CHAPTER V
The Individual in Hobbesian Political Thought

For a long while after Hobbes's time, his political ideas found almost no significant champions. In a sense, Hobbes's political ideas are not part of the mainstream of political thought, and indeed, have been subjected to plenty of critical hostility over time. The predominant strand of criticism centres around the absolutist element in his politics. Among many twentieth-century political thinkers, Thomas Hobbes has often been regarded as a materialist presenting an apologia for a deplorably absolutist government, thereby reducing the individual to a position of political impotence. Indeed, no one before Hobbes ever made so elaborate and uncompromising a case for totalitarian government, so much so that he is even popularly regarded as the author of a theory that
licenses tyranny and belittles mankind. Hobbes's advocacy of absolute state control over the different spheres of individual life may well be interpreted as a conscious denigration of individual interests.

This is so because every theory of absolute government is associated with a disparaging view of mankind, in so far as it minimizes the role of the individual to a state of abject submission. As such, any justification of totalitarianism must stem from a negation of individualism. As far as Hobbes's state is concerned, the familiar picture conveyed is that of an undifferentiated mass of subjects relegated to servitude before the awesome might of a totalitarian sovereign. As Susan Moller Okin states, "The citizen of Hobbes's Leviathan state is . . . faced with the terrifying absurdity of finding himself totally obligated to obey an insane individual . . . who may be utterly incapable of protecting and governing himself, much less the
commonwealth."¹ It is but understandable, therefore, that Thomas Hobbes should be regarded largely as the prophet of a negative, pessimistic or even antagonistic outlook towards the individual human being and his interests, seeking to trample and crush him under the wheels of a totalitarian state machinery.

Yet, despite having provided a theoretical defense of absolute government, Thomas Hobbes was not antagonistic to individual human interests. Notwithstanding its absolutist element, Hobbes's political theory is a reflection of the significance he attributed to the individual as an independent social entity. Even more importantly, his theory is a testimony to his deep concern for the human individual, and his commitment to the individual's fundamental need for peace and security in a ruthless, competitive society of scarce resources and unlimited wants.

In this context, it is necessary to clarify the connotation of the term 'individual'. The conception of man as an individual is the dominant modern conception of man. The individual, after all, is the main bearer of social values. Louis Dumont argues that the expression 'the individual' bears fundamentally on two aspects of the individual man:

"1. The empirical subject of speech, thought and will, indivisible sample of the human species (which I call for analytical clarity the particular man, and which is found in all societies or cultures); and

2. The independent, autonomous and thus (essentially) non-social moral being, as found primarily in our modern (commonsense) ideology of man and society."²

The Hobbesian focus is on the constitution and development of the individual in the second sense of the

term, and of concomitant political institutions. In the light of a reappraisal of the individual-oriented elements in Hobbessian theory, it would seem that notwithstanding its overt authoritarian implications, Hobbess's portrayal of the individual is not a negative one. Hobbess's importance lies in having made it difficult to forget that the very rationale of political institutions is that they should provide man with security and guarantee his preservation. It is also in this respect that the terms of Hobbess's political philosophy are almost timeless in quality, particularly if one accepts Hobbess's basic premise that self-preservation is the individual's basic end in human society, and that society exists to maintain life.

The primary focus of Hobbess's political analysis remains the cause of the individual involved in a relentless struggle for survival and security under situations of political anarchy. Having convincingly established that such anarchic conditions are primarily
caused by the predominantly egoistic human nature, Hobbes's main contention has been to devise means of transcending such egoistic motivations in the interest of a larger, lasting social peace. In this sense, Hobbesian political thought primarily addresses itself to the individual, prompting him to try and surmount seemingly insurmountable obstacles to his security and remould political society to serve his own interests. Therefore, contrary to being pessimistic or even hostile to individual interests, Hobbes seeks to show that it is possible for the individual to achieve peace and happiness through his own effort and initiative, through an expedient use of his rational powers. In other words, the individual is responsible for his own well-being in a world of uncertain political fortunes.

As discussed in the foregoing chapters, Hobbes claimed to give a 'scientific' explanation of human behaviour, which he regarded as determined by reflex actions and to provide a political theory which was based
on human conduct so determined. Essentially, Hobbes looks for the cause of individual behaviour within the psychology of the individual. Each individual human being is to himself an independent entity living under circumstances of radical uncertainty, particularly uncertainty regarding the attitudes and intentions of other human beings. On this score, Hobbes is, in effect, describing the inescapable primitive human condition, immortalized in his vision of 'the state of nature'. The state of nature is a historical abstraction, a hypothetical condition introduced in Ch. XIII of Leviathan. (Though Hobbes does not call it that in Leviathan, he does in the Philosophicall Rudiments of Government and Society). The logic of the thought-experiment called the state of nature is to discover the constitutive causes of human order from a study of the way human beings would behave in the absence of order, law and government. Hobbes painted a very bleak picture of both the quality and brevity of man's life in such a
condition outside society, traumatized as it is by violent invasions of life and property. The chief characteristic of the state of nature is that men seek, above all, their own security, the really fundamental need of human nature. Yet, the desire for security, for all practical purposes, is really inseparable from the desire for power, the present means of obtaining apparent future goods, because every degree of security needs to be still further guaranteed. The apparent need for security, therefore, is equivalent to an endless need for power of every sort. The desperation of the situation is aggravated by the fact that individuals have equal ability, equal hope of attaining the ends they aspire to, since they are roughly equal in physical power and faculties of mind. Hence none can be secure, and their collective condition, as long as there is no civil power to regulate their behaviour, is a "war of every man
against every man"—a condition inconsistent with any kind of civilization. Hobbes is aware that civilized men have never been in such a condition; they only approximate to it in times of civil war. Thus, he was addressing individuals not in a state of nature, but individuals in an imperfect political society, that is to say, in a society which guarantees no security to life, as per its tendency to lapse into civil war.

Hobbes's portrayal of the state of nature conjures up the image of individuals who are discrete, each looking upon the other as a potential rival and threat to his aims and aspirations. Hobbes depicts individuals as atomistic, constantly in motion reacting to external stimulus. As a whole, the state of nature, then, is a composite agglomeration of self-contained, insecure individuals, bereft of any social intercourse or social nexus, competing for the scarce necessities of life in an

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3 *Leviathan*, op. cit., Ch.XIII, p.64.
environment of limited resources. Given the circumstances, the competition between the inhabitants of the state of nature must assume the form of aggressive violence and belligerent depredations. Depicting the absolute solitude and stark barrenness of such a condition, Hobbes conveys a sense of life where the sheer desperation of survival leads to a crisis of self-preservation.

It is to be noted, however, that the individuals in Hobbes's state of nature are never, at any stage, evil or malevolent, exulting in conflict because it affords them a display of their power. It is a logical principle for Hobbes that each individual desires 'bonum sibi', his own good, which is continual life, preservation and security; and each desires to avoid evils to himself, and especially the greatest of evils--his death. As such, individuals do not engage in "the war of all against all"

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4 Elements of Law, op.cit., Part I. Ch.14, Sec.6, pp.54-5.
simply in order to satisfy immediate short-term interests. In competing with their fellows, they are merely seeking their preservation. For he who would opt out of the competition would make himself even more vulnerable to death. Hence, individuals acting on their own, however reasonable they may be, are destined, as it were, to this war—a war based not on innate hostility, but on hostility derived from the potential conflict between individual powers of self-maintenance. The state of nature dramatizes what Hobbes takes to be the fundamental dilemma of human existence: that human beings both need each other and "grieve" each other.

Hobbes's account of the condition of this conglomerate of individuals in the state of nature constitutes the very basis of his theory. The real significance of the state of nature is that the actions which individuals naturally perform, without being irrational, in order to secure their preservation, prove to be self-defeating. The competitive search for
increased security leads only to ever-increasing insecurity. Thus Hobbes stresses the innate instability and insecurity of the natural condition of mankind, only to focus on the wide difference of life without a common powerholder from life in civil society. Individuals in the state of nature are interlocked in a situation where their basic objective of self-preservation is constantly threatened and they are more or less continuously faced with the fear of death. Human nature, as Hobbes describes it, is made up of appetites and aversions. The constant fear of violent death constitutes the most powerful of human aversions and, in the final analysis, is the most urgent of the human passions which incline men to peace. The fundamental basis of politics is the realization of all individuals when they are in a state of war that peace is the only rational solution. Since they can reason and can acquire knowledge of consequences, they can discover the means to peace, they can imagine rules whose general observance would give them peace. The
individual's reason, therefore, leads him to devise certain 'laws of nature'—conducive to his individual preservation, and consequently, the collective preservation of human society. The laws of nature, therefore, are the dispensations of reason; they are human solutions to human problems. In substance, all Hobbes's laws of nature amount to this: peace and cooperation have a greater utility for security and self-preservation than violence and competition. The laws of nature, which are the preconditions of peaceful social coexistence, effect the transition from the savage and solitary to the civilized and social condition.

Though individuals differ in their moral opinions, they are all alike in their common, fundamental desire for security and self-preservation. As such, the function as well as the limits of civil society must be defined in terms of the individual's inalienable right of self-preservation. Thus, "the first and fundamental Law of Nature", according to Hobbes, "is to seek peace and
follow it". This is the essential Hobbesian purpose and mission, the foundation-stone of a civil society designed to meet the basic security interests of the individual human being.

Since the first law of nature enjoins the individuals to seek peace, the second law of nature provides the means of acquiring peace. The only way to attain peace is by a contract, perpetual and irrevocable, mutually agreed to and concluded by individuals. Each individual is conceived to contract with the others to give up some part of the right to govern himself. The result is a covenant which purports to create a common power—authorized and empowered by covenanters who thereby become "united in one person", transforming themselves into civil subjects and, thus, releasing themselves from the condition of the "war of all against all". In so far as they have transferred the right of

5 *Leviathan*; op.cit., Ch.XIV, p.67.
6 Ibid., Ch.XVII, p.89.

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each to govern himself to a Sovereign Actor, they have covenanted with one another to authorize all his actions, to submit their judgements and wills to his judgement and will in all that concerns their peace and security. This sovereign power, a creation of the efforts of individual wills, is essentially a substitute for the conflicting wills of all the individuals. It is only through such a substitution that unity is achieved among multitudes of individuals. Thus, the covenant creates an artifact—a civil society, also called a Commonwealth or Civitas. Hobbes, therefore, was emphatic in his view that civil society is an artificial phenomenon, visualised and concretised by individuals exhausted of internecine warfare and ruthless antagonism. Its formation, therefore, is a matter of human choice, born of human necessity. The civil authority—the sovereign power—is, again, an individual chosen by a conglomerate of individuals to ensure their common interest of collective security and preservation.
Peace and security, then, are the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of individual desires, the best means of self-preservation; the principle upon which the laws of nature concerning the life of men in society are founded, and the end toward which these laws are oriented. Hobbes's basic political commitment, then, was a commitment to civil peace. The purpose of the peace Hobbes advocates is the protection of the lives of the individuals composing the society. This involves two things: (1) internal peace, security of life within the society, and in so far as possible, the elimination of the use of force by one member against another; (2) preservation of the society and of its members against foreign invasion, armed attacks etc. The continuance of the society is the best way of ensuring man's continued preservation. The destruction of a society is likely to involve the premature death of many of its members, as a result of the breakdown of internal peace--a return to the state of nature.
Hence, it stands to reason that the sovereign's function is to preserve the society, so that individuals may live without fear, threat or danger, to establish an internal order or peace, and to defend that peace against external aggression. Hobbes argues that the interests of sovereign and subject are not opposed. Society was established for the common benefit of all i.e., for the collective security and preservation. "And this benefit extendeth equally both to the sovereign, and to the subjects. For he or they that have the sovereign power, have but the defence of their persons, by the assistance of the particulars; and every particular man hath his defence by their union with the sovereign."  

The rights of the occupant of the sovereign office are those which the covenanters confer upon him. They are the right to rule which is the right to be the sole judge of what is necessary for the peace and protection

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2 *Leviathan*; op.cit., Ch.XVIII.

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of subjects. The sovereign must have a monopoly of authority to maintain peace. There can be no sharing of authority, since that would lead to a disruption of peace. While peace and protection are entrusted to the sovereign, the sovereign himself is not a party to any agreement, and is, therefore, free of any contractual obligations towards his subjects. Hobbes argues that the sovereign is, in a Christian community, obliged by the force of God's command, and that he is bound in conscience by the laws of nature, and that it is, in any case, in his interest to keep his subjects contented by protecting and upholding the agreement for peace. Injustice is defined as 'breach of covenant', so the sovereign cannot treat his subjects unjustly.

Corresponding to the absolute authority of the sovereign, the subjects have an almost absolute obligation of obedience. The individual, after all, voluntarily covenanted with his fellow-men to institute a sovereign and thereby erect a Commonwealth. Now, if he
utters any protestations against the decrees of the Commonwealth, he does so "contrary to his Covenant", and, thereby, acts unjustly, since injustice is the breach of covenant in any form. The alternative, after all, is to be left in the condition of war he was in before, wherein he might, without injustice, be destroyed by any other. Thus, in a contractual society, the motive for political obedience is to be found not in the emotional ties of loyalty, but in a rational conception of the need for peace and security. This is why the covenant which forms civil society cannot be broken, for to do so would be contradictory to the individual’s interest of peace and security. The covenant stands dissolved only if the sovereign does not fulfil his role of serving the individual cause of security and preservation, in which occasion the individual may reasonably and justifiably resist the sovereign.

Notably, Hobbes makes it clear that the whole obligation of subjects to the sovereign lasts only as
long as the sovereign has power to protect them. The right of self-preservation remains an absolute, indefensible right of the individual, since the basic rationale of the agreement for total surrender of individual powers is self-preservation. Hence, there are some things which the individual subject is not obliged to do. The central commitment of the social contract was to accept the sovereign's judgement in all cases that concerned the security of the individual and it is therefore against reason that the individual should not resist when the sovereign seeks to deprive him of it in any way. Hence, Hobbes argued that an individual could withdraw his allegiance at any time if the original conditions of the contract were not being met. Therefore, the representative base of the sovereign's rights provided the necessary limitations on his power. The sovereign is constituted by the

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9 Leviathan; op.cit., Ch.XXI, p.114.
individuals—he exists because of them. He enjoys total powers due to a total surrender of powers by the individuals. In his capacity as the people's representative, he is strictly entitled to enforce on his subjects only those things which he believed necessary for their preservation. Hence, Hobbes's theory has often been referred to as 'representative absolutism', for it combines the idea of representation, i.e., authorization with the idea of absolutism.

The defense of absolutism, preferably monarchic absolutism, is central to Hobbes's theory of politics. Hobbes is not trying to change human behaviour or motivations, but merely restrain these through the overwhelming power of the state with the view to end "the state of war", and to guarantee and ensure the security of the individual. The power of the state finds its absolute limit in safeguarding the natural right of each individual to self-preservation. Hence, not only does Hobbes expose the lineaments of governmental power
clearly and systematically, but he also asserts the equal natural rights of the individual in unequivocal terms.

It is now widely acknowledged that Hobbes was a forerunner in identifying and safeguarding what is essentially a private sphere of the individual where none, including the state, has control. Hobbes made a statement of negative liberty when he considered freedom to be a private pursuit of the individual. Each individual can create his own conception of freedom, but within the framework of state authority. Subsequently, this theme became a fundamental postulate of liberalism. According to C. B. Macpherson, although Hobbes cannot be designated a liberal, he is, undeniably, an individualist, and this, paradoxically, is an inseparable, intrinsic part of liberalism. Today, Hobbism is commonly considered a bifurcated and, indeed, paradoxical theory of politics. The "paradox of Hobbism" is seen to lie in its derivation of absolutist conclusions from liberal-individualist premises of
natural rights, consent and individual self-interest.  

Before Hobbes, the assumptions of political theorists had been predominantly theological. Political thought was centred upon the revelation of God and the institution of government was sanctified as part of a God-oriented order. Hobbes was the first to attack the old and powerful tradition that had developed from the time of Plato which viewed the state as a moral institution, to inculcate virtues in the individual. He was a radical sceptic, an agnostic, a rationalist and a materialist, for whom matter and motion alone were real. As the chronicler of such a world-view, Hobbes was a pioneer in according primacy and credibility to man-made institutions. In Hobbes's view, it is necessary to create an external structure which will prevent human behaviour having its normal consequences. As J. P. Plamenatz has opined of Hobbes, "The state, according to him, is

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neither the promoter of the good life, nor the protector of rights. It is the conciliator of interests. The state, therefore, is seen as a mechanical contrivance, an artificial construct, created to circumvent the results of passions predominant in human nature. As far as government is concerned, its value consists solely in what it does. The advantages of government must be tangible and must accrue to individuals, in the form of peace and security of person and property. This is the only ground upon which government can be justified or even exist.

Hobbes's method required that his political theory should be anthropocentric from start to finish. Hobbes set himself against the whole structure of traditional sanctions which assumed that the individual cannot reach the perfection of his nature except in and through civil society, and, therefore, that civil society is prior to

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the individual. Hobbes, while asserting the primacy of natural rights, asserted that the individual person is in every respect conceptually prior to civil society. In a word, human individuals are best revealed in their natural state, stripped of all social connections. For Hobbes, not only the individual’s reflexes, but also his basic human characteristics, abilities, desires and motivations are intrinsic properties. He maintains that if we enter into cooperative interactions with other people, it is only because we perceive these interactions to be in our interest in some way. That is, we desire society only in so far as it has instrumental value for us, which means that our individuality grounds our sociality, not the reverse.

David Gauthier finds in Hobbes’s theory a very strong brand of individualism, one that regards individual human beings as conceptually prior not only to political society, but also to all social interactions, so much so as to suggest that man is social because he is
human, not human because he is social. In his *Elements of Law, De Cive* and *Leviathan*, which are analytical and philosophical in nature, Hobbes considers the human individual, the particular human being, and not the group, as the starting point of civil society. The passage from the 'individual' to the 'group' is possible only in terms of "covenant", i.e., in terms of conscious transaction or artificial design. All rights of civil society or of the sovereign are derivative from rights which originally belonged to the individual.

Many modern political scholars, therefore, are of the opinion that Hobbes exemplifies an individualistic style of political reasoning. Political individualism denotes a style of reasoning which translates political issues into questions about the motivation, liberties and

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13 *De Cive*; *Leviathan*; op.cit., Ch.XVIII, p.113.
duties of abstract individuals. Scholars frequently cite Hobbism as an exemplar of this kind of political analysis, as Stephen Lukes does:

"This abstract way of conceiving the individual is most clear in Hobbes, for whom Leviathan, or the sovereign power, is an artificial contrivance constructed to satisfy the requirements (chief among them survival and security) of the component elements of society."14

The opinion that Hobbes reasons in the fashion of a political individualist is defended on the basis of his scientific intentions as well—the idea of a 'resolutive-compositive' method. The method consists in analyzing a whole into constitutive parts. However, Hobbes expects to find parts that are, in effect, "wholes" themselves. Just as he believes that dissection of a watch, or even of a human body, produces components that are separately defined but interacting parts of a unified mechanism, so,

too, does he think that dissection of the state results in the discovery of separately defined human individuals who, after instituting the sovereign, are interacting parts of this "artificial man". The constituents of the state, therefore, are isolated, asocial individuals. The discrete, atomistic individuals are not eliminated with the institution of the Commonwealth. They retain their individuality, even when they are a part of an organized, cohesive political community.

Contrary to Aristotle and the medieval thinkers who believed in the innate sociability of man, Hobbes extended the Machiavellian conception and viewed human beings as isolated, self-interested individuals who seek society only as a means to their ends. "For two centuries after him, self-interest seemed to most thinkers a more obvious motive than disinterestedness, and enlightened self-interest a more applicable remedy for social ills

15 De Cive ; op.cit., Author's Preface to the Reader, p.32. See also Ch.VIII, Sec.1, p.117.
The recognition of self-interest as the dominant motive in human life has recognizably been among the most pervasive of tendencies in modern times.

Since all human behaviour is motivated by individual self-interest, society must be regarded merely as a means to this end. The power of the state and the authority of the law, are justified only because they contribute to the security of individual human beings, and there is no rational ground of obedience and respect for authority except the anticipation that these will yield considerable individual advantage.

Hobbes sets the extreme case for political theory—the case in which civil society must be developed for, and adapted to, the security interests of the individual human being. A civil society moulded to individual human requirements can alone promote a renewal of the

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individual. It is to the individual, therefore, that Hobbes basically and primarily addresses himself. In the past, the individual was seen as a passive spectator of the political process. Hobbes, for the first time, viewed him as a creature endowed with both reason and passions. The individual is regarded as a potentially effective agent of social regeneration, through his ability to form civil society and control it with the powers of his reason. Reason, according to Hobbes, does not provide us with any sublime insights or moral truths. It is simply the capacity to calculate the likely outcomes of our desires.

More significantly, perhaps, Hobbes has sought to open the possibility of establishing social bonds between human beings, in an attempt to integrate the individual with others of the same species, since he cannot live alone. Desirous individuals, naturally dissociated and autonomous, would associate themselves through force and consent in a state ruled by a sovereign. It is the only
way that they can survive together.

For a long time, criticism of Hobbes stemmed from his account of the absolute nature of sovereignty and the indispensability of a coercive powerholder to a stable society, to the extent that the popular notion of Hobbism has come to be identified with arbitrary despotism. In his lifetime, Hobbes took such accusations seriously, and offered certain counter-arguments. Ascribing central importance to the constitution of sovereign authority, Hobbes argued that divided sovereignty is likely to produce impotent government. He discerns a causal connection between divided sovereignty and civil war. Divided sovereignty fosters elite conflict and this, in

17 For a survey of commentaries of the inter-war period associating Hobbism with totalitarianism, see Deborah Baumgold's *Political Commentary: Interpretation of the Tradition of Political Theory as a Mode of Political Inquiry; An Examination of Leo Strauss's Hobbes Commentaries* (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1980, Ch.2).

18 *Leviathan*; op.cit., Ch.XVIII, p.236.

19 Ibid., p.236-37.
turn, tends to spread into civil war as elites mobilize the masses to fight on their behalf. The Hobbesian defense of absolutism comes down to the contention that in such circumstances, which are not limited to early-modern Europe, ordinary lives are at greater risk from political ambition than from tyrannous government. Weighing the hazard of bad government against the calamity of civil war, Hobbes argues that ".....the estate of Man can never be without some incommmodity or other; and that the greatest, that in any forme of Government can possibly happen to the people in generall, is scarce sensible, in respect of the miseries, and horrible calamities, that accompany a Civille Warre....."20 Unified and unconditional sovereignty offers the best prescription against civil war, and, therefore, offers the happiest political circumstance for ordinary subjects, by inhibiting the ambitions of the

20 Ibid., Ch.XVIII, p.94.
sovereign power. A similar analysis is elaborated in *Behemoth*, the history of the Civil War that Hobbes wrote after the Restoration. According to M. M. Goldsmith, Hobbes defends the principle of unconditional sovereignty as an analytic truth. His analysis of political agency has the point of showing that sovereignty is necessarily unconditional, unified or indivisible.²¹ The corresponding question is which form of government best serves the purpose of the state, namely, "the Peace and Security of the people."²² For Hobbes, the case for unified sovereignty and that for monarchy are of a piece: absolute monarchy is a prophylactic against the menace of political ambition. As Hobbes put it in the *Elements of Law*: "The greatest inconvenience that can happen to a commonwealth, is the aptitude to dissolve into civil war, and to this are monarchies much less subject, than any


²² *Leviathan* ; op.cit., Ch.XIX, p.241.
other governments."²³ Hobbes points out that there is
greater likelihood of rational rule in a monarchy than in
any other form of government. "Where the publique and
private interest are most closely united", Leviathan
claims, "there is the publique most advanced. Now in
Monarchy, the private interest is the same with the
publique".²⁴ This translates into the positive thesis
that absolute monarchy serves the interest of ordinary
people, in so far as it best serves his desire for a
"retired life". "Whosoever therefore in a Monarchy will
lead a retired life, let him be what he will that
Reignes, he is out of danger: for the ambitious onely
suffer, the rest are protected from the injuries of the
more potent."²⁵

Further, according to constitutionalist thinkers,
legal restraint—the antithesis of unconditional

²³ The Elements of Law; op.cit., II, V.8, p.112.
²⁴ Leviathan; op.cit., Ch.XIX, p.241.
²⁵ De Give; op.cit., X, 7, p.134.
sovereignty—is the requisite of good rule. Absolutism, therefore, is equated with arbitrary government. 'Arbitrary' rule usually refers to personal rule and is the opposite of rule according to law. But Hobbes implies a preference for rule by law. Law is what the sovereign, in his public capacity, commands. Because individuals naturally disagree and are therefore in conflict, "... it was necessary there should be a common measure of all things that might fall in controversy".28 For the sovereign's judgements to function as that common measure, a settled standard, they must take the form of codified law. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the sovereign's office consists not only in the hearing and resolving of individual cases but also, in the promulgation of 'good laws' with a wide purview of justice, and in formulating public decrees directed towards the collective welfare of citizens. "And this is

28 The Elements of Law ; op.cit., Ch.X,8, p.150.
intended should be done, not by care applied to individuals, further than their protection from injuries, when they shall complain, but by a generall Providence, contained in publique Instruction, both of Doctrine, and Example; and in the making, and executing of good Lawes, to which individual persons may, apply their own cases."27 Moreover, every individual has a property in his own person; the sovereign's job is to provide the conditions in which each man can make the fullest use of it. "Of things held in propriety, those that are dearest to a man are his own life, and limbs; and in the next degree (in most men) those that concern conjugall affection; and after them riches and means of living."28

Hobbes is explicit in his delineation of the sovereign's duties. The sovereign, according to Hobbes, is just as much under a rigid law of moral obligation as

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27 Leviathan; op.cit., Ch.XXX, p.175.
28 Ibid., p.179.
his subjects. He is obliged to equity, the strict observance of the natural (or moral) law, which means, in effect, that he is bound to command and forbid always with a view to the good of the community (and, therefore, as Hobbes is careful to explain, to the practice of just judgement, humanity, mercy and benevolence). A cursory perusal of the *Leviathan* may lead to the ostensible impression that Hobbes's sovereign has extensive rights, but nothing to speak of in the way of corresponding duties. This impression would be set to nought by the *De Cive*, Ch.XIII, concerning the 'Duties of those who bear Rule' [especially sections 15-17], which deal with the way in which this duty is violated by the 'princes' who unduly restrain the 'harmless liberty' of the subject by superfluous laws, unnecessary penalties, inefficient administration or a corrupt judiciary. All such misconduct on the part of 'princes' is constantly described by Hobbes as iniquity and sin. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes commends fair and lawful government,
directed to the common interest.29 Ch. XXX of the 
Leviathan entitled "Of the OFFICE of the Sovereign 
Representative" enjoins concern for the people's safety 
and prosperity, political education, promulgation of good 
laws, equal justice and taxation, fair execution of 
punishments and rewards, and the discriminating choice of 
counsellors and military commanders. The sovereign's job 
is to procure, above all, "the safety of the people", and 
by safety is meant, not a mere preservation of life, "but 
also all other Contentments of life, which every man by 
lawfull Industry, without danger, or hurt to the 
Commonwealth, shall acquire to himself".

Hobbes also thinks that rulers have moral and 
instrumental reasons for governing well. He distinguishes 
between the structure of sovereign authority and the

29 Eg.: "Introduction to Leviathan", in Hobbes on 
Civil Association, Michael Oakeshott, (Oxford, Blackwell, 
1975, pp.62-63); The Political Philosophy of Hobbes; His 
Theory of Obligation, Howard Warrender, (Oxford, 
Clarendon Press, 1957, pp.180-88); "The Ethical Doctrine 
conduct of government, "between the Right, and the exercise of supreme authority". Ruling well is a natural law duty for which rulers are accountable to God. "And therefore", according to De Cive, "there is some security for Subjects in the Oaths which Princes take". Hobbes also counts on the sovereign's interest in ruling well. Duty coheres with interest: "For the duty of a sovereign consisteth in the good government of the people.....And as the art and duty of sovereigns consist in the same acts, so also doth their profit." Hobbes, therefore, focuses on the incentives of the role or office of the sovereign. Specifically, Hobbes holds that rulers have a positive interest in their subjects' well-being, and second, that good rule deters elite conflict and rebellion. 'Salus populi' is the supreme law and duty

30 De Cive; op.cit., Ch.XIII,1, p.156.
31 Elements of Law; op.cit., Ch.II,ix,1, p.142.
32 De Cive; op.cit., Ch.VI,13, p.99.
33 Elements of Law; op.cit., Ch.II,ix,1, p.142.
of political rule, "by which must be understood, not the mere preservation of their lives, but generally their benefit and good".34

Caring for the common good, specifically the Commonwealth, also profits rulers. Hobbes has in mind the dependence of the state, and therefore, the sovereign, on social prosperity. "The riches, power, and honour of a Monarch", *Leviathan* observes, "arise onely from the riches, strength and reputation of his Subjects. For no King can be rich, nor glorious, nor secure; whose Subjects are either poore, or contemptible, or too weak through want, or dissention, to maintain a war against their enemies".35 Hobbes, therefore, holds rulers responsible for their societies' character: Hobbes describes rebellion as the "natural punishment of negligent government".36 Furthermore, the "poore seduced

34 Ibid., Ch.IX, i, p.142.
35 *Leviathan* ; op.cit., Ch.XIV, pp.241-42.
36 Ibid., Ch.XXXI.
People" in a rebellion ought not to be punished severely in as much as the sovereign is also at fault for not better instructing them.\(^{37}\) The government, therefore, is to be fully accountable for situations of rebellion, which are rooted, in the first place, in its negligence, and are not of the subjects' making.

Thus, we may attribute to Hobbes the view that the entire authority of a Hobbesian sovereign hinges on the support of ordinary, individual citizens. The state is a \textit{Leviathan}, but it is reduced to a utility, merely the medium of individual security and preservation. Hobbes, therefore, was not pessimistic about the human individual, nor was he indifferent or hostile towards the interests of the individual. Rather, the individual remains his primary focus of concern. Hobbes's account of civil society is, indeed, entirely motivated and prompted by his understanding of the individual's basic and

\(^{37}\) Ibid., Ch.XXX.
primary need for peace and security. The individual-oriented approach of Hobbesian political analysis must remain, therefore, a pioneering and inspiring point of reference in the history of western political thought.

Moreover, instead of seeking to trample the individual under the yoke of political authoritarianism, Hobbes's empathy with the common individual is evident in his vision of politics. Hobbes argued in favour of such political institutions that best protect common people against political instability. According to him, divided sovereignty leads to power conflicts among the political elite. This kind of conflict often escalates into armed struggle, thereby jeopardizing the lives of common individuals. Unified sovereignty, therefore, offers the sole defense against civil war, and, therefore, best serves the interests of ordinary subjects, by protecting them against the ambitions of the political elite. In fact, Hobbes intended his political thought to be not merely speculative, but a contribution and a solution to
a political situation which led, during his lifetime, to
civil war, regicide and military rule.

Hobbes, therefore, shares a very political concern
for the bearing of political institutions on the
political and social order and the lives of ordinary
people. In one of his last works, Hobbes left the
following autobiographical statement:

"I [the 'Philosopher'] am one of the common people,
and one of that almost infinite member of men, for whose
welfare kings and other sovereigns were by God ordained:
for God made Kings for the people, and not people for
Kings."38 Appealing for political acquiescence, Hobbes
asks ordinary people to see that they are victimized by
the power struggles of the great. This empathy and
identification with ordinary subjects which lies at the
very root of Hobbes's political vision gives a more

38 Dialogue between A Philosopher and A Student of
the Common Laws of England, in The English Works of
Molesworth. (London : John Bohn, 1839).
balanced picture of Hobbes's politics than is usually presented, and serves to modify the view of Hobbes as an uncompromising defender of exploitative absolutism. Appreciating Hobbes's political understanding requires and evokes an appreciation of the variety of forms of political endangerment there are and have been. The menace on which Hobbes focussed were the momentous consequences for ordinary people of political ambition—a menace which is very real till today.

The fact that emerges as one of the most significant aspects of Hobbes's political thought is his belief that the social order is not an established, stable equilibrium, but an order under continual turmoil and threat of dissolution. It is in respect of Hobbes's concern for the cause of the politically beleagured individual, grappling with the uncertainties of an unstable polity, that Hobbism remains a point of reference. The essential postulates of Hobbes's paradigm have been vindicated time and again, thus reiterating his
relevance for times to come. Today, despite a more modern, secular age, our generation is more mindful of the threats of civil war and more conscious of the significance of peace, for every individual member of society. Hobbes was one of the voices from the distant past which uncategorically rejected the politics of violence and expressed an overriding concern for peace as the foundation-stone of a civil society. Hobbes's purpose was to carry out the first and fundamental law of nature which is "to seek peace, and follow it". The universality of the law derives from the fact that all men seek peace, at least as a way of avoiding the greatest of evils—death. It is an indispensable postulate that marks out a world very different from the debilitating conditions of political anarchy—a world of possible human cooperation, of improvement and security, a world where science, industry, art and culture can flourish. And it is the individual who builds this world. The civil authority or sovereign power is only an individual chosen by a
conglomerate of individuals to ensure their common interest of collective peace and security. He remains in power for as long as he proves himself capable of meeting this core commitment of his high office. Hobbesian political theory, therefore, is an attempt to delineate that kind of civil society which is completely compatible with individual interests of preservation, peace and security.

Much of Hobbes's appeal, then, is to be found in his overriding concern for peace in human society. Today, we continue to share Hobbes's purpose in trying to devise ways and means of ensuring peace and security for the individual human being. Except as there is a tangible superior to whom men render obedience and who can, if necessary, enforce obedience, there are only individual human beings, each actuated by his private interests. Although the absolutist solution Hobbes prescribed may be questioned, the problem of the containment of egoism remains. The validation of the individual's will and
interest has proved to be a pervasive concern of modern political systems.

Though Hobbes is not a modern political theorist, he still has much to say to the modern individual. Significantly, what remains as an enduring and inspiring truth is Hobbes's projection of the individual human being as the determining agent of his own political destiny, as the architect of a civil society founded upon binding rules of mutual cooperation, as a being capable of realizing the shared aspirations for peace nurtured by him and his fellow beings. It is a portrayal by one who was a thoroughgoing optimist with regard to the future of the human race.