



Of the State of Men Without Civil Society

Thomas Hobbes

1. The faculties of human nature may be reduced unto four kinds: bodily strength, experience, reason, passion. Taking the beginning of this following doctrine from these, we will declare in the first place what manner of inclinations men who are endued with these faculties bear towards each other and whether and by what faculty they are born apt for society and so preserve themselves against mutual violence; then proceeding, we will show what advice was necessary to be taken for this business and what are the conditions of society or of human peace—that is to say (changing the words only), what are the fundamental laws of nature.

2. The greatest part of those men who have written aught concerning commonwealths either suppose or require us or beg of us to believe that man is a creature born fit for society. The Greeks call him *zoon politikon*; and on this foundation, they so build up the doctrine of civil society, as if for the preservation of peace and the government of mankind there were nothing else necessary than that men should agree to make certain covenants and conditions together, which themselves should then call laws. Which axiom, though received by most, is yet certainly false and an error proceeding from our too slight contemplation of human nature. For they who shall more narrowly look into the causes for which men come together and delight in each other's company, shall easily find that this happens not because naturally it could not happen otherwise, but by accident. For, if by nature one man should move another (that is) as man, there could no reason be returned why every man should not equally love every man, as being equally man, or why he should rather frequent those whose society affords him honor or profit. We do not therefore by nature seek society for its own sake, but that we may receive some honor or profit from it; these we desire primarily, that secondarily. How by what advice men do meet, will be best known by observing those things which they do when they are met. For if they meet for traffic, it's plain every man regards not his fellow, but his business; if to discharge some office, a certain market friendship is begotten, which has more of jealousy in it than true love and whence factions sometimes may arise, but good will never; if for pleasure and recreation of mind, every man is wont to please himself most with those things which stir up laughter; whence he may (according to the nature of that which is ridiculous) by comparison of another man's defects and infirmities, pass the more current in his own opinion. And although this be sometimes innocent and without offence, yet it is manifest they are not so much delighted with the society as their own vain glory. But for the most part, in these kinds of meetings, we wound the absent; their whole life, sayings, actions are examined, judged, condemned. Nay, it is very rare, but some present receive a fling before they part; so as his reason was not ill, who was wont always at parting to go out last. And these are indeed the true delights of society unto which we are carried by nature, i.e. by those passions which are incident to all creatures, until, either by sad experience or good precepts, it so fall out (which in many never happens) that the appetite of present matters be dulled with the memory of things past, without which the discourse of most quick and nimble men on this subject is but cold and hungry.

But if it so happen that being met, they pass their time in relating some stories and one of them begins to tell one which concerns himself; instantly every one of the rest most greedily desires to speak of himself too. If one relate some wonder, the rest will tell you miracles, if they have them; if not, they'll feign them. Lastly, that I may say somewhat of them who pretend to be wiser then others, if they meet to talk of Philosophy, look how many men, so many would be esteemed masters, or else they not only love not their fellows, but even persecute them with hatred. So clear is it by experience to all men who a little more narrowly consider human affairs, that all free congress arises either from mutual poverty or from vain glory; whence the parties met, endeavor to carry with them either some benefit or to leave behind them that same some esteem and honor with those with whom they have been conversant: The same is also collected by reason out of the definitions themselves of will, good, honor, profitable. For when we voluntarily contract society, in all manner of society we look after the object of the will, i.e. that which every one of those who gather together propounds to himself for good, now whatsoever seems good, is pleasant and relates either to the senses or the mind; but all the mind's pleasure is either glory (or to have a good opinion of one's self) or refers to glory in the end; the rest are sensual or conducing to sensuality, which may be all comprehended under the word conveniences. All society therefore is either for gain or for glory; i.e., not so much for love of our fellows, as for love of ourselves. But no society can be great or lasting, which begins from vain glory, because that glory is like honor: If all, men have it, no man has it; for they consist in comparison and precellence. Neither does the society of others advance any whit the cause of my glorying in my self; for every man must account himself such as he can make himself without the help of others. But though the benefits of this life may be much furthered by mutual help, since yet those may be better attained to by dominion than by the society of others, I hope nobody will doubt but that men would much more greedily be carried by nature, if all fear were removed, to obtain dominion, than to gain society. We must therefore resolve that the original of all great and lasting societies consisted not in the mutual good will men had towards each other, but in the mutual fear they had of each other.

3. The cause of mutual fear consists partly in the natural equality of men, partly in their mutual will of hurting; whence it comes to pass that we can neither expect from others nor promise to ourselves the least security. For if we look on men full grown and consider how brittle the frame of our human body is (which perishing, all its strength, vigor, and wisdom itself perishes with it) and how easy a matter it is even for the weakest man to kill the strongest, there is no reason why any man trusting to his own strength should conceive himself made by nature above others. They are equals who can do equal things one against the other; but they who can do the greatest things (namely kill) can do equal things. All men therefore among themselves are by nature equal. The inequality we now discern, has its spring from the civil law.

4. All men in the state of nature have a desire and will to hurt, but not proceeding from the same cause, neither equally to be condemned. For one man, according to that natural equality which is among us, permits as much to others as he assumes to himself (which is an argument of a temperate man, and one that rightly values his power); another, supposing himself above others, will have a license to do what he lists and challenges respect and honor as due to him before others (which is an argument of a fiery spirit). This man's will to hurt arises from vain glory, and the false esteem he has of his own strength; the other's from the necessity of defending himself, his liberty, and his goods against this man's violence.

5. Furthermore, since the combat of wits is the fiercest, the greatest discords which are, must necessarily arise from this contention. For in this case it is not only odious to contend against, but also not to consent; for not to approve of what a man says is no less then tacitly to accuse him of an error in that thing which he speaks; as in very many things, to dissent is as much as if you

accounted him a fool whom you dissent from; which may appear hence, that there are no wars so sharply waged as between sects of the same religion and factions of the same commonweal, where the contestation is either concerning doctrines or politic prudence. And since all the pleasure and jollity of the mind consists in this, even to get some, with whom comparing, it may find somewhat wherein to triumph, and vaunt itself; it's impossible but men must declare sometimes some mutual scorn and contempt either by laughter or by words or by gesture or some sign or other, than which there is no greater vexation of mind and than from which there cannot possibly arise a greater desire to do hurt.

6. But the most frequent reason why men desire to hurt each other, arises hence that many men at the same time have an appetite to the same thing, which yet very often they can neither enjoy in common, nor yet divide it. Whence it follows that the strongest must have it, and who is strongest must be decided by the sword.

7. Among so many dangers therefore, as the natural lusts of men do daily threaten each other withal, to have a care of one's self is not a matter so scornfully to be looked upon, as if so be there had not been a power and will left in one to have done otherwise. For every man is desirous of what is good for him and shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death; and this he does, by a certain impulsion of nature, no less then that whereby a stone moves downward: It is therefore neither absurd nor reprehensible, neither against the dictates of true reason, for a man to use all his endeavors to preserve and defend his body, and the members thereof from death and sorrows; but that which is not contrary to right reason, that all men account to be done justly and with right; neither by the word right is any thing else signified than that liberty which every man has to make use of his natural faculties according to right reason. Therefore the first foundation of natural right is this, that every man as much as in him lies endeavor to protect his life and members.

8. But because it is in vain for a man to have a right to the end, if the right to the necessary means be denied him; it follows, that since every man has a right to preserve himself, he must also be allowed a right to use all the means and do all the actions, without which he cannot preserve himself.

9. Now whether the means which he is about to use and the action he is performing be necessary to the preservation of his life and members or not, he himself, by the right of nature, must be judge. For, say another man judge that it is contrary to right reason that I should judge of mine own peril, why now, because he judges of what concerns me, by the same reason, because we are equal by nature, will I judge also of things which do belong to him; therefore it agrees with right reason—that is, it is the right of nature that I judge of his opinion, i.e. whether it conduce to my preservation or not.

10. Nature has given to every one a right to all. That is, it was lawful for every man in the bare state of nature, or before such time as men had engaged themselves by any covenants or bonds, to do what he would and against whom he thought fit and to possess, use, and enjoy all what he would or could get. Now because whatsoever a man would, it therefore seems good to him because he wills it, and either it really does, or at least seems to him to contribute toward his preservation, (but we have already allowed him to be judge in the foregoing article whether it does or not, in so much as we are to hold all for necessary whatsoever he shall esteem so) and by the 7. article it appears that by the right of nature those things may be done and must be had, which necessarily conduce to the protection of life and members, it follows that in the state of nature to have all and do all is lawful for all. And this is that which is meant by that common saying, nature has given all to all; from whence we understand likewise, that in the state of nature, profit is the measure of right. In the mere state of nature, this is thus to be understood: What any man does in the bare state of nature is injurious to no man; not that in such a state he cannot offend

God, or break the laws of nature; for injustice against men presupposes human laws, such as in the state of nature there are none. Now the truth of this proposition thus conceived is sufficiently demonstrated to the mindful reader in the articles immediately foregoing; but because in certain cases the difficulty of the conclusion makes us forget the premises, I will contract this argument, and make it most evident to a single view. Every man has right to protect himself, as appears by the seventh article. The same man therefore has a right to use all the means which necessarily conduce to this end by the eight article. But those are the necessary means which he shall judge to be such by the ninth article. He therefore has a right to make use of and to do all whatsoever he shall judge requisite for his preservation; wherefore by the judgment of him that does it, the thing done is either right or wrong and therefore right. True it is therefore in the bare state of nature, but if any man pretend somewhat to tend necessarily to his preservation, which yet he himself does not confidently believe so, he may offend against the laws of nature, as in the third chapter of this book is more at large declared. It has been objected by some: If a son kill his father, does he him no injury? I have answered, That a son cannot be understood to be at any time in the state of nature, as being under the power and command of them to whom he owns his protection as soon as ever he is born, namely either his fathers, or his mothers, or his that nourished him, as is demonstrated in the ninth chapter.

11. But it was the least benefit for men thus to have a common right to all things; for the effects of this right are the same, almost, as if there had been no right at all; for although any man might say of everything, this is mine, yet could he not enjoy it, by reason of his neighbor who, having equal right and equal power, would pretend the same thing to be his.

12. If now to this natural proclivity of men to hurt each other, which they derive from their passions, but chiefly from a vain esteem of themselves, you add the right of all to all, wherewith one by right invades, the other by right resists, and whence arise perpetual jealousies and suspicions on all hands, and how hard a thing it is to provide against an enemy invading us, with an intention to oppress and ruin, though he come with a small number, and no great provision. It cannot be denied but that the natural state of men, before they entered into society, was a mere war, and that not simply, but a war of all men against all men; for what is war, but that same time in which the will of contesting by force is fully declared either by words or deeds? The time remaining is termed peace.

13. But it is easily judged how disagreeable a thing to the preservation either of mankind or of each single man, a perpetual war is: But it is perpetual in its own nature, because in regard of the equality of those that strive, it cannot be ended by victory; for in this state the conqueror is subject to so much danger, as it were to be accounted a miracle, if any, even the most strong should close up his life with many years, and old age. They of America are examples hereof, even in this present age. Other nations have been in former ages, which now indeed are become civil, and flourishing, but were then few, fierce, short-lived, poor, nasty, and destroyed of all that pleasure, and beauty of life, which peace and society are wont to bring with them. Whosoever therefore holds, that it had been best to have continued in that state in which all things were lawful for all men, he contradicts himself; for every man, by natural necessity desires that which is good for him: nor is there any that esteems a war of all against all, which necessarily adheres to such a state, to be good for him. And so it happens that through fear of each other we think it fit to rid ourselves of this condition, and to get some fellows; that if there needs must be war, it may not yet be against all men, nor without some helps.

14. Fellows are gotten either by constraint or by consent: By constraint, when after fight the conqueror makes the conquered serve him either through fear of death or by laying fetters on him. By consent, when men enter into society to help each other, both parties consenting without any constraint. But the conqueror may by right compel the conquered, or the strongest

the weaker (as a man in health may one that is sick, or he that is of riper years a child), unless he will choose to die, to give caution of his future obedience. For since the right of protecting ourselves according to our own wills proceeded from our danger, and our danger from our equality, it's more consonant to reason and more certain for our conservation, using the present advantage to secure ourselves by taking caution, than when they shall be full grown and strong and got out of our power, to endeavor to recover that power again by doubtful fight. And on the other side, nothing can be thought more absurd, then by discharging whom you already have weak in your power, to make him at once both an enemy and a strong one. From whence we may understand likewise as a corollary in the natural state of men, that a sure and irresistible power confers the right of dominion; and ruling over those who cannot resist; insomuch, as the right of all things, that can be done, adheres essentially and immediately unto this omnipotence hence arising.

15. Yet men cannot expect any lasting preservation continuing thus in the state of nature, i.e. of war, by reason of that equality of power and other human faculties they are endued withal. Wherefore to seek peace, where there is any hope of obtaining it, and where there is none, to enquire out for auxiliaries of war, is the dictate of right reason; that is, the law of nature, as shall be shown in the next chapter.

.Thomas Hobbes. *De Cive*. Chapter 1. London, 1651. Text language updated.

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