

Thomas Hobbes' view on the subject of power in "Leviathan"

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Abstract

Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679) was one of the outstanding representatives of English materialism in the seventeenth century (Duncan, 2021), who "systematized Francis Bacon's materialism" (Marx & Engels, 2004, p. 196). At the same time, he applied the principle of mechanism to the socio-political field (Hobbes, 2019, p. 3). In the work on politics, "Leviathan," the main work expresses quite fully the content which is the essence of the political thought of Thomas Hobbes.

The state and power, including power in Leviathan, were formed under the influence of the English revolution and civil war. From the loss and suffering caused by the "[w]ar of everyone against everyone" and "man and man are wolves" caused by civil war, Hobbes established the theory of Social contract. That is, in the process of transitioning from the natural state to the civil state, individuals agree to transfer power to the supreme being with incomparable power in order to ensure peace, stability, and security. The powerful, supreme being was described by Hobbes with the image of Leviathan, a sea monster of incomparable power, described in the Christian Bible. The power, responsibility of the supreme, and the relationship between the supreme and the citizens analyzed by Hobbes in "Leviathan" have so far remained topical, leaving valuable lessons for the formation of reasonable political space for socio-economic development.

Keywords: Leviathan, social contract, the natural state, the civil state, the subject of power.

1. Introduction

Along with the state, the issue of political power, including the nature and power occupying a central position in the political field of social life, has been studied for ages since the past to the present from many different perspectives. In the 17th - 18th centuries, the impact of

economic, political and social changes in the bourgeois revolution era on ideological activities led to the birth of many political theories, which date back to ancient times. Social contract theory is one of them. For Thomas Hobbes, social contract theory became the starting point in the interpretation of a wide range of political issues, which prominently his views on the state and political power.

The content and substance of social contract theory, power and authority in "Leviathan" are studied and evaluated from many different approaches. In the work *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, Mary G. Dietz (1990) argued that the image of the supreme being presented by Hobbes in the *Leviathan* is both a recognition of the situation of England in turbulent times, both carrying the meaning of the approach of a strong power. However, while justifying this political choice, it is impossible not to see his conservatism.

David P. Gauthier (2000) argued that the socio-political and economic conditions of England during the post-revolutionary English civil war (1642–1651) influenced determining the appropriate political environment to overcome a state of war and hostility. The giving of almost absolute power to a supreme being is a voluntary and inevitable choice.

2. Background of the study

In *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory* (2000), Gabriella Slomp clarified Hobbes' key ideas about the effect of political stability on national development, conflicts and ambitions, paradoxes and counter-resolution, fear, and hope for a better world. At the same time, she pointed out that Hobbes' view of the nature of the power of the head of state through the voluntary agreement of individuals has deep historical roots, going back to antiquity.

In addition, Stephen J. Finn (2004) pointed out the connection between Hobbes' natural philosophy and political views. Stephen has a different view that Hobbes' political views influenced Hobbes' natural philosophy. By analyzing the content and substance of Hobbes' political philosophy in "On the Citizen" and "Leviathan", Stephen clarified the historical imprint of England in Hobbes' political philosophy and responsibility of the Supreme being in the process of regulating social relations.

Additionally, Norberto Bobbio (1993) makes some fairly new observations on the content of Hobbes' political philosophy and its influence on modern political philosophy.

From the survey of research works on Hobbes, especially the subject of power in *Leviathan*, the author believes that *Leviathan* is topical in

today's conditions, when issues such as peace and war, social consensus and responsibility of the head of state are still unfinished stories. The author's research seeks to find the starting point of Hobbes' view of the subject of power, then examines Hobbes' view of the subject of power and responsibility of the ultimate. From there, the author points out the values and limitations of Hobbes' view on the subject of power.

Therefore, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the bourgeois revolution and the civil war affect the content and substance of Hobbes's theory of the social contract?
2. What are the merits and limitations of the "two-state" approach (natural state and civil state) in analyzing the issue of power and the subject of power?
3. When presenting the image of Leviathan as a symbol of tyranny - dictator, did Hobbes go against the trend of the times and fall into political conservatism, as Plato experienced?

Those are the problems raised in clarifying important points in Hobbes' political philosophy, which are expressed quite concentrated in the work "Leviathan", thereby contributing to clarifying the nature, values and limitations of Hobbes' political philosophy.

3. Literature Review

This section explains the literature review on the topic and explain its relevance to the study

3.1. "Social contract" theory - the starting point of view on the subject of power

"Leviathan" (Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil) is of a particular importance in Hobbes' political philosophy. Leviathan is the model for Hobbes to build the symbol of power in the theory of the state. It is the sea monster of unparalleled power, described in the Christian Bible (Complete Bible: Old and New Testament, 1998, pp. 1012-1015). The Leviathan in the original Latin consists of four parts, with 47 chapters. When translated into English, there are three remaining parts: The first part discusses man, the second part discusses the commonwealth, and the third part discusses Christianity. Although the main theme of "Leviathan" is politics, the first chapters deal with ontological and epistemological issues, thereby demonstrating the unity of Hobbes' philosophical worldview. Gauthier (2000, p. 2) stated that "[h]obbes was a methodological mechanist. He sought to structure a unified

science, proceeding from the study of objects in general to specific objects, that is, people, and then objects artificial (body) man-made.”

The seeds of social contract theory have been established since antiquity, especially in the view of the Pythagorean confederacy and the dialectic, when it comes to a voluntary association in the community or the role of language in the enforce legal covenants. However, it was not until Hobbes formulated the social contract theory that this theory had a clear content, and a new system was established. Unlike Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626), who advocates establishing an ideal society on a remote island (only in the imagination), there is an application of the concept of "knowledge is power" (Bacon, 2009). Hobbes builds on his social contract theory from his political experiences in England and examines ancient to medieval models of state and power. The direct socio-political basis of this theory is the reality of England during the decades of revolution and civil war. Such anarchy and inhumanity are hard to accept, and can only be related to the wild, social, immoral and lawless condition, the natural condition of mankind (Hobbes, 2019, p. 42). But even with animals, brutal exclusion is not always the case. Hobbes writes, “[i]t is a fact that certain living beings, such as bees and ants, live in a social manner. Aristotle included these creatures among those that are political” (p. 60). Humans, "equipped with more intelligence than animals", behave towards each other worse than animals. Lack of mutual trust, honor, status and lust for glory cause people to often lose control of their behavior. When there is a lack of a common guarantee of security, a public power, people get lost in constant confrontation. In nature, there are neither proper laws and nor moral standards but only muscle strength in the sense that the strong win the weak.

According to Hobbes, in the absence of a common power, which forces everyone to fear, people are in a state known as war, where every individual is at war with every other individual " (Hobbes, 2019, pp. 43-44). In the state of nature, everyone has a right, yet, it is only a formality because it is a right under the condition of being on guard, and fear of being taken away. Rights, from the right to life to the right to freedom and possession, are not clearly and transparently defined for each individual because, instead, a sense of community is the physical and immoral force that governs all. Today someone has the right; tomorrow, the right is taken away. There is only one basic "right" to survive - the right to self-defense, to flee from the stronger. Hobbes points out that "the four human abilities are physical strength, experience, reason, feelings (or emotions)", but humans use them in a one-sided way then causing those abilities to be wasted in the state of nature (Hobbes, 1983, p. 41).

In a state of chaos and war, "man to man is wolf," the need for survival has forced a man to consider the possibility of a "contract and agreement by which the main parts of the body value are first created, linked" (Hobbes, 2019, p. 3). Only then will the human's innate abilities become useful and meaningful beyond the natural state, which is the opposite of the most quintessential value in every human being. It is necessary to overcome that state, not only by reason, but also by desire. Hobbes considered civil war to be inhumane and as horribly absurd as can be imagined. Animosity and fraternal conflict are rife only because of uncontrolled fantasies. From there, he emphasized the need to link people together to transition to a new state when the institutionalization of human abilities and nature takes place on the basis of the voluntary consent of all. The seemingly simplest need has become the sacred and serious one, prompting people to "legalize" inevitably what has related to the existence and development of man himself. The desires (passions), which lead people to peace, are the fear of death. Hobbes writes the desire to obtain what is necessary for a good life and hopes to obtain them through diligence. Reason suggests appropriate efforts for peace on the basis of which people can come to an agreement. Such proposals are what is otherwise called the "lawes of nature" (p. 44). What is natural law? Hobbes defines:

"A law of nature, also known as *lex naturalis*, is a general rule or principle discovered through reasoning. It prohibits individuals from doing anything that may harm their life or take away their means of preserving it. Additionally, it requires individuals to perform actions that they believe will help preserve their life" (Hobbes, 2019, p. 44) The same concept of natural law is also highlighted in "De Cive." (1983, pp. 51-52).

Hobbes also noted the difference between "jus" and "lex" or right and law. He believes that these two concepts must not be mixed, as the right is the freedom to do or not to do. In contrast, the law prescribes and forces members to choose one. Thus, clearly different laws and rights, similar to obligation and liberty, have different meanings in relation to one and the same thing.

Thus, transitioning from the natural state to the civil state requires a contract or agreement between people based on acknowledging a supreme power, with the symbol of the sword of justice and the power of the king to maintain peace and ensure the security of each individual. "The mutual transferrin of Right, is that which men call CONTRACT" (Hobbes, 2019, p. 46). The right to be replaced by law is a necessity in the consent process of each individual. They reduce their own rights and give the subject power to maintain peace and stability, making human abilities be used in a reasonable and directional way.

Thus, “[r]ight If a person renounces their right or transfers it to another, they are no longer entitled to it. Renouncing is when a person does not care who receives the benefit of the right, while transferring is when they intend for a specific person or group to receive the benefit. Once a person has abandoned or transferred their right, they are obligated not to interfere with those who now possess it. It is their duty not to undo their voluntary action, and doing so is considered injustice and injury because the right was previously renounced or transferred. Therefore, injury or injustice in disputes is similar to absurdity in scholarly debates because contradicting one's original position is absurd, and undoing a voluntary action is considered injustice.” (Hobbes, 2019, p. 45)

In accepting alienation, losing natural rights is a reasonable choice to avoid the situation of "war of all against all". It is no coincidence that the first natural law is the 19 laws. "The Lawes of Nature are Immutable and Eternal" asserts as "the imperative, or the general rule of reason", that, "[t]he Passions that incline men" to peace, are Feare of Desire of such things as necessary to commodious living" and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them. And Reason suggesteth convenient Articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement" (Hobbes, 2019). Hobbes again stressed the need to seek and adhere to peace, because, in the end, stemming from the painful history of mankind as well as that of England, peace, though poor, is still better than war, associated with an irreparable loss.

Thus, it can be said that, in Hobbes' analysis of the Social contract, the transfer of power from the formal and meaningless right of each individual to the right of a supreme being or lord (the Right of Sovereign) became a necessity. This transfer of power is the core content of the Social contract.

3.2. Hobbes' view of the subject of power and responsibility of the ultimate - the autocrat

When the state was born, the civil state replaced the natural state in order to remedy unrest and maintain peace for the benefit of all. In chapter XVII of "Leviathan" - Hobbes, in his work "Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Common-Wealth", argues that the ultimate goal of individuals in forming a commonwealth is their own self-preservation and a more peaceful life. He notes that people have a natural love for liberty and power over others, but they come to realize that living in a commonwealth restrains these passions. By doing so, they are able to avoid the miserable condition of war that is the inevitable consequence of natural human passions. In order to ensure that individuals keep their agreements and follow the laws of nature, there must be a visible power to keep them in line, and this is achieved through the fear of punishment" (Hobbes, 2019, p. 59).

"Sovereign Power" is awarded, whether to an individual or a collective meeting. It must take into account the will of the people, "transferred by the people's agreement" to be valid. Such is Hobbes' message about the art of power built on an understanding of human will. Hobbes expressed his views clearly and consistently. Stemming from the lessons of history - instability originates from the crisis of slave democracy in Greece and the lack of transparency in the exercise of power between the people and the Senate of the Roman Republic. Next came the unscrupulous domination of the church in the "kingdom of darkness" (medieval), and finally, the tragic practice of England during the Civil War. The foregoing shows that it is necessary to form a centralized and effective power apparatus to maintain peace and stability. The "sacrifice" of each individual's rights to focus is on the right of the lord to govern fairly. Expressing the transformation of human rights is from the natural state to the civil state to form the state. Voluntary choice through agreement is also an expression of freedom of choice. The logic of the problem lies in the subject of power. The head of state does not appear spontaneously, nor is it an abuse of power, but is consciously chosen by individuals. Hobbes writes, "In every commonwealth, the sovereign represents all the subjects absolutely" (Hobbes, 2019, p. 78). From here, it can be said that the sense of citizenship in the state, when every citizen's behavior is associated with the survival of the country, each choice must show civic responsibility. It is now a responsibility to the nation through the supreme representative of the supreme being, the lord - Leviathan, because after all, "they dissolved, not by external violence, but intestine disorder" (p. 111).

The subject of power has been interesting since the emergence of the state, and the interpretation of the powerful subject often reflects changes in social reality. When the subject of power does not bring into play the effect of state administration and social activities, the replacement of the powerful subject is put in place. Faced with the prospect of a severe crisis of slave democracy, Plato wished to replace it with an aristocratic-republican polity. Philosophers were chosen by him as the head of the state because it was the "golden class", representing the highest value, wisdom and intelligence. He argues that "until the philosopher plays the role of leader of the state, power will not be unified, and the state will not be liberated from evil" (Plato, 2013, pp. 399-400).

More than two millennia later, in the context of Italy falling into a state of fragmentation and interference from the outside, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527) established a political view of making the ends justify the means. He determined that the ultimate goal is national unification, territorial integrity, stability and prosperity. In that sense, Machiavelli exalts the role of a Cesare Borgia-type "skillful

leader” who chooses to gain the throne by “deviation and wickedness,” (1979, p. 103) and, at the same time, compares rulers with wise and decisive qualities to foxes and lions (1971, p. 135). The determination of the subject of power is epochal and his inheritance. It is not established by chance but based on socio-historical conditions and specific political events. That requires a new approach, beyond the existing, towards what is needed for the common good of the nation. For Hobbes, it is a powerful supreme being, capable of ensuring the effective operation of the state apparatus for the common good of society, not the interests of any group of people. In chapter XXIX of "Leviathan", which discusses the causes of the weakening and disintegration of the state, Hobbes criticizes those who, One reason why people seek to gain power, such as to become a ruler of a kingdom, is that they may be satisfied with having less power than what is required to maintain peace and defend the commonwealth” (Hobbes, 2019, p. 111).

From the lessons of history and British reality, Hobbes opposes the idea of separation of powers. He argues that the separation of state power is tantamount to destroying it, because such division leads to branches of power "annihilating each other", weakening the state. He declares, “[t]hat The governments that people are obligated to obey are straightforward and unrestricted. In a monarchy, there is only one person who is supreme, and all others who hold power in the state do so by their appointment”(Hobbes, 2019, p. 189). In addition, considering the relationship between the Supreme Being and God, the Supreme Being himself is only the Subject of God, so he must still fully comply with laws, from divine law to natural law.

Highlighting the powerful subject (the autocrat) through the image of Leviathan, Hobbes points out the qualities, powers and duties of the head of state. Despite his objection to encouraging "free speech against the supreme government", Hobbes still emphasizes that the highest moral quality of a ruler is "trusted by the people". If trust is betrayed, then the government has no place in the hearts of the people; sooner or later, it will be removed from power. He mentions Julius Caesar (100 – 44 BC) to warn of a case of loss of power by abuse of trust, "unlimited greed." Hobbes and Machiavelli have in common the qualities of the supreme being, as this thinker promotes the image of a politician who is "popular," avoiding being "hated and despised by the people" (Machiavelli, 1971, pp. 139, 164-165)

In chapter XVIII of “Leviathan” - Of the Right of Sovereigns by Institution, Hobbes outlines the right:

“The sovereign's power in a government is absolute and cannot be forfeited. Subjects are not allowed to change the form of the government, protest against the sovereign's actions, or accuse them

of wrongdoing. The sovereign has the authority to judge what is necessary for the peace and defense of the people and what doctrines should be taught. They have the right to make rules that ensure every person knows what belongs to them, and they alone have the power to make decisions in all legal disputes. Additionally, the sovereign has the power to make war or peace as they see fit, select advisors and ministers for both peace and war, and to reward and punish subjects as they see fit. In cases where no existing law has determined the appropriate punishment, the sovereign's decision is final, and they also have the authority to grant honors and establish orders [...]” (Hobbes, 2019, pp. 61-64).

But the supreme being is only "a subject of God", so the right is not unlimited and arbitrary, but associated with the obligations and responsibilities that are given. Since the Supreme Being, after all, is entrusted with the highest authority, he is responsible before God for ensuring peace and security for the people, as well as their interests and personal needs (Hobbes, 2019, p. 116). That is the primary responsibility of the Supreme Being (the autocrat).

Second, the autocrat is responsible for promulgating laws to the people and, at the same time, establishing a system of consultants and assistants to explain the laws to the people. The people must not be left in a state of not understanding or thoroughly understanding the basic rights and duties of citizenship. Ensure people do not fall into "unfounded fear of punishment" for accidental negligence. Third, the autocrat seeks ways to improve the people's understanding of government, civic duties before society, the state, the supreme being, and even God - the king of kings (Hobbes, 2019, p. 118). In other words, the autocrat needs to be the one who enlightens people's minds.

Fourth, the autocrat must naturally have full authority to establish the legal system but must not violate fairness. According to Hobbes, good law must be established on the principle of fairness, for both the rich and the high and the poor and the unpopular. Hobbes writes, "It is the responsibility of every sovereign to ensure that justice is taught. This entails instructing people not to take away what belongs to others through violence or deceit, as this is what justice is ultimately about" (Hobbes, 2019, p. 118).

3.3. Values, limitations and lessons from Hobbes' perspective on the subject of power

Hobbes' perspective on the subject of power is founded on his social contract theory. Considering the whole theory, subjective idealism can be seen in the analysis of the birth of the state. Historically, there have been different views on the origin of the state, such as Plato's needy view (Plato, 2013, pp. 170-171), Aristotle's naturalistic view (Aristotle,

1999, p. 5; Do, 2022; Do Thi Thuy, 2022) and Hobbes' view join a long list of approaches that lack scientific basis and objectivity on state origin.

In the movement trend of history, the British bourgeois revolution is a revolution that has paved the way. Although it encountered resistance from royalist forces, subsequent developments showed that the process of reforming socio-political life in the direction of secular democracy was irreversible. Hobbes was in contact with people who were more radical than he was at the time, but he chose the option of authoritarian power. Through the image of Leviathan as a model for the British political regime with the criterion of transferring power to the supreme, tyranny was to maintain peace, stability, security and discipline. That choice was based on the state of fraternal civil war in post-revolutionary England, but it itself showed Hobbes's limitation on historical vision. Therefore, his social contract plan was considered politically conservative, going against the general trend of England and Europe. The limitation in Hobbes' socio-political view is also an unavoidable limitation in most of the seventeenth-century philosophers.

Next, it can be said that Hobbes' political views were partly influenced by nominalism, as well as by the exaggeration of the role of language. This exaggeration once again shows his idealistic stance. In "Leviathan," he writes, "... The existence of justice is necessary for the formation of human societies, contracts, and peaceful relationships. Without it, there would be no commonwealth or social order, and humans would behave like wild animals such as lions, bears, and wolves." (Hobbes, 2019, p. 10) In this case, Hobbes is wise to emphasize one of the two pheromones in evolution, but in considering language as the cause of all socio-political life, he turns the medium into reason.

Besides, Hobbes also presents a number of arguments with profound human value. The first is the point of view of the birth of the state. The subjective and conventional nature of the view of the state origin does not obscure the value of the idea of the state (as a product of history, not a creation of the Creator). Moreover, the autocrat - Leviathan does not appear spontaneously but is "transferred by agreement of the people". Therefore, the autocrat must uphold his responsibilities before the people, but first of all, ensure a peaceful life.

Second, the positive side of the deism element in "Leviathan" is the inspiration for John Locke (1632 - 1704) in the process of asserting indivisible human rights - the right to life, liberty and property possess (Do & Nguyen, 2022). According to Karl Max (1818 – 1883), deism proved useful in the fight for freedom of belief and tolerance (Marx & Engels, 2004, p. 197). In "Leviathan," at chapter XXXI: "Of The

Kingdome of God by Nature," Hobbes critiques pantheism, it is asserted that the existence of God as "Father, King and Lord" and that "God reigneth over men" and punisheth those that break his Lawes" (Hobbes, 2019, pp. 125-126, 123). However, in another aspect, Hobbes emphasized the autonomy of secular government, not accepting the intervention of supernatural factors in social life. This is shown in Part III - Of a Christian Common-Wealth, Debates with Cardinal Bellarmine on Power Ecclesiasticall. Hobbes clearly distinguishes "the limits of church power" while asserting that.

"... The type of government does not affect the power of a pastor (unless they hold the civil sovereignty), since their duty is to educate and persuade through arguments, not to govern by commands. The three forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy) refer to different types of sovereigns, not pastors. It is similar to the three types of family heads, rather than three types of schoolteachers for their children". (Hobbes, 2019, p. 189)

Hobbes' deism influences the view of John Locke and other eighteenth-century French enlighteners (Rousseau) of the "divine rule of law"—an expression of the divine meaning of the realization of God's will in establishing a despotic state and democracy (Do, 2023; Do & Nguyen, 2022).

4. Results and Discussion

Evaluating Hobbes' political thought, expressed in "Leviathan" and "De Cive," some Vietnamese scholars judge through two main points. First, Hobbes is a radically anti-theocratic person, according to deism - the popular embodiment of the philosophy of this period. Hobbes considers belief and non-belief to be the private business of each person, but in social affairs, citizens must fully submit to secular authority. Second, although Hobbes considers the model of an absolute monarchy as an appropriate model for political stability, He also shows an interest in the rule of law model. He affirms that a unified, sovereign state should eliminate inequality in rights (regulations on inheritance and castes). In "neutrality of interests", the relationships between citizens and the state, morality and law, between the king and the citizens are analyzed quite convincingly by Hobbes, favoring the promotion of "citizen spirit" (Dinh & Doan, 2018, p. 651).

From Hobbes' point of view on the social contract, on the qualities, rights and responsibilities of the powerful, some useful lessons can be drawn for the present era. First, building the science of power was based on the proper understanding of human nature and personal interests. Second, upholding the qualities of the head of state (the

autocrat). The four points of responsibility Hobbes proposes have so far remained topical and worthy of acceptance. Third, the lesson of peace, stability and discipline is a condition for the country's development. Hobbes is a witness to the loss and pain caused by conflict and war, so he understands the price to pay for anarchy, "unreasonable," inhuman conflict for the survival of humanity. His warning so far is still a valuable lesson for humanity, considering the current unstable global picture, from Africa and the Middle East to peaceful areas like Europe.

5. Conclusion

Over 330 years since Hobbes' death, the world has undergone many changes, and mankind has made great strides on the path of development. Some of the issues Hobbes raises were overcome, even just nine years after his death. England, after the Glorious Revolution (1688), entered a period of peace and stability, but the political regime did not go as Hobbes wanted because the times were different. The Right of the Sovereign - Leviathan, with the symbolism of the sword of justice and the scepter, is only a national symbol; real power belongs to the people, of which the parliament and the government are the representative. However, Hobbes's suggestions about the nature of power, the responsibility of the government, especially the head of state, about the law and the spirit of the rule of law, about the "divine rule of law" in the deism plan continued to be inherited and applied to political life, from England to France, Germany and other countries.

The imprint of Hobbes' political thought in "Leviathan" is still quite deep in the current political space, with positive aspects, limitations and problems that are worth pondering. It is impossible not to take into account the role of the head of state in ensuring peace, stability and security for citizens and, at the same time, preventing the abuse of citizens' rights in the current conditions.

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