordinary and mediocre at such a time. The crucial point that Hobbes is making is a factual

one about a rough equality of power as opposed to a moral point about the equality of standing or concern and respect that modern liberal egalitarians argue for (Kelly 2005). In his view, this emphasis on the natural condition of equality leads to the next condition: 'diffidence'.

Diffidence, for Hobbes, does not mean timidity or hesitancy but instead a universal suspicion of (or weak form of paranoia about) other people. In circumstances of natural equality of power, it follows that everyone is under threat from everyone else. This does not mean that we are all negatively motivated towards everyone else or hate. Instead, rough equality of power does undermine cooperative motivations and hence inhibits the formation of any natural permanent society. As everyone could be a potential threat or risk to our own person and possessions, we naturally assume that risk exists when interacting with or confronting others. Thus, competitors become more than a natural fact of scarcity; they become a threat and potential enemy who could threaten our life and estate. Even if they show no signs of behaving in this way, we can never know that they will not do so in the future. Consequently, our behaviour towards others tends to change from competition and wariness towards conflict. We chose to take the advantage whenever it presents itself and before others have a chance to become a threat to us, by which time it could be too late. When diffidence is aligned with glory as the natural desire for status over others, we also move from a situation where the natural condition is one of strong inconvenience and burden to one in which it becomes a permanent situation of potential or actual conflict, or, as Hobbes puts it, a war of all against all.

War, for Hobbes, really is the natural condition, as it does not have to 'consisteth ... in actual fighting; but the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary' [Chapter XIII] (1991, p. 88). In this sense, war fits the classical realist position of being not something that just breaks out periodically but the natural condition because of fear or threat of inequality or power. For Hobbes, war is not something that can be attributed to bad or fallen character, as it is for Augustine or Machiavelli. Instead it derives from the structure of human interaction in the absence of an imposed order: in this case a political authority or the sovereign.

The interplay of scarcity, diffidence and glory, coupled with equality of power, illustrates the consequences of the absence of political authority and why we would create it if it did not exist. In a wonderful and memorable passage in Chapter XIII, Hobbes describes how political authority is the condition of any of the benefits of society. Society does not create the conditions for its completion in a political order, as Aristotle argued; rather, without political authority there is no society:

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength,

and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short. [Chapter XIII] (Hobbes 1991, p. 89)

This account of the state of nature as being a state of war is an implication of the structure of human interaction, given the minimal universal account of motivations in Hobbes's psychological theory. As such, it can be seen as a hypothetical model. This is certainly something that attracts the interest of modern formal theories of political interaction or international relations, such as the theory of games. Scholars are often keen to distinguish Hobbes's social contract theory from that of his rivals on the grounds that his scheme is a hypothetical or a theoretical model (Boucher and Kelly 1994). Yet, Hobbes is also keen to emphasise the realism of his model and show how it fits historical experience, not as an empirical account of the origin of states but as an account of the condition of man in the absence of political authority:

It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of warre as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places, where they live so now. For the savage people in many places of *America*, except the government of small Families, the concord whereof dependeth on natural lust, have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before. Howsoever, it may be perceived what manner of life there would be, where there were no common Power to feare; by the manner of life, which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government, use to degenerate into, in a civil Warre. [Chapter XIII] (Hobbes 1991, pp. 89–90)

Although Hobbes's account might work as a formal model, or even as a descriptively accurate anthropology, there is surely something missing in his account that Aristotelians or his medieval followers (the 'schoolmen' that Hobbes hated) would appeal to in order to modify the negative features of the natural condition, namely moral obligation. It is common amongst Hobbes scholars to claim that the state of nature is free of morality, so that there humans are not immoral, but instead neither good nor bad. This simple characterisation has some truth in it, but technically it is not the case that Hobbes's state of nature is a morality-free zone. To see why, we need to turn to his account of natural right and natural law.

The law of nature and the right of nature

The morality that underpins the argument of the state of nature is not addressed until Chapter XIII, in which Hobbes makes a major shift from the classical natural law theory of Aquinas and Vitoria to a modern theory based on natural right. The classical theory asserts the priority of a law that distributes duties, from which individuals can infer rights. On this view, the law of nature distributes duties on everyone not to kill others, and from this one can infer a right to life constituted by being the beneficiary of those duties. In contrast, Hobbes begins with the priority of right over duty and law. In the natural condition, everyone has the power to do whatever is required to preserve themselves, and this is accompanied by a natural liberty. He defines liberty as the absence of 'externall Impediments' to the exercise of our natural powers in action, thus providing one of the classic statements of negative liberty (Berlin 1998, pp. 191–242). To be free, under this concept, is to enjoy the absence of external restrictions on one's power to act. A good deal later in the book, he makes clear that freedom is a characteristic of objects which can move or be hindered from moving:

A Free-Man, is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to doe what he has a will to do. [Chapter XXI]
(Hobbes 1991, p. 146, italics in original)

Standard examples of being hindered in acting would be restraints such as locks and chains or being imprisoned. As we will see later, it does not involve the absence of non-physical constraints such as fear or threats, or the absence of resources. In the state of nature, everyone has the right of nature because they are not under any obligation or duty not to act in a certain way.

Thus, the natural right of nature is a liberty-right that expresses our free power. Importantly, it also places no one else under any obligations to act or forbear from acting any way. This leads to his infamous claim that 'It followeth, that in such a condition, every Man has a Right to every thing: even to one anothers body' [Chapter XIII] (Hobbes 1991, p. 91). In other words, whilst there is a liberty-right to life, this imposes no duties on others not to kill me, and, if another person poses a potential risk to my life, I may pre-emptively kill them, hence the right to 'another's body'. Because the state of nature is characterised by diffidence, where potentially everyone poses such a risk, there cannot be any security. The unrestricted right of liberty creates the absence of security; we can only enjoy secure freedom if we limit our own natural liberty, and this leads to Hobbes's account of the law of nature, which has been the focus of considerable scholarly dispute.

He describes the law of nature as a:

Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; [Chapter XIV] (Hobbes 1991, p. 91)

The use of the word 'forbidden' in the quotation raises the ambiguity that scholars have found in his account of natural law morality. In what sense are people forbidden in the state of nature from destroying themselves? If there is a pre-political duty to preserve oneself, such that *not* to do so would be to act unjustly, then his argument for the priority of natural right falls. Yet, Hobbes is quite clear that in the absence of a common power in the state of nature 'nothing can be Unjust' [Chapter XIII] (Hobbes 1991, p. 90). Some scholars have inferred from this that in the natural condition there are no duties and therefore there is liberty but not morality. Others, such as Howard Warrender (1957), have argued that there is a source of duty in the state of nature, namely God, who places us under a direct duty not to kill ourselves as part of His creation. But in the state of nature that duty is incomplete because it has no sanction in this condition; hence, the creation of the sovereign occurs under a duty to complete the moral law. There are many difficulties with this thesis, not the least of which is that Hobbes says nothing to endorse it in his account of obligation. Yet, it remains of interest in that it explains how he might be able to speak of self-destruction as being morally forbidden.

Furthermore, if there are no moral duties in the state of nature, then it is difficult to see how the fundamental elements of the law of nature can be obligation-creating? Hobbes identifies 19 specific laws of nature following from the duty to preserve oneself. All are implications of this primary motive, but three are especially important as they play an important part in his contract theory of sovereign power:

1. We should strive to preserve ourselves, which means that we should strive to maintain peace among ourselves.
2. If others are willing to seek peace, then all should 'lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as we should allow other men against himself'.
3. We should keep agreements.

Hobbes is clear that we can speak of moral obligations in the natural condition if we see that these are derived from the fundamental motive to preserve ourselves. This motive is not an externally imposed duty (like a duty to obey the law of the state) but it is something that is rooted in human nature. To understand why, it should be distinguished from the source of juridical obligations (which is the artificial person of the sovereign). Juridical rights and obligations are the conclusion of his theory of right. But it is equally important that Hobbes does not argue that natural law morality is partial and incomplete, as implied by Warrender. The law of nature is genuinely binding, but this is so only *in foro interno* and not *in foro externo* [Chapter XV] (Hobbes 1991, p. 110). What he means by this distinction is that reason gives us the motive to act in ways that preserve ourselves and other people through the pursuit of peace.

Yet, as we have seen, external circumstances or the structure of human interaction will often give us reason to depart from the law of nature. So this law creates ‘hypothetical imperatives’, which for those influenced by Kant’s moral philosophy are the wrong kinds of imperatives because they hold externally only on certain conditions. Hobbes is not a Kantian and is clear about the conditional hypothetical character of the law of nature. At the same time, he does not simply reduce obligation to personal advantage. Whilst it is mostly the case that humans differ significantly in their judgements and beliefs, Hobbes thinks that in terms of fundamental motives or desires they are broadly similar. In addressing ‘the foole’ (or what we would term the free-rider) who seeks to maximise their own advantage whilst others obey the law, Hobbes’s fundamental point is that our primary motive is not to maximise advantage but to avoid violent death and preserve ourselves. In that context, the free-rider is wrong. The conflict of motives is unlike the conflict of beliefs in that its resolution requires security through determination and sanction, by a sovereign civil power. However, it is important for Hobbes that, whilst the sovereign has the ultimate authority in determining how morality should be sanctioned, the sovereign is not totally free to decide what the content of morality is. Hobbes’s ultimate conviction is that morality is given by our natures. Only the commonality of our motives to seek peace and self-preservation means that leaving the state of nature by authorising a sovereign is at least possible, as well as desirable. The account of natural right as the primacy of liberty and of natural law explains why we need sovereignty and why it must be absolute.

The creation of the sovereign

The adverse character of the state of nature provides strong reason why people would leave it, and Hobbes’s natural law theory explains why we might be said to have a duty to leave it. Both arguments are intended to explain the origin and scope of the powers of the sovereign. Both parts of the argument also emphasise that political authority or sovereignty is an artifice created by humanity to address the problem of our nature. It is explicitly not an emanation of our natures, as Aristotle suggests. This artificial character of sovereignty is beautifully captured in the image from the frontispiece of the 1651 edition of *Leviathan*, which depicts a giant body wholly made up of individual human bodies, with a head and crown and wielding a sceptre and a sword. Beneath this towering figure of the body politic united under a single head is a further depiction of an ordered and peaceful realm with well-laid-out towns and cultivated countryside. This famous engraving by Ambrose Bosse provides an iconographic depiction of sovereignty, and was intended to make the complex argument accessible to those unable to read the text. If the state of nature is the problem, then the sovereign is the solution. But how does sovereignty arise? Hobbes has

two accounts. Although they are formally the same, I examine them separately, before addressing the nature and scope of sovereign power itself.

Sovereignty by institution

Hobbes explains the origin of sovereignty by institution in the following way:

I Authorize and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorize all his Actions in like manner. [Chapter XVII] (1991, p. 120 emphasis in the original)

Of course, in arguing this he is not offering a causal explanation. Indeed, given the circumstances of the state of nature and his account of human fear and diffidence, such a causal explanation faces acute difficulties, although he does argue that these are surmountable. Instead, Hobbes's account provides a juridical explanation of political authority within his conception of natural right and natural law. As such, elements of the covenant statement above are crucial for his theory. The first point is that sovereign power is the result of individuals agreeing to give up their natural right to govern themselves. As in the 1651 frontispiece image, the sovereign is made up of individuals and more importantly of the natural rights of individuals. Yet, it is not just the culmination of these individual powers, although it is that too. Instead, it is primarily a *juridical entity* composed of the natural rights of individuals.

The second point in the quotation above is that the wording is that of a covenant or agreement. Individuals agree to transfer their natural rights through this form of words, and the agreement is the legitimate transfer of those rights; they are not simply taken away or usurped. This is the key point of the juridical institution of sovereignty: it is composed of a legitimate transfer of right. Scholars of Hobbes depict him as one of the first great social contract theorists, but it is important to also note that the agreement or covenant is of a special kind. It is not a mutual advantage contract between sovereign and subject, where the subject agrees to give up subjective right in return for security and peace. Hobbes believes that such peace and security will be the outcome of an 'original agreement', but it is not specified in the actual covenant. Subjects expect to benefit, but there is no duty imposed upon the sovereign by the alienation (or irreversible transfer) of subjective right from subject to sovereign. The agreement is not with the sovereign at all and therefore it places no conditions on the sovereign. It is explicitly a mutual agreement amongst all potential subjects to subject themselves to a sovereign. The sovereign as a person is a third-party beneficiary of the agreement and not a direct party to the agreement. The sovereign is the beneficiary of each of us alienating our subjective rights and the agreement is amongst each of us to alienate our rights if all others do so at

the same time. The sovereign agrees nothing with their subjects, nor are they asked to. The agreement to authorise a sovereign is what is often referred to as an alienation contract. By this is meant the fact that it is a one-off, unconditional agreement to give up powers that once done cannot be lawfully undone. This is so because when the juridical entity of the sovereign has been created it becomes the formal arbiter of its own rights, powers and jurisdiction. By definition there can be no right or power higher than a sovereign power.

Finally, Hobbes points out the limitation of the powers of alienation of subjective right. The motive for engaging in an agreement to establish a sovereign is the desire to remove ourselves from the 'warre of all against all' in the state of nature, and to exchange unprotected liberty for security and peace. Yet, we cannot be said to place ourselves under a duty to destroy ourselves or to submit to death: this remains part of the law of nature. This does not place a limitation on the powers of the sovereign, for it leaves the juridical authority to create and enforce punishments up to, and including, the death penalty in order to secure civil order. However, that legitimate right of sovereignty does not create a reciprocal duty on an individual to accept death at the gallows, or (in another case) to go willingly to one's death in battle. This is so because the sovereign's right to require obedience ultimately depends upon our overriding right to avoid death.

Thus, Hobbes seeks to provide a juridical account of sovereign power of political authority, rather than a causal theory of the how any particular sovereign state arose in a unanimous alienation contract or agreement. That does not imply he is not interested in the origin of political society, for he does attempt to show that his juridical account of sovereignty is consistent with a causal theory in his second account of sovereignty by acquisition or conquest.

Sovereignty by acquisition

The primordial origin of the first political societies is not Hobbes's primary concern, since this is hard to find in any historical record. There will have been original acts of institution of political societies, however, just as he acknowledges that there are places where the conditions of the state of nature do hold even in his own time, such as uncolonised parts of the Americas. The real issue addressed is a question about the normal way in which most actually existing political societies arose, from force and conquest. Are such cases consistent with a just transfer of right, and therefore the creation of sovereign powers that can in turn claim obedience and rule with legitimacy? Similarly, Hobbes asserts that individuals who are simply born as subjects of sovereign dominion have thereby authorised the alienation of their subjective right to that incumbent sovereign, and therefore have a duty of obedience to it. To understand this argument, we need to turn to Hobbes's account of liberty (in Chapter XXI).

The standard argument against conquest as a case of a legitimate transfer of right is that it involves coercion and therefore the denial of freedom. If one is

coerced into acting, then the action is not free and therefore a coerced transfer of right is not a legitimate act. Hobbes contests this view, arguing that it rests on a mistaken understanding of the concept of liberty. He provides a strong negative theory of liberty in which freedom is characterised by the absence of impediments to action: 'LIBERTY, or FREEDOME, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition, (by Opposition I mean Externall Impediments of Motion)', and he gives the examples of being 'imprisoned, or restrained, with walls, or chaynes' [Chapter XXI] (Hobbes 1991, pp. 145–146). In the absence of such impediments, a person is free to do whatever she has a will to do. As freedom is a property of objects in motion, impediments are always physical restraints on action. Consequently, an absence of will or a mental feeling of fear of the consequences of acting is not for Hobbes a restriction on the liberty of a person:

Feare, and Liberty are consistent; as when a man throweth his goods into the Sea for *feare* the ship should sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to doe it if he will: It is therefore an action of one that was *free*: [Chapter XXI] (Hobbes 1991, p. 146)

This passage has an important implication that transfers of right based on my fear of the consequences of withholding agreement is a relevant case of free action and therefore a legitimate right-conferring act. In the circumstances of being required to 'consent at the point of a sword', Hobbes is quite prepared to consider such consent a binding transfer of right. In such circumstances, we still have the opportunity to withhold consent, so the action is free. Consequently, just as a highway robber may ask, 'Your money or your life', and acquire a free transfer of property, a conquering power can legitimately acquire the right of sovereign dominion over a people, by offering them a choice between an imposed order or death. Of course, Hobbes also acknowledges that within a state the free transfer of property to a robber in return for life is not a legitimate transfer, because the sovereign will have instituted laws governing the transfer of property. The important point of Hobbes's argument is the parallel between an act of institution and a transfer of right by acquisition or conquest: both constitute free agreements because they are not the result of impediments or obstacles to action. Of course, if someone agrees to subjection at the point of a sword whilst bound to a chair, this would not constitute a free transfer of right, as the possibility of avoiding the obligation is missing. It is the ability to act that is important, irrespective of the cost of the choice or the adverse consequences of trying to avoid making it.

The parallel between an original alienation contract, and an agreement in the face of a conquering power, is completed by the argument that the intention does *not* have to be expressed in the words of a contract. The end or goal of submission to a conquering power, namely peace and order, is sufficient to demonstrate the intention to transfer right, since we all have an overriding motive

to avoid a violent death and to preserve ourselves. By linking submission to a dominant power to the transfer of right to a sovereign, Hobbes has answered the challenge of engagement with the newly installed Cromwellian Commonwealth. Having lost the Civil War, the House of Stuart was no longer able to command obedience and in so doing provide peace and security, whereas the Cromwellian army was able to do so. The forces thus became not merely the *de facto* sovereign in the absence of the Stuarts but also the *de jure* or rightful sovereign to which everyone has not only a duty but an interest in submitting to. For Hobbes, the acknowledgement of the Commonwealth was not merely an act of personal prudence on the part of someone who wished to return to England and live a quiet life; it was also a personal duty as someone who was under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth.

The constitution of the sovereign either by institution or acquisition creates the political society that Hobbes describes as a Leviathan in this famous passage:

This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS. This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that *Mortall God*, to which wee owe under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defence. For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Commonwealth, he hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to *con*forme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad. [Chapter XVII] (Hobbes 1991, p. 120)

Absolutism and the *Christian Commonwealth*

Although the political authority or the power of the sovereign is a crucial element in the emergence of the idea of the modern state, Hobbes does not really have a specific theory of the state in the way that later thinkers do. He gives no extended discussion of the relationship between constitutional powers, nor is there an outline of the crucial elements (such as the bureaucracy) that play an important role in the work of Montesquieu, Hegel or J.S. Mill. Yet, in the account of sovereignty in the latter part of Part II of *Leviathan* and in Part III, *Of the Christian Commonwealth*, and IV, *Of the Kingdom of Darknesse*, Hobbes sets the parameters for subsequent theories of the state, and for the system or society of states that forms the Westphalian model of international relations.

The central contention of Hobbes's account of sovereignty is that it must be absolutist. It is important to note that this is not necessarily a defence of monarchical absolutism, especially as he offers *Leviathan* as a declaration of engagement with the new Cromwellian Commonwealth. But what is not in doubt is his claim that the sovereign power is unitary, total, indivisible, inalienable

and final. Consequently, Hobbes cannot allow for a constitutional division of powers or right of appeal against the final demand of political authority, because that would merely identify where the true sovereign power resides. Nor can the sovereign alienate or delegate powers to an external authority. In this way, Hobbes rules out the idea of sharing power or jurisdiction with a foreign power, such as ceding the power of appointing ecclesiastical offices to the Pope or exempting clergy from civil courts – both key features of Thomas Cromwell's English revolution in government under Henry VIII. Only the sovereign can appoint ministers and political or judicial offices, or confer honours or status on subjects.

For later liberal-inclined constitutional theorists, Hobbes's theory is problematic because it gives the sovereign sole and final (total) authority over the subject and their rights. The sovereign judges all controversies over rights and claims, and decides and imposes punishments and rewards in all disputes. In so doing, the sovereign cannot ever be judged as acting unjustly by his subjects, or be subjected to punishment by them, because by definition it alone determines the content of justice. Also, equally, by definition the sovereign cannot harm his subjects. To judge the sovereign would involve appealing to a private standard outside of the law and consequently would be an unjust act by a subject. This position seems to give the sovereign extraordinary powers, and it has led many to claim that Hobbes is merely providing a cover for tyranny and oppression. Hobbes addresses this point by claiming that cries of tyranny are no more than judgements of sovereign power that a subject either dislikes or finds inconvenient. But his main point is a purely logical point about the nature of sovereign power itself, and not a judgement about the personal character of a particular sovereign prince or a prudential judgement about how sovereign power should be used. To be sovereign, political authority must be final, unified and unchallengeable, and that is why it is considered absolute as it cannot be subject to a higher authority or law as that would, by definition, be the sovereign.

Yet, this does not give a particular prince *carte blanche* to act in whatsoever way they wish. The point of sovereignty is the provision of security and the avoidance of war and conflict, and Hobbes is clear that the prince should be prudent both in the exercise of powers to avoid any collapse back into civil war, and in the exercise of their powers of war in the international realm (an implicit criticism of the Stuarts). Again, whilst the power of war is an inalienable right of sovereignty, the reckless pursuit of war, especially when the prospects of success are uncertain, places subjects in circumstances where they are being required to act against the law of nature and their own self-preservation. The successful sovereign will thus be mindful of the demands of prudent policy, whilst nevertheless enjoying the right of final decision in matters needed to preserve the peace and security of their subjects. What one has a right to do, and what it is wise or prudent to do, are not the same things, but for the benefits of civil peace it is crucial for the sovereign not to confuse these questions.

Historically, the Church had alternative claims to authority apart from the power of the sovereign, so Hobbes's argument is extended in considerable depth in Parts III and IV, which tackle the implications of his theory for religion. These major parts of the text are often glossed over by contemporary students of Hobbes as a mere historical elaboration of the fundamental logic of the origin and nature of sovereignty in Parts I and II. Yet, Hobbes's extensive discussion of the ecclesiastical power and its subordination to the civil sovereign is both a central part of Hobbes's argument and a fundamental illustration of the doctrine *cuius regio, eius religio* (who rules, their religion), derived from the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and which underpins the Westphalian settlement of 1648. The style of Hobbes's discussion in Parts III and IV is also an important illustration of the primacy of his new civil science from within the terms of political theology. Few commentators emphasise the extent to which Hobbes offers his argument as a political theology (although there are exceptions: see Lloyd 1992). Instead, most expositors praise him as one of the first genuinely modern philosophers of politics, someone who decisively subordinates all claims of revelation to the demands of reason.

This is too hasty a dismissal of how central Hobbes's political theology was to his thought. He clearly intended his book to answer those (such as Cardinal Robert Bellarmine) who used scripture and political-theological argument to advance their defence of papal claims to exercise civil and imperial power. Bellarmine (1542–1621) was one of the most important defenders of Catholic political theory following the Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent – and Hobbes had actually seen him in Rome in 1614 (Martinich 1992, p. 34). For Hobbes to simply assert the primacy of reason in the face of revelation and scripture would have been a *non sequitur* that would have failed to convince any of his contemporary opponents. It was therefore essential that he show that the argument of the first two books of *Leviathan* is fully consistent with scripture. In addition, he sought to provide the best explanation of the Old Testament account of the Kingdom of God as a limited period of sovereignty over the Jewish people, exercised by Moses on behalf of God until the time of Samuel, when the Jewish people abandoned priestly rule for a civil kingdom. Similarly, in the case of the New Testament, Hobbes emphasises that Jesus Christ's preaching of 'the coming of the Kingdom' is not an historical prediction of a temporal kingdom or state but something precisely different, which inherently leaves the domain of the political for civil sovereigns as part of God's providence.

An important consequence of these arguments is that the nature of ecclesiastical authority is not directly derived from God, or through an intermediate power such as that of the Pope, who for Hobbes is merely another European civil sovereign. It is instead a civil construct for governing religious affairs within a political community, and therefore totally subject to the discretion of the sovereign. In Part IV, Hobbes reinforces this subordination of ecclesiastical

power to civil power by supplementing scriptural arguments with scientific explanations of the origins of the idea of spirits and the way these tricks of the imagination are deployed as the cover for exercises of illegitimate political power. Against those who use the claims of scripture and religion as a basis for challenging political authority, Hobbes argues that the only thing necessary for salvation is a belief in the proposition that 'Jesus Christ is Saviour'. The affirmation of this belief is something that is independent of sovereign demands for external conformity. Therefore, no one's salvation can be put at risk by the sovereign demanding a particular form of religious observance or the proscription of it. When properly understood, the minimal demands for salvation cannot be undermined by the sovereign, and thus there can never be a legitimate religious basis for rejecting any claims of the sovereign.

The revolutionary significance of Hobbes's synthesis of civil science with political theology is perhaps lost in the modern world where the claims of revelation are given less credence, at least in the west. Yet, this change is central to the claim of the emerging sovereign state to have the ultimate power to determine the extent and claims of religion within its jurisdiction and territory. Hobbes's argument turns the *modus vivendi* compromises of 16th-century wars of religion into principled claims about the legitimate extent of political authority over the claims of religion. Hobbes undermines the claims of Christendom to be a transnational imperial order that creates the space for local sites of subsidiary rule. And he displaces the complex integration of the 'two cities' (Augustinian) model of politics as the transient secular order awaiting the final reckoning at the last judgement. With Hobbes, the idea of the modern state begins, and with it the idea of the modern state system that is at the heart of international relations.

The Hobbesian tradition in international relations

Although Hobbes's account of the unitary sovereign state provides one of the fundamental building blocks of modern international relations theory, he does not provide extensive discussion of international relations as being (just) the external relations of states. However, he does say things that intimate the direction of such a theory of international politics. Scholarly discussion of Hobbes's international thought tends to discuss those passing references as contradictions of the way that his theory has been used in contemporary international relations theory. I will turn to this aspect in the final section, but first I want to explore here the ways in which Hobbes's arguments have given rise to a distinctive approach in international relations.

Whether the common appropriation of Hobbes is ultimately faithful to the detail of his argument is a secondary matter, unless thinkers who articulate this Hobbesian tradition are simply offering scholarly historical interpretations of Hobbes's argument, which they generally are not. Only in a narrow history

of ideas is the authenticity of such interpretations a self-sufficient question. But in Hobbes's case the logic of his theory lends itself to being taken up by other writers, so that such appropriation is particularly important, and a question arises about whether it is potentially legitimate to argue that Hobbes does not have the final word on the implications of his theory. The closest that Hobbes comes to drawing a direct implication of his theory of the state of nature for international relations is captured in the following famous quotation:

But though there had never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of warre one against another; yet in all times, Kings, and Persons of Sovereigne authority, because of their Independency, are in continuall jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their Forts, Garrisons, and Guns upon the Frontiers of their Kingdomes; and continuall Spyes upon their neighbours; which is a posture of War. But because they uphold thereby, the Industry of their Subjects; there does not follow from it, that misery, which accompanies the Liberty of particular men. [Chapter XII] (Hobbes 1991, p. 90)

This passage emphasises the most significant lesson that can be drawn from *Leviathan*, namely the account of the natural condition as being one of anarchy. The concept of anarchy has become the primary understanding or challenge to the external relations of the states. By anarchy is meant the idea of a world without hierarchical or vertical authority, that is, the idea of an authority or source of power that exists above the individual units of the international domain. Neither God, through natural law, nor any imperial institution enjoys a right of authority or the power to impose its will on those units namely states. Amongst realist scholars this is both a normative and a descriptive claim, whereas amongst some liberal theorists it is a claim to be assessed empirically but not a normative claim. The factual claim is that there is no such power. The normative claim is either that there is no such authority (realists) or else that there is no such authority but there could and should be (liberals) and so we have obligations to seek it. Although providing some evidence for both positions, Hobbes is primarily appropriated by the realist tradition, especially because the nature of that international anarchy which is characterised as the exemplar of structural realism (Doyle 1997). In Doyle's account, this structural realism is contrasted with the complex realism of Thucydides and the fundamentalist realism of Machiavelli, because it does not depend upon an account of individual motivation or some flaw in human psychology. Instead, it merely and solely depends upon the circumstances or 'structure' of interaction, where the individual can be replaced by a unified state.

International anarchy follows Hobbes's model, according to realists, precisely because, whatever motivates a state's national interest, the circumstances of competition and the absence of a coordinating power create the condition

of continual potential conflict, which makes the anarchical condition a state of war. In a strikingly (and deliberately) Hobbesian passage, Waltz makes precisely this point:

The state among states, it is often said, conducts its affairs in the brooding shadow of violence. Because some state may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so – or fall in line at the mercy of their more militarily vigorous neighbours. Among states, the state of nature is a state of war. This is not meant in the sense that war constantly occurs but in the sense that, with each state deciding for itself whether or not to use force, war may at any time break out. (Waltz 1979, p. 102)

Waltz is a particularly good exemplar of the modern Hobbesian tradition because his theory is based on a model of international interaction, as opposed to a series of inferences from experience or an account of history. It is the logic of the model of the state of nature, and whether it is real or not, that is of primary importance to a Waltzian science of international relations. Waltz is not a Hobbesian in the sense of following the historical Hobbes in detail, so the historicity of his appropriation is irrelevant for the purposes of explaining international relations.

International anarchy as the absence of a permanent (as opposed to some contingent) hierarchical power amongst the states is not the only feature of Hobbes's argument in contemporary realist international relations theory. Equally important is the manifestation of what Hobbes calls 'diffidence' in international affairs, that is, not only fear but lack of trust and suspicion, which motivates the desire to strike first. This can be seen most clearly in Herz's (1951) account of the 'security dilemma' and in its most forceful version in the sceptical realism of John Mearsheimer (2014). This is the idea that in circumstances of international anarchy the quest for security by a state impels actions such as building military advantage. This in turn creates risks amongst neighbour states, and consequently leads to reactions that reduce rather than enhance security in a vicious cycle. This is precisely the argument that Hobbes says propels individuals out of the state of nature and into sovereignty, although the very possibility of this in mass settings has been challenged using modern game theory by Jean Hampton (1988). The usual argument against an expectation of states coalescing to enhance their collective security is that effective equality of power does not hold amongst states as it does amongst individuals in the state of nature. For sceptics like Mearsheimer, incentives to collaborate are weakened in a particularly Hobbesian way, so that any contingent order that might emerge within international anarchy is always evanescent and vulnerable to new security challenges. No balance of powers (for instance) is ever sufficient to constrain the threat of conflict for long. On the other hand, Waltz sees the balance of power theory as the key response to international anarchy, and most decisively in the

Cold War context in which he was writing in the balance between the two poles (or power blocks) of the United States and NATO allies versus the USSR and Eastern bloc countries (Waltz 1979).

The most striking disagreement within the Hobbesian tradition of international relations concerns the way in which the theory is supposed to fit actual international politics. It is exemplified by the contrast between the *system of states* theory, of Waltz and hard realists, and the *society of states* model, of Hedley Bull and the English School (Vincent 1981). For Waltz, a theory of international politics requires a model from which law-like generalisations can be derived, and where theories contain non-factual assumptions that must be prior to experience. In this approach, a Hobbesian theory of international politics is a system built on the interactions of stable units (such as states) seeking a balance of power or order. By simplifying experience in this way, he claims to capture what is important in the logic of international politics. What Hobbes's theory does not do, however, is attempt to reflect or explain the many forms of relationship that can exist in an anarchical system of states. For 'society of states' theorists such as Bull, international anarchy does not mean that there are no norms at all operating in the international order. All that is required is that there is no one hierarchical authority with superstate-like powers *imposing* these norms on states and commanding obligation (Bull 2002, pp. 44–47). Unlike Waltz, Bull is interested in how far 'anarchy' is an empirically accurate or realistic description of international politics. In that context, Bull rejects important elements of Hobbes's state of nature, especially his claim that there is 'no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea' [Chapter XIII] (Hobbes 1991, p. 89). Whilst there is no international order, there has always been international trade and norms that follow from this, which states and peoples (generally) comply with or there is no trade. In this sense, we have not just a state system but a society of states, albeit one that retains international anarchy, hence Bull's famous description of international relations as an anarchical society. For Bull, and those influenced by him, not only does an adequate theory need explanatory power but it must also be descriptively adequate as an account of the world.

Why internationalising *Leviathan* is not possible

With its primary focus on international anarchy as either a system or society of states, the Hobbesian tradition in international relations leaves two questions for Hobbes's theory about why a *Leviathan*-like solution is not feasible in affairs between states. Why is the state of nature argument not global in scope? And why does the logic of the derivation of sovereign not also hold amongst states, giving rise to a global state?

A global state of nature

What the system of states and society of states theorists share is the common assumption that there is more than one state, and this is the legacy of Hobbes's theory. But there remains an important question for his theory: given the logic of his argument, why is there a question about the relation between states? Indeed, why is there not a single global state? Hobbes's argument begins with individuals in a natural condition without a natural order or authority and, whilst he may argue that this is something that holds within his own time amongst the tribes of America, the logical question is why particular states ever arise: why does the state of nature not hold across the world such that the logic takes us from individuals to a global state in one move? Indeed, this is a question that Immanuel Kant asks in his rethinking of the logic of the Hobbesian account of sovereignty. Murray Forsyth also asks this question in an important essay (Forsyth 1979). He seeks to answer it by focusing on changes to the way the state of nature is theorised as Hobbes develops his argument from the *Elements of Law* through *De Cive* to *Leviathan*.

What is certainly clear is that there is nothing in the logic of the argument of *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII, that qualifies the scope of the argument: so, does that mean that there could be such a global state? This is an important question for contemporary cosmopolitan theorists addressing the challenge of globalisation. Hobbes undoubtedly makes many references to the particularity of political communities. And he reinforces the internal/external distinction of modern international politics by including defence against foreign threat as a condition of individuals' submission to the sovereign. Alongside the argument for sovereignty by acquisition, with its focus on conquest by foreign powers, this suggests that Hobbes recognises that state formation takes place within a situation of aspirant but incomplete political communities. That said, all these references and allusions to the real world of international politics are occasional and not logically entailed by his argument.

Curiously, from the perspective of modern readers, the only part of Hobbes's argument that might be seen to make necessary reference to a pluralism of political states or nations (to use biblical language) is the political theology of Part III. Here we are presented with the biblical order of a plurality of many nations, of which the Kingdom of Israel is one, and by implication, following the post-resurrection new order, another world of separate nations that are yet all subject to the new mandate of Christianity. In responding to the challenge of Jesus Christ's kingship, Hobbes clearly emphasises its extra-political nature, but also that it leaves the plurality of political communities or nations unchanged. This is the basis of his rejection of papal and Imperial claims to domination, as much as Puritan claims to turn the state into a Church or confessional political community. For Hobbes's argument to have any purchase on the Christian imagination of his readers, he has to acknowledge the plurality of nations and hence deny the idea of a world state or empire.

This peculiarly Protestant idea of the providential order as an order of distinct nations explains the inadequacy of many so-called Hobbesian realist international relations theories that simply *assume* the plurality of states as a natural fact and then focus on the systemic effects of that empirical fact. This stance might seem to echo Hobbes's own natural individualism, which also seems to acknowledge the natural fact of diverse human individuals and then model the consequences of their interaction. Yet, the assertion of a plurality of states in the international system is also a normative claim because it singles out some forms of contingent political societies as particularly significant and not just ontologically given. The plurality of nations in Christian theology is not just an observation but involves a normative claim that this is the providential order that needs to be acknowledged, and not usurped by an extra-national power like the imperial claims of the 16th-century papacy. So Hobbes actually links his philosophical and juridical account of sovereignty with a particular view of the providential order.

Although this is largely overlooked in the discussion of Hobbes's ideas in contemporary international relations and in political theory, it preoccupied Hobbes in half of the text of *Leviathan*. And according to some scholars it was an important part of Hobbes's appeal to the radical Puritan elements of the coalition around the Commonwealth Party and Cromwell's Protectorate (McQueen 2018, pp. 105–147). This political-theological claim about the providential significance of the sovereign state, or, as we now know it, the nation state (the sovereign claim of a particular people), remains an enduring part of the justification of state sovereignty in opposition to superstate organisations in the 20th and 21st centuries – even though the original biblical or apocalyptic motivations behind that perspective have long since lost their motivating power.

The (re)assertion of the sovereignty of a nation state against a superstate that curtails national sovereignty has been a curious feature of one of the most significant developments in British politics since the 2016 (Brexit) referendum to leave the European Union, and the subsequent long-running debates about 'taking back' British sovereignty. For the defenders of the UK's decision to leave the European Union, the default argument has been the incompatibility between British national sovereignty and membership of a multistate union that pools sovereignty and accepts the imposition of laws and the adjudication of those laws by the European Court of Justice (the Court of Justice of the EU). This stance was more important than any argument about the relative economic advantages of EU membership versus independence. Sovereignty and not political economy was the critical issue in the run-up to and aftermath of the referendum. As 'Leavers' defended that position of prioritising sovereignty against counterclaims of its economic irrationality, the political-theological aspect of Hobbes's argument has re-emerged. This story could be told from the left-of-centre side of the British ideological perspective using the work of Richard Tuck, who along with Noel Malcolm (see below) occupied a dominant position in British Hobbes scholarship in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Tuck was a supporter of Brexit from the left – a position sometimes referred to as ‘Lexit’ (2020).

An equally interesting example from the right is provided by Noel Malcolm’s writing on the future of conservatism. Malcolm is one of the most important Hobbes scholars of his generation, the general editor of *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes* and editor of the definitive edition of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. His well-known essay ‘Conservative Realism and Christian Democracy’ (1996) was published 20 years before the Brexit referendum debates. It criticises the elision of English conservatism with European Christian democracy, which was advocated by a number of British Conservative Party thinkers and MPs. Malcolm gives a relatively uncontentious account of the development of Christian social democracy alongside – or, in parts of Europe, out of – Catholic social teaching, derived from late 19th-century social papal encyclicals. He next argues that European Christian social democracy might align on some key issues with conservatism, as understood in England. But it fails to acknowledge the most important element of national sovereignty, which is the primacy of the political in it. This is the key danger of European Christian democracy and its dominance within the political structures of the European Union and its advocates’ preoccupation with ever closer union and the diminishing of national sovereign competencies.

Malcolm’s essay does not advocate leaving the European Union; that is still some two decades away. But it does distinguish between a social approach to politics as derived from Catholic social theory, which explicitly remains silent on the issue of national sovereignty, and the claims of national sovereignty by sovereign peoples as national states. He argues in good Hobbesian fashion that politics is about sovereign powers and tends to particularism amongst people with conflicting identities, whereas Catholicism as a religion that makes universal moral claims is essentially cosmopolitan. It therefore cannot make sense of the primacy of sovereign political claims over those of individuals and social groups. In raising the prospect of a way of understanding politics that does not assume that sovereign political powers are just given in the natural order of history, Malcolm’s argument reminds us that sovereignty is an irreducibly normative concept. It is also one in real competition with other ways of conceiving of political and social relationships, whether that be in the context of the British state’s relationship with the EU, the British Conservative Party’s choices over its fundamental ideological commitments, or Hobbes’s argument with his contemporaries about the claims of the sovereign prince over the claims of an international and imperial absolutism based on papal authority. When realist international relations theorists assume the idea of the nation state as a given, they are not merely making an observation statement about the world but are categorising it in a normative way.

Although this political-theological perspective is central to the argument of *Leviathan*, and therefore an important feature of Hobbes’s theory of the state

and the system of states, it is not a logical implication from the account of sovereign power. To understand this argument, we need to distinguish between two questions that run in parallel through Hobbes's book but which remain distinct. The first is the account of the logic of sovereignty and the second is the origin of the sovereign state. Sovereign power is presented as an answer to the problem of a state of nature, and so the power of sovereignty is as broad as that state of nature. The extent of sovereign power is therefore potentially as extensive as the whole earth, hence the question 'could there be a global sovereign?' For Hobbes, there is no *logical* limitation to the scope of sovereign power. That said, there may be practical limitations to the effective extent of sovereignty, such that the requirements break down; these, however, are practical and empirical (not logical) limitations to sovereignty. Similarly, if the state of nature always arises first in local contexts, because of natural limitations to human interaction, then the problem of the logical scope of sovereignty will not arise as a problem, because it must always be scaled at the size necessary to deliver peace and security. If this small-scaledness is a natural fact or a consequence of divine providence, then there will always be different particular states of nature in different locations, and the problem of a global sovereign will not arise.

Towards a hierarchical world order?

Although the absence of a universal or global state of nature rules out a global sovereign, other scholars have continued to ask why the state of nature between local sovereign powers does not later on create a two-tier logic working towards a global state or some other state-like sovereign order. This model has been most influential amongst those who have tried to theorise an institutionalisation of international peace or global governance. Here the idea is that there is a first-stage covenant between individuals to establish a sovereign state, and then a second-stage covenant between sovereigns to establish a global hierarchical order or world state. We might think Hobbes's theory could entail this because the example of the relations between princes (states) is used as an illustration of how the state of nature as a state of war, the implication being that there is an analogy, and, if the analogy is strict, then the same logic ought to hold.

In this case, Hobbes's argument is much clearer about the analogy not being precise. Firstly, his allusion to foreign princes is to illustrate permanent risk of war, and not the full logic of state of nature itself. So Hobbes does not intend to make the analogy precise enough to warrant the inference of a two-stage logic to his contract theory. More importantly, two fundamental elements of the state of nature do not hold in relations between states. Although individuals clearly fear death (for the most part), they certainly can die and that is not the case with political communities. However, we see the catastrophes that befall peoples, states or nations; they do not die altogether. Wars and revolutions can

certainly devastate whole countries, but they do not die completely in the same way that individual people do.

The other element of the state of nature that does not hold between states is the requirement of rough equality of power. Hobbes clearly recognises that this condition does not hold amongst states, and he does not expect it to hold given his argument for sovereignty to transform by acquisition or conquest. In the absence of these elements of the state of nature, the implication of a second-tier agreement does not hold. Without the fear of death and the equality of power making all equally vulnerable, there will always be reasons for princes to seek other ways of securing their position. Sometimes this will be war and sometimes this will be alliances. Those princes who enjoy a natural advantage of power will always seek to structure the terms of interstate cooperation to secure order on advantageous terms for them. This 'realpolitik' is precisely what motivated (Catholic) France's alliance with Sweden and the Protestant powers against the fellow Catholic Habsburgs' empire.

The final point that has been taken as a sign of Hobbes lending support to a view of the international realm as an anarchical society (Bull 2002, pp. 44–47) is the introduction of sociability following the establishment of sovereignty. Hobbes famously characterises the state of nature as a world without commerce, trade, industry and art. So the implication of this stance is that only the creation of a sovereign state allows these evidently important and pervasive activities to flourish. In consequence, the international order is not a world without these important elements of human sociability, even if it is one characterised by the threat of war. Throughout the huge devastation of the Thirty Years War, German and central European industry, art, philosophy and some of the highest achievements of humanity continued to flourish, as did international trade amongst non-belligerents during World War II.

In these circumstances there is the opportunity for cooperation and collaboration across borders as well as competition. As Boucher and Malcolm show, Hobbes was both aware of and involved in colonial trade and commerce (Boucher 1998; Malcolm 2002). This is not just an extraneous biographical fact unrelated to the logic of Hobbes's argument. He is quite clear that international conflict, cooperation and collaboration are shaped by post-state sociability that is absent in the state of nature. This sociability is limited and is insufficient to ensure a permanently pacific international order, but it is not a state of nature (cf. Beitz 1999). So any analogy between politics within states and between states does not hold, nor was it meant to hold.

Overall, Hobbes's great achievement is to provide a unified concept of a sovereign entity that we now know as the state, and to outline the logic of the state system that emerged out of the catastrophe of the European wars of religion. This model is considerably developed and extended by subsequent thinkers, but Hobbes provides its fundamental outline and logic. Whether that system, and the Westphalian order it explains, is stable and permanent is an historical question that Hobbes avoids.

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<https://oll.libertyfund.org/person/thomas-hobbes>