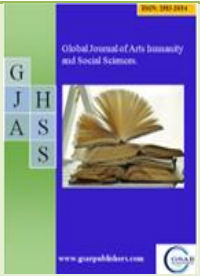


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Civilization as Political Order: Examining the Transition from Primitive Society to the Operational State in Thomas Hobbes' Theory

By

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Abstract

This paper examined the emergence of political order in Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy by analysing the transition from primitive society to the operational state and its implications for understanding civilization as a political construction. The paper addressed the central problem of how and why political authority becomes necessary for the creation and maintenance of civilized social existence. Drawing primarily from Hobbes' *Leviathan* and supported by relevant scholarly interpretations, the paper adopted a theoretical and textual analytical approach to examine Hobbes' conception of the state of nature, social contract, sovereignty, and state formation. The paper argued that Hobbes presents the state of nature as a condition of insecurity, uncertainty, and conflict arising from the absence of a common authority capable of regulating human interactions. Although individuals possess rationality, their actions are influenced by self-preservation, fear, competition, and the pursuit of power, making stable cooperation difficult without political intervention. The study demonstrated that the transition to civil society occurs through the social contract, whereby individuals collectively establish a sovereign authority with the capacity to enforce laws, maintain security, and transform disorder into political stability. The paper further argued that the Hobbesian state represents an artificial political institution created to provide the conditions necessary for social cooperation, development, and peaceful coexistence. By engaging with classical and contemporary interpretations of Hobbes, including contextual analyses of political obligation and state formation, the study revealed that civilization in the Hobbesian sense is not a natural condition but an organised political achievement sustained through authority, law, and institutional capacity. The paper concluded that Hobbes' theory remains relevant for understanding contemporary questions of governance, state effectiveness, security, and the enduring relationship between political order and civilization.

Keywords: Civilization, Political Order, Social Contract, Sovereign State.

1. INTRODUCTION

In political theory, civilization is often associated with the emergence of civil order, which refers to an organised and predictable system of authority, institutions, laws, and social regulations that govern human interactions. Beyond material advancement, cultural achievements, or economic development, civilization represents the establishment of a political arrangement

capable of maintaining security, regulating social relations, and promoting peaceful coexistence among members of society. The existence of such an order is closely connected to the purpose of the state, which is expected to secure the welfare of citizens and create the conditions necessary for the attainment of the good life (Aderibigbe, 2015). Thus, political order remains a central foundation upon which civilized society is constructed.



The social contract tradition provides a significant theoretical framework for understanding how political order emerges from conditions of insecurity and disorder. Among the major contributors to this tradition, Thomas Hobbes offers one of the most systematic explanations of the origin, necessity, and legitimacy of political authority. His political philosophy is not merely concerned with describing the formation of government but also with establishing why a sovereign authority is necessary for the preservation of peace and social stability (Aderibigbe, 2015). Hobbes begins his analysis from the hypothetical condition of the state of nature, where individuals exist without a common authority capable of regulating their actions or resolving disputes. Drawing from his materialist understanding of human behaviour, Hobbes argues that human actions are influenced by desires, fears, appetites, and aversions, with self-preservation and the pursuit of power serving as dominant motivations.

Within this condition, individuals are naturally exposed to competition, suspicion, and the struggle for recognition, resulting in persistent insecurity and conflict. Hobbes describes this situation as a “war of every man against every man,” where life becomes uncertain due to the absence of a superior authority capable of enforcing common rules. Although this depiction has often been criticised as an unrealistic representation of human history, scholars have emphasised that Hobbes’ state of nature should be understood as a philosophical argument designed to demonstrate the necessity of political authority rather than a factual account of primitive human existence (Monthathip, 2025).

The transition from this primitive condition to an organised political society occurs through the establishment of a social contract. According to Hobbes, individuals collectively surrender certain freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for protection, peace, and security (Igidigba & Liman, 2024). Through this process, the state becomes the mechanism through which social disorder is transformed into political stability. Hobbes’ argument therefore presents civilization as closely connected to the creation of an effective political order, where legitimate authority provides the foundation for cooperation, security, and social development. Despite emerging from the political uncertainties of seventeenth-century Europe, Hobbes’ ideas continue to influence contemporary debates on state formation, governance, and the relationship between authority and civilization.

2. Statement of the Problem

The relationship between civilization and political order remains a major concern in political philosophy, particularly regarding how societies move from conditions of insecurity and disorder to systems characterised by stability, governance, and social cooperation. While civilization is often understood through indicators such as technological advancement, economic growth, and cultural development, less attention is sometimes given to the role of political institutions and sovereign authority in creating the conditions necessary for such progress. Hobbes’ theory challenges this limited understanding by suggesting that civilization depends

fundamentally on the establishment of political order capable of restraining conflict and guaranteeing collective security.

However, Hobbes’ explanation of the transition from primitive society to the operational state has generated significant intellectual debates. Critics argue that his emphasis on fear, conflict, and self-interest presents a pessimistic view of human nature and gives excessive importance to absolute sovereign power. Others contend that his theory provides important insights into why societies require legitimate institutions, laws, and authority to maintain stability. The problem, therefore, lies in determining whether the state, as conceptualised by Hobbes, is merely a tool for controlling human conflict or whether it serves as the essential foundation upon which civilization itself emerges and survives.

This study examines Hobbes’ conceptualisation of civilization as political order by analysing the transition from the primitive condition of the state of nature to the formation of the operational state. It seeks to evaluate the extent to which political authority, sovereignty, and social contract provide the necessary framework for the emergence and preservation of civilized society.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Conceptual Review

3.1.1 Civilization

The concept of civilization has attracted extensive debate across sociology, anthropology, and political theory because of its connection with human development, social organisation, and institutional advancement. Elias (2000) conceptualises civilization as a long-term historical process through which societies develop patterns of self-restraint, social discipline, and organised forms of interaction, arguing that civilised life emerges through changes in manners, institutions, and systems of power rather than through material advancement alone. Similarly, Giddens (2013) views civilization as associated with the expansion of institutional structures that regulate social relations and create predictable forms of interaction within complex societies.

However, the concept has been criticised for sometimes carrying hierarchical assumptions that classify some societies as more advanced than others, particularly in earlier evolutionary approaches that presented civilization as a linear movement from “primitive” to “advanced” forms of existence (Kuper, 2005). Such interpretations risk overlooking the diversity of social arrangements and the capacity of different societies to develop meaningful systems of order without following a single historical pathway.

From a political perspective, civilization is better understood not simply as cultural refinement or technological progress but as the development of institutional arrangements capable of sustaining security, cooperation, justice, and collective wellbeing. Therefore, this paper adopts civilization to mean the achievement of an organised social condition where legitimate political institutions, shared rules, and mechanisms of governance provide stability and enable peaceful human coexistence.

3.1.2 Political Order

Political order refers to the existence of stable systems of authority, institutions, and rules through which societies regulate behaviour, resolve conflicts, and maintain collective stability. Fukuyama (2014) argues that political order depends on the development of effective state institutions, the rule of law, and mechanisms of accountability capable of restraining arbitrary power. Similarly, Hobbes (1996) presents political order as the outcome of establishing a sovereign authority strong enough to prevent disorder and insecurity associated with the absence of common political power.

However, scholars have questioned Hobbes' emphasis on coercive authority by arguing that political order cannot be sustained through force alone but also requires legitimacy, participation, and social acceptance of institutions (Beetham, 2013). North et al. (2009) further contend that political order emerges when societies create institutional arrangements that regulate access to power and resources, thereby reducing violence and promoting cooperation. Although these perspectives differ regarding whether order is primarily produced through authority, legitimacy, or institutional arrangements, they collectively demonstrate that political order represents more than the absence of conflict; it involves the presence of structures that organise social relations and provide predictable governance. Accordingly, this paper adopts political order as the condition in which legitimate authority, institutional arrangements, and established rules regulate human conduct, maintain security, and facilitate peaceful social interaction.

3.1.3 Primitive Society

The concept of primitive society has historically been used to describe early forms of human social organisation that existed before the emergence of complex political institutions, formal states, and advanced systems of governance. Morgan (1877) initially associated primitive societies with early stages of human social evolution, proposing that societies progressed through stages from simple forms of organisation towards more complex political arrangements. However, this evolutionary perspective has been strongly criticised by contemporary anthropologists for presenting human societies as developing along a single hierarchical path and for creating artificial distinctions between "primitive" and "civilised" communities (Kuper, 2005).

Instead, anthropological scholars emphasises that societies without formal states often possess sophisticated systems of authority, social regulation, kinship organisation, and conflict resolution mechanisms (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). In relation to Hobbes' political theory, primitive society does not necessarily represent an actual historical stage of humanity but rather a theoretical condition used to explain the absence of central authority and the challenges associated with maintaining social stability. Therefore, this paper adopts primitive society to refer to a pre-state social condition characterised by the absence of centralised political authority and formal institutions of governance, where social relations are primarily regulated through informal norms, customs, and traditional mechanisms.

3.1.4 Operational State

The operational state refers to a functioning political system in which governmental institutions possess the capacity to establish authority, enforce laws, maintain security, and provide essential social functions. Weber (1978) defines the state through its ability to exercise legitimate authority and maintain a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force within a defined territory. Building on this understanding, Fukuyama (2014) argues that effective states require institutional capacity, bureaucratic competence, and the ability to implement policies beyond the mere possession of political power.

However, scholars such as Migdal (2001) challenge state-centred assumptions by demonstrating that many states experience gaps between formal authority and actual capacity, where governmental institutions may exist legally but struggle to regulate social life effectively. This distinction highlights that the existence of state structures does not automatically guarantee an operational state; rather, effectiveness depends on institutional performance, legitimacy, and the ability to translate authority into practical governance outcomes.

Within Hobbes' framework, the operational state represents the transformation of disorder into organised political life through the establishment of sovereign authority capable of ensuring peace and security. Thus, this paper adopts the operational state as a politically organised system where legitimate institutions possess the capacity to enforce rules, maintain public order, protect citizens, and create the conditions necessary for social stability and civilisation.

3.2 Classical Interpretations: Hobbes as Absolutist Thinker

The classical readings of Hobbes have historically cast him as an absolutist theorist, based on a negative perspective of human nature. At its very heart, this interpretation is based on the premise that without political authority, individuals are motivated initially by fear, self-interest, and the need to have power. This reading has been dominated by Hobbes's portrayal of the state of nature as one of insecurity, where justice and injustice are not to be discussed. Conceptualizing the state of nature, Hobbes sees a place where there is no institutional or moral restriction in human interaction, and humanity swings between cooperation and violence, with rationality tending to choose the latter in the face of uncertainty of trust (Lakitsch, 2021). This confirms the classical opinion that human beings are conflict-prone in nature and that strong sovereign power must be imposed.

This meaning is consistent with the views of Leo Strauss, who saw Hobbes as a founder of contemporary pessimistic political realism, which focuses on the importance of fear and power in the organization of the political. Equally, the claim by Hobbes that people have an unending and insatiable drive for power has been used as a demonstration of an innate desire of competition and egocentrism in humans. The ensuing war of everyone against everyone highlights why an absolute sovereign is needed to bring sanity and stop the society from collapsing. Within this context,

moral principles do not legitimize political power but its ability to achieve peace and survival.

3.3 Revisionist Readings: Rationality, Law, and Conditional Authority

In recent years, scholarship focusing on Hobbes has moved away from purely absolutist interpretations toward an emphasis on rationality, natural law, and conditional political obligation. Mansell (2023) draws attention to a fundamental dilemma in Hobbes' position whereby human beings must all yield their power to a sovereign and risk their self-preservation while retaining the ultimate right to judge threats to their own survival. According to scholars, the puzzle created here is that political obligation is seen as conditional, but the sovereign is seen to have absolute authority.

Hobbes' Laws of Nature are better seen not as an account of how people behave but rather how reason tells people to act to preserve themselves and have peace. Mansell (2023) shows that these laws work as rational rules, which implies that Hobbes' political theory can be understood as a form of moral rationalism rather than coercion. It is thought that subjects may justifiably disobey the sovereign when their survival is at stake, which complicates the idea of absolute authority.

According to Quentin Skinner's contextual interpretation of Hobbes, the theorist was reacting to the intellectual and political crises of his time, demonstrating the practical rationality of his theory for crisis situations. From this perspective, Hobbes is not just a supporter of authoritarian rule but a theorist looking to construct a stable and rational foundation for political order. By weighting and giving significance to legitimacy, not domination, it is shown how the sustainable existence of political power and authority depends on reason, consent, and will survive.

3.4 Contemporary Relevance: Hobbes, Power, and Political Order Today

The theory by Hobbes remains to be relevant in the modern political discourse, especially when one speaks about governance, the crisis, and the instabilities in the world. Lakitsch (2021) also applies Hobbesian thinking to the Anthropocene, stating that the modernist effort to detach human society and nature has backfired, putting humanity back into a state of uncertainty and contingency that are reminiscent of the state of nature. In this respect, the messages about fear, insecurity, and the need for political order by Hobbes are acquired with a new meaning as modern communities are facing environmental and systemic disasters that are questioning the established political governance systems.

Likewise, Batista (2026) rethinks Hobbes as a post-collapse situation in which he proposes a scarred original position in which the political actors are determined by crisis and instability. This view supports the notion that the state of nature proposed by Hobbes is not a historical fact but a conceptual instrument that depicts the bare minimum that is necessary to achieve order in society. Comparing the Hobbesian model of sovereignty to the alternatives, e.g., mutual aid, reveals the timelessness of the emphasis of Hobbes on the issue of security as the basis of political organization.

Meanwhile, criticisms of social contract theory, including that proposed by Holcombe and Robson (2024), challenge the practicality of collectively working out the political order based on hypothetical contracts. Their suggestion that the conditions of a social contract cannot be identified without the real conditions of a negotiation contradicts the predictive assumptions of theorists such as John Rawls, whose framework of the original position tries to define principles of justice in advance. This critique highlights the intricacy of political order and the shortcomings of abstract models.

The idea of power as developed by Hobbes can be fruitfully compared with the examination of Michel Foucault, who redefines power as being diffuse and situated in the social practices instead of being concentrated in the hands of the sovereign. Whereas Hobbes insists on the need to have one, central power, Foucault's framework points to the plurality of power relations and can provide a critical perspective with which to reevaluate the Hobbesian sovereignty in modern contexts.

3.5 The State of Nature: Primitive Society

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines the state of nature as a pre-political state where there is no shared authority to govern human behavior. Without such authority, there would be no law and, as such, no justice or injustice because these notions of justice and injustice rely on the presence of rules to be followed (Hobbes, 1651/1996). This state is characterized by radical insecurity, in which people are abandoned to survive only on their individual abilities.

Life in this state of nature is described by Hobbes as a war of all men against all men, not necessarily as an ongoing physical warfare but as a state of fear and preparedness to war. The state of nature, as Lakitsch (2021) claims, is a state of the world in which there are no institutional and moral restrictions, and human relationships are formed by uncertainty and contingency. People in such an environment run back and forth between the tactics of collaboration and aggression, but rational calculation usually supports pre-emptive aggression since trust is not reliable. This confirms to Hobbes that the characteristic of pre-political existence is insecurity.

The essence of this condition is the description of human nature by Hobbes. Appetites and aversions motivate individuals to pursue pleasure and evade pain, leading them in a cycle of pursuing power as a tool of ensuring future wants. Hobbesian individuals are essentially self-seeking and competitive, according to C. B. Macpherson, in the prism of possessive individualism, where other people are viewed as something that may threaten them or be used as a means of personal advantage (Macpherson, 2022). This view is the reason why despite rationality, there is conflict: the lack of resources coupled with equality of vulnerability brings about a situation where competition is unavoidable.

According to Hobbes, there are three main reasons why there is conflict in the state of nature: competition, distrust, and glory. Competition makes people strive to gain; mistrust makes them strive to gain security by means of domination; glory makes them strive to gain reputation and recognition (Neoh, 2024).



Collectively, these aspects create an environment of reciprocal aggression where collaboration is weak and short-lived. This portrayal must be viewed as a theoretical framework more than a historical narrative such that it represents the effect of unmanaged human engagement as opposed to a phase in human evolution as explained by Monthatip (2025).

But the modern scholarship makes this traditional interpretation more complex, focusing on the importance of rationality and the possibility of transformation. Neoh (2024) argues with the fixed perception of the Hobbesian individual by saying that the process of state of nature to civil society is a change of a basic moral and psychological character. In the state of nature people are driven by their desires in the short run, and they are unable to plan in the long term. In this case, freedom is held in a mechanistic sense, or in other words, freedom is the lack of external restrictions to movement. However, this sparse understanding of freedom is not enough to maintain stable social relations, as people are susceptible to varying passions and impulses.

The shift to political society can thus not be achieved through the mere enactment of foreign power, but rather it is something that must be modified internally within the self. Like Neoh (2024) proposes, people need to learn the ability to act rationally in the long term and coherently, taking them to the point of making agreements and fulfilling obligations. Without a sovereign power, promises are of no use just a word without a sword and without the power to enforce the promise (Hobbes, 1651/1996). This understanding underscores the shortcoming of collaboration in the state of nature and supports the need of a third party to normalize social relations.

Contextually, Richard Tuck points out that the state of nature as illustrated by Hobbes is a mirror of political instability during his era, especially the encapsulation of civil war. This strengthens the understanding that the state of nature is a concept made up by theorists to rationalize the necessity of a powerful and centralized power. Finally, the description of Hobbes shows that without the political order, human life is insecure, conflictual, and unstable, and the creation of the state is the necessary condition to create civilization.

3.6. Human Nature and Rationality

3.6.1 Rational Self-Interest and the Foundations of Human Behaviour

Hobbesian politics is based on the fundamental structure of rationality mixed with self-interest, underpinning human nature. Hobbes does not appear to depict individuals as unreasonable or completely chaotic; instead, he presents them as rational actors whose behavior is dictated by the necessity to preserve him/herself, as well as to achieve personal gain. Considering that individuals, as argued by Thomas Hobbes, are guided by appetites and aversions, set out to achieve pleasure and avoid pain, this leads to the pursuit of self-interest, that is, towards the attainment of their own well-being. This view can be compared with the subjectivist view of value mentioned by Meyers (2013), where the notions of a good

and a bad thing are situated in the context of personal desires where human motivation is naturalistically self-regarding.

However, the notion of rationality presented by Hobbes is more than the satisfaction of desires. According to the points made by Lloyd (2009), the aim of moral and civil philosophy is to help people to organize their lives in such a way that they can gain peace and stability. Rationality is thus instrumental—it helps individuals to understand that an unfettered quest to fulfill their own interests will lead to conflict and insecurity. In this respect, the explanation by Hobbes does not lapse into the reduction of human behaviour to mere egoism; rather, it contains the rationality of self-interest (as an accounting activity) as the conditions under which the need to socialize towards cooperation is realized. What this means is the fact that though individuals are self-centred, they comprehend the long-term advantages of peaceful coexistence.

3.7 Natural Equality and Mutual Vulnerability

One of the key points in the argument of Hobbes is the doctrine of natural equality. With the help of their ability to injure each other, people are regarded as equals, not in terms of physical or intellectual capabilities. The feeble man, too, has means, with which, either by wile or by confederation, he may endeavor to disarm the strongest. This state of equality generates a state of mutual vulnerability with no single person able to achieve absolute dominance. This leaves people with no other option but to be in a state of vigilance constantly in fear of the other possible attack by some other individual.

Such a pattern supports the instability of the state of nature, as equality does not lead to harmony but contributes more to competition and mistrust. Lack of a common authority implies that people will have to use their own judgment to ensure their survival, which results in the situation where cooperation is insecure and fragile. One is likely to find the collective insecurity coming up as a result of the individual advantage pursued in such a setting. The penetration that Hobbes makes concerning the issue of equality is that it is not, when left unregulated by the political authority, a source of justice but rather a source of conflict.

3.8 Rational Fear, Natural Laws, and the Emergence of Cooperation

Although the state of nature is characterized by conflict, Hobbes shows the way to go towards order through working constraints of rational fear. The specter of violence and insecurity always forces people to find increased stability against their conditions of existence. This rationality makes them appreciate the fact that a peaceful existence is a better option as opposed to the ongoing war, thus inspiring the formation of mutual agreements. This change is informed by what Hobbes will call the "laws of nature," logical precepts that guide individuals in seeking peace, fulfilling agreements, and acting in a manner that will be conducive to self-preservation. Lloyd (2009) also contextualizes these laws to mean principles that are directed towards the general welfare and not just individual benefit. In this perspective, the laws of nature are normative rules that allow the establishment of stable communities. As they cannot count on others to enforce agreements, however, in the absence of a co

ercive power. Hobbes distinctly writes that words made in the state of nature are promises that must be conditional upon knowing of the place of a conditional card or promise, which is obligatory and must be acted upon given the circumstance was known of before.

Hence, as much as rationality allows people to recognize the outturn of cooperation, it also brings forth the shortages of voluntary assent in circumstances of insecurity. The social contract can be seen as a way out of this dilemma that creates a system of cooperation through the establishment of the sovereign authority, which can enforce rules and bring about order. By doing so, Hobbes shows how the change of state of nature to political society is not influenced by moral idealism but rather by rational calculation based on fear, self-interest, and withdrawal of self-preservation.

3.9. The Social Contract and Creation of the State

The process of overcoming the state of nature and creating political society in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes is realized by the establishment of a social contract, which is the foundation of the state as a man-made authority. In *Leviathan* (Chapters 17-18), Hobbes asserts that the individual, driven by the rationality to preserve their own selves, and through a collective agreement, agrees to relinquish their natural rights to a sovereign authority. This assignment of rights is so entire that only an undivided power can be effective in preserving the state against relapse into the condition of hostility that was characteristic of the state of nature. Thus, the social contract is a reasonable treatment for insecurity, in which citizens are trying to find safety rather than the right to complete freedom.

Notably, the Hobbesian state has not been a natural state but rather an artificial one established by agreement. The legitimacy of such an arrangement, as explained by Nejad et al., (2023), is that such an arrangement is legitimate in that it is rational: people agree to authority because it brings them maximum opportunities to survive and be stable. The sovereign, sometimes metaphorically referred to as the Leviathan, is the will of all the people, merging the power of everyone into just one unified political force. This conceptualization of the primary significance of sovereignty as the hallmark of political order.

However, the theory of Hobbes provokes timeless concerns in terms of authority-liberty balance. Although the sovereign is endowed with very broad powers to maintain peace in the country, people do not completely lose their interest in preserving their lives. Even in the framework of Hobbes, there is an existing tension as the subjects are given a restricted authority to defy the orders that pose a direct threat to their survival (Lebuffe, 2012). This is to indicate that Hobbesian sovereignty, as strong as it is, is not completely absolute in nature but conditional in nature, being conditional by the very nature of reason that justifies its existence. It is also essential to have centralization and the indivisibility of authority to secure compliance with laws and the political stability of the community. In the absence of such authority, there would be no enforceability of agreements, and cooperation would be unsustainable.

3.10. Civilization as Political Order

Thomas Hobbes, in his political philosophy, has adjoined civilization to the defining of political order. To Hobbes, civilization does not naturally evolve on human social ability but rather artificially generated based on power, law, and order. Without a sovereign power, human life will remain in the wretchedness of the state of nature, where neither justice nor constant cooperation can be found. In its turn, civilization seen as stemming out of the culture, economy, and social institutions' development is heavily dependent on the presence of a political authority that could beat up order.

The argument presented by Hobbes is based on the following premises: human beings, though being rational, are driven by self-interest and prone to conflict. This situation is not conducive to the formation of stable systems since they are needed to ensure progress. Consequently, the efforts related to civilization, like trade, industry, and intellectual progress, cannot thrive. Political power becomes, then, the structural base on which are constructed all the collective forms of existence. The state makes the state of disorder to be transformed into order by providing security, enforcing contracts, and establishing laws, and this makes the conditions to enable human development.

Scholars also elaborates this perception further by pointing out that there is a complexity in the conception of individuals and social relations as portrayed by Hobbes. Vrapca (2024) questions the oversimplified view of Hobbesian individuals as being strictly isolated and selfish individuals but instead focuses on the realization that people live in the dynamic interaction of material conditions. That Hobbes denies natural hierarchies, including those of patriarchal power, further supports the notion that natural inequality is not, in any form, the foundation of political order but a product of collective agreement. Particularly, the radicalism of the theory in Hobbes, where power and consent form the foundation of political power instead of tradition and gender inequality, can be pointed out. This supports the thesis that civilization is a creation of institutional order and not natural social orders.

The comparative view also explains why Hobbes has drawn a clearly delineated spot under the social contract theory. In opposition to John Locke, who promoted limited government, as it was the only option to ensure stability, Hobbes favored absolute power since it was the only choice that offered stability (Shea, 2020). On the same note, Jean-Jacques Rousseau perceives man as inherently benevolent and festering within the bad. Hobbes, on the other hand, views political society as the remedy that is necessary to curb the bad in man. These oppositions bring to the fore the main idea of Hobbes that the process of civilization is not the manifestation of natural harmony but rather the result of forced order.

3.11. Critiques of Hobbes' Theory

Although Thomas Hobbes provides a pessimistic explanation of the ideology of transitioning out of anarchy and into the political order, his theory has come under constant criticism on a variety of

grounds, especially in relation to his pessimistic ideology of human nature, his justification of authoritarian rule, and his limited sense of morality.

The most eminent criticism is that Hobbes presents human nature as being antagonistic and guided ultimately by fear and self-interest. Jean-Jacques Rousseau has contested Hobbes' account of the state of nature, in which individuals are insecure and competitive, and in which society and the state corrupt individuals. In this sense, the theory by Hobbes seems to be excessively pessimistic, as it sees human motivation as simply being based on fear of death and power. Evrigenis (2021) also questions whether Hobbes is overstating the importance of fear in the interactions between humans because collaboration and moral feelings might be more fundamental than Hobbes might want people to assume. According to this criticism, Hobbes would be justified in holding that the absence of a sovereign is an unnatural state of human existence, as it is challenging the supposition that the state of anarchy is an unnatural condition of human existence.

The second significant critique relates to the fact Hobbes supports absolute sovereignty, which, in the views of numerous researchers, can be interpreted as the defence of the authoritative regime. Hobbes maintains that human beings need to give up their rights to a government with virtually unlimited power to boost peace and prevent re-entry into the state of nature. Nonetheless, such concentration of authority gives rise to the fears of inability to exercise personal freedom and of misuse. Hannah Arendt attacks these ways of concentrated power, emphasizing the dangers of unchecked power and the loss of political freedom. Prokhovnik (2019) supports this concern by pointing out that the model introduced by Hobbes can be exploited to justify an excess of power by placing higher importance on order than accountability. Although Hobbes defends his version of this arrangement as a reasonable reaction to a state of insecurity, critics have argued that this arrangement is excessively mechanical to the extent that higher individual autonomy would not jeopardize their security.

Another criticism is centered on how Hobbes culled morale up to rational self-interest and fear. The laws of nature, as proposed by Hobbes, are based on the need to survive, which makes moral behavior a survival mechanism, rather than an act of morality. John Rawls contradicts this point by providing a theory of justice founded on fairness and rational choice based on other factors such as fear or coercion. In a Rawlsian sense, the framework of Hobbes is normatively insufficient in terms of accounting principles of justice that are not limited to individual survival.

Jakonen (2011) makes this limitation even more enlightening, as he points to the critical role played by fear not only as the constituent element of the commonwealth but also as a political tool that was used by the sovereign. Under this interpretation, the foment of fear that exists in the state of nature is brought together by the sovereign and converted into a mechanism of government. The fear is both a source and the supporting force of the political power, influencing the perception and behavior of subjects. Although this observation is instructive in the sense that it shows the internal

consistency of the system that Hobbes develops, it, at the same time, demonstrates the potential perils of the political order that Hobbes creates: being based on fear, this political order may be able to secure obedience but at the cost of true moral independence and political participation.

3.12 Contemporary Relevance

3.12.1 Weak and Failed States: The Persistence of the State of Nature

The political theory of Thomas Hobbes has been the most pertinent theory on the contemporary world in relation to the dynamics of weak and failed states. The description of the condition of insecurity, violence, and absence of authority in a state of nature presented by Hobbes is a powerful tool to use in the analysis of areas where state institutions have either failed and no longer functional. In these situations, the lack of a central authority tends to redirect the state towards the recurrence of the conditions, which approximate the situation described by Hobbes of the war of all against all, where competing groups struggle to gain power and resources and to survive.

Such modern conflict areas help to realize that the stability of the political order could be very fragile under the conditions of disintegration of the institutional authority. In the absence of a functioning state to enforce laws and arbitrate over the differing interests, social trust is compromised, and violence is one of the main tools of advancing interests. This is congruent with the argument by Hobbes that peace and cooperation are not sustainable without a coercive government. Modern work in international relations often uses Hobbesian insights to explain how a state failure results in long-term instability and how this persistent insight into the enduring causes of conflict and disorder.

3.12.2 International Anarchy and Global Governance

In addition to domestic politics, the ideas of Hobbes are also used as the center of study of international relations since the absence of a global sovereign brings a similar situation as in the state of nature. Here, nations are in a structure of anarchy, where there is no authority at the top permitting the enforcement of regulations or ensuring security. This approach has largely been applied in the conceptual framework of realist theories of international relations, which focus on the use of power, self-interest, and strategic competition between states.

The present arguments about global governance make this Hobbesian model difficult, however. Although there is no central authority to the international system, there are institutions, international organizations, treaties, and norms that aim at reducing anarchy and encouraging cooperation. These events point to the fact that even though the Hobbesian condition is still present, it is somewhat balanced out by some new types of collective regulation. In this view, the theory of Hobbes can serve as a reference point in linking international insecurity and also helps in the realization of the difficulties of the process of achieving stable cooperation when there is no centralized sovereign.

Michel Foucault has provided a significant complement to Hobbesian analysis in the sense that it shifts the focus upon



centralized power to that of dispersed forms of power (Hindess, 2005). Unlike Hobbes, who focuses on sovereignty as the main order mechanism, Foucault addresses the issue of power at work without referring to sovereignty. This further understanding of power indicates that contemporary political order is not sustained by one way only, coercion, but by other less overt forms of regulation and control that are embedded within social systems. A combination of these views makes it possible to help us understand better how order is maintained both at home and internationally.

3.12.3 Security versus Liberty in Modern Political Debates

The conflict between security and liberty is one of the most persistent lines of Hobbes's political thought, which is still relevant today, shaping contemporary political discussions. Hobbes is a classic example of the thinker who believes that it is urgently needed to count on security and, in their turn, on the security of their families (Lindholm, 2023). This trade-off has continued to be the focus of contemporary arguments on governance, especially as far as issues like surveillance, counterterrorism, and emergency powers are concerned.

In most of the modern states, the governments justify the development of authority by the means of appealing to the necessity of security, which is not a new principle borrowed by Hobbes to substantiate his argumentation. The critics, however, present an argument that over security will result in the loss of civil liberties and democratic accountability (Masferrer, 2023). This discussion represents a major conflict in the theory of Hobbes: on the one hand, strong authority might be needed to ensure that there would be order; however, on the other, such power is also fraught with the danger of diminishing the intimate freedom of man.

Contemporary political theorists still grapple with this dilemma: at what point should the demand of effective governance be compromised to protect the rights and freedoms? The relevance of the Hobbesian framework in this respect is twofold: on the one hand, it emphasizes the determining role of security in the life of politics; on the other hand, it triggers a critical understanding of the assumptions on the limits of the power. Using the knowledge of Hobbes on current issues, the problem of reconciliation of order and liberty is a problem of the past as well as the present.

4. Discussions

The central argument emerging from Hobbes' political philosophy is that civilization should not be understood merely as the outcome of human intellectual advancement, technological development, or social cooperation, but fundamentally as a product of political ordering. The transition from primitive society to the operational state represents, in Hobbes' account, the movement from an uncertain condition of insecurity to a structured political arrangement where authority, law, and institutions regulate human behaviour. The significance of this argument lies in Hobbes' rejection of the assumption that human beings naturally progress towards harmonious social relations. Rather, he argues that social stability requires deliberate political construction because individuals, although capable of reason, are also driven by competing desires, fear, and the pursuit of self-preservation.

Therefore, civilization emerges not as an automatic extension of human sociability but as a political achievement created through collective agreement and the establishment of sovereign authority.

Hobbes' description of the state of nature as a condition of insecurity provides the foundation for understanding why political order becomes necessary. The state of nature is not presented as an actual historical stage through which all societies passed, but rather as a theoretical condition illustrating what human relationships would resemble in the absence of a common authority. In this condition, individuals possess natural equality and freedom, but such freedom produces insecurity because there is no recognised institution capable of regulating disputes or enforcing agreements. The absence of a sovereign authority means that individuals must rely on personal judgement for survival, resulting in suspicion, competition, and fear. As discussed in the paper, Hobbes' famous description of the "war of every man against every man" should therefore be interpreted as a condition of insecurity rather than continuous physical conflict. This interpretation demonstrates that the problem confronting humanity is not simply the presence of disagreement but the absence of an institution capable of transforming conflict into predictable social relations.

The movement from primitive society to the operational state occurs through the rational recognition that unregulated freedom cannot guarantee security. Hobbes does not argue that individuals abandon their natural rights because they suddenly become morally perfect or naturally cooperative. Rather, they enter into a social contract because reason reveals that continued insecurity threatens their survival. The social contract therefore represents a calculated political decision where individuals accept limitations on their freedom in exchange for protection and stability. The sovereign state becomes the institutional expression of this agreement, possessing sufficient authority to enforce laws, maintain peace, and prevent society from returning to disorder. In this regard, the Hobbesian state is artificial rather than natural because it is deliberately created by human beings to overcome the limitations of pre-political existence.

However, Hobbes' explanation of political order raises important questions concerning the relationship between authority and liberty. While the establishment of sovereign power resolves the problem of insecurity, critics argue that Hobbes places excessive emphasis on authority at the expense of individual freedom and democratic accountability. The concentration of power in the hands of the sovereign creates the possibility of political domination, particularly where authority operates without adequate limitations. This criticism challenges the assumption that security alone is sufficient to define civilization. A society may possess order and stability while simultaneously restricting political participation and individual rights. Therefore, although Hobbes correctly identifies the necessity of authority for maintaining social order, his theory requires further reflection regarding how political power can be balanced with accountability and freedom.

Despite these criticisms, Hobbes' contribution remains significant because he identifies political order as the foundation upon which

other aspects of civilization depend. Economic exchange, cultural development, scientific advancement, and social cooperation require a predictable environment where rules are recognised and enforced. Without such conditions, collective activities become vulnerable to insecurity and conflict. The operational state, therefore, represents more than a governmental structure; it symbolises the institutional capacity required to transform human interaction from uncertainty into organised cooperation. Hobbes' argument remains relevant because contemporary societies continue to experience situations where weak political institutions produce insecurity, violence, and social instability. In such contexts, the absence of effective authority resembles the Hobbesian condition where competing interests operate without reliable mechanisms for regulation.

Furthermore, the Hobbesian conception of civilization provides an important basis for understanding the relationship between state capacity and social development. The existence of a state alone does not guarantee civilization; rather, the state must possess the capacity to perform its essential functions. An operational state requires effective institutions, legitimate authority, and the ability to enforce laws consistently. This distinction is important because many societies possess formal political structures but experience difficulties in maintaining security, delivering public services, or ensuring compliance with legal frameworks. From this perspective, Hobbes' theory extends beyond the origin of government and contributes to broader debates about state effectiveness and political stability.

Nevertheless, Hobbes' understanding of human nature remains contested. His emphasis on fear, competition, and self-interest has been criticised by scholars who argue that cooperation, morality, and social relationships also form important aspects of human behaviour. Societies have historically developed systems of mutual assistance and informal regulation even without centralised political authority. This suggests that human beings are not exclusively motivated by conflict and self-preservation. However, such criticisms do not completely invalidate Hobbes' argument; rather, they demonstrate that while cooperation may exist naturally, maintaining large and complex societies requires formal institutions capable of managing competing interests. Hobbes' enduring contribution is therefore not the claim that humans are permanently violent, but that stable political communities require mechanisms that can regulate disagreement and sustain collective expectations.

The transition from primitive society to the operational state in Hobbes' theory ultimately demonstrates that civilization is inseparable from political authority. Civilization represents the transformation of insecurity into stability through the creation of institutions, laws, and legitimate power. The sovereign state becomes the mechanism through which individuals move beyond isolated survival towards organised social existence. Although Hobbes' preference for strong sovereignty creates tensions concerning freedom and accountability, his central insight remains relevant: political order is not guaranteed by human existence alone but must be consciously constructed and maintained.

Civilization, therefore, emerges as a political achievement sustained by authority, institutional capacity, and collective acceptance of rules that make peaceful coexistence possible.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined Thomas Hobbes' theory of political order by analysing the transition from primitive society to the operational state and demonstrating that civilization is not an inherent condition of human existence but a political achievement constructed through authority, law, and institutional arrangements. The analysis reveals that Hobbes conceptualises civilization as emerging from the rational efforts of individuals to overcome the insecurity, uncertainty, and conflict associated with the state of nature. Through the social contract, individuals collectively establish a sovereign authority capable of transforming disorder into stability by enforcing rules, securing agreements, and creating the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence. Thus, political order becomes the foundation upon which civilized society is developed and sustained.

The central argument of the paper is that civilization depends fundamentally on the existence of effective political authority. Without a sovereign institution capable of maintaining security, enforcing laws, and regulating social relations, the conditions required for cooperation, economic advancement, and social development remain fragile. Hobbes' insistence that order precedes other social achievements provides an important insight into the organisation of political life, as stability serves as the basis upon which broader human aspirations can be pursued. The operational state, therefore, represents not merely the existence of government but the capacity of political institutions to create predictable and secure conditions for collective development.

Although Hobbes' pessimistic interpretation of human nature and his justification of strong sovereign power have attracted substantial criticism, his theory remains significant in contemporary debates concerning governance, state capacity, security, and political stability. His work demonstrates that political order cannot be assumed as a permanent feature of society but must be deliberately established and continuously maintained through legitimate institutions. Ultimately, Hobbes' enduring contribution lies in the argument that civilization is not simply a natural progression of human existence; rather, it is a constructed political condition sustained through collective agreement, institutional authority, and the effective exercise of political power.

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