

Evaluation of Philosophical Foundations of Hobbs and Locke's Views on Peace

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Abstract:

Modernity's attitude for new perspective on politics began with Thomas Hobbs and John Lock. Both of these philosophers had based their political views on some philosophical assumptions about mankind. They offered two opposite political disciplines because of their different philosophical anthropology based on their empirical philosophy.

The role of peace in their account of natural state of man is in the core of their political thought. Lock introduced natural state of men in peace, therefore concluded a democratic government. Hobbs supposed that natural state of men is in war, therefore he thought about imperial government governed by a powerful dictator to bring peace and security.

Although their views were as models for political discipline for a country, their philosophical foundation for their political suggestions can be considered as a basis for the study of world peace. In my paper I am going to examine their views for world peace and evaluate them for realizing world peace. Western modernity based on these two anthropological assumptions had its conclusions in the worst disaster in human history like fascism and Nazism. What has been wrong with modernity that results these problems with humanity? Postmodern thinkers have criticized modern attitude toward peace and security. However, I am going to study the dangers of some anthropological thought that will destroy real world peace in the name of spurious peace.

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thought and the foundations that those ideas are based on, then examine their political doctrine.

Hobbes and the Natural State of War

Hobbes thinks of men that are by nature equal in bodily and mental capacities in the sense that, by and large, an individual's deficiencies in one respect can be compensated by other qualities. The physically weak can master the physically strong by craft or by conspiracy; and experience enables all men to acquire prudence in the things to which they apply themselves. And this natural equality produces in men an equal hope of attaining their ends. Every individual seeks and pursues his own conservation. Nobody resigns himself to making no effort to attain the end to which he is naturally impelled, on the ground that he is not equal to others.

Now, This fact that every individual seeks his own conservation and his own delectation leads to competition and mistrust of others. Further, every man desire that others should value him as he values himself; and he is quick to resent every slight and all signs of contempt. "So that in the nature of man we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence (that is, mistrust); thirdly, glory."¹

From this Hobbes draws the conclusion that until such time as men live under a common power, they are in a state of war with one another. The natural state of war, therefore, is the state of affairs which the individual is dependent for his security on his own strength and his own wits. "In such condition there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, no use of commodities that may imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts no letters; no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor nasty, brutish, and short."² In this frequently quoted passage Hobbes depicts the natural state of war as a condition in which civilization and its benefits are absent. The conclusion is obvious, namely, that is only through the organization of society and the establishment of the commonwealth that peace and civilization can be attained.

The natural state of war is deduction from consideration of the nature of man and his passions. But if anyone doubts the objective validity of the conclusion, he has only to observe what happens even in a state of organized society. Everyone carries arms when he takes a journey; bars his door at night; he locks up his valuables. And this shows clearly enough what he thinks of his fellow men. "Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions, as I do by my words? But neither of us accuses man's nature in it. The desires and other passions of man are themselves no sin. No more are the actions that proceed

¹ - *Leviathan*, I, 13; *E.W.*, III, p. 112.

² - *Ibid.*, p. 115

from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them; which till laws be made they cannot know: nor can any law be made, till they have agreed upon the person that shall make it.”³

This quotation suggests that in the natural state of war there are no objective moral distinctions. And this is precisely Hobbes view. In this state “the notions of right and wrong is no common power, there is no law, where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues.”⁴

The Laws of Nature as the Convenient Articles of Peace

It is obviously in man’s interest to emerge from this natural state of war; and the possibility of doing so is provided by nature itself. For by nature men have their passions and their reason. It is, indeed, their passions which brings about the state of war. But at the same time fear of death, desire of such things as are necessary to “commodious” living, and hope of obtaining these things by industry are passions which incline men to seek for peace. It is not that the passions simply lead to war, whereas reason counsels peace. Some passions incline men to peace; and what reason does is to show how the fundamental desire of self-conservation can be made effective. It suggests first of all “convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles are they, which otherwise are called the Law of Nature.”⁵

Hobbes defines a law of nature as “the dictate of right reason,⁶ conversant about those things which are either to be done or omitted for the constant preservation of life and member, as much as in us lies”.⁷ Again, “a law of nature, *lex naturalis*, is a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved”.⁸ A law of nature in this context is for Hobbes a dictate of egoistic prudence. Ever man instinctively pursues self-preservation and security. But man is not merely a creature of instant and blind impulse; and there is such a thing as rational self-preservation. The so-called laws of nature state the conditions of his rational self-preservation. And as Hobbes goes on to argue that the rational pursuit of self-preservation is what leads men to form commonwealths or states, the laws of nature give the conditions for the establishment of society and stable government. They are the rules a reasonable being would observe in pursuing his own advantage, if he were conscious of man’s predicament in a condition in which impulse and passion alone ruled and

³ - *Ibid.*, p. 114

⁴ - *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵ - *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶ - Right reason, Hobbes explains, means here “the peculiar and true ratiocination of every man concerning those actions of his, which may either redound to the damage or benefit of his neighbors”. “Peculiar”, because in the “state of nature” individual’s reason is for him the only rule of action.

⁷ - *Philosophical Elements of a True Citizen*, 2, I; *E.W.*, II, p. 16.

⁸ - *Leviathan*, I, 14; *E.W.*, III, pp. 116-17.

if he himself were not governed simply by momentary impulse and by prejudices arising from passion.

Hobbes, In *Leviathan*, tells that the fundamental law of nature is the general rule of reason that “every man ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he can not obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps and advantages of war”.⁹ The first part he asserts, contains the fundamental law of nature, namely, to seek peace and follow it, while the second part contains the sum of natural right, namely, to defend ourselves by all means that we can.

The second law of nature is “that a man be willing, when others are as so too, as far forth, as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as would allow other men against himself”.¹⁰ But if a man lays down his right in this sense, he does so with a view to his own advantage.

Hobbes declared that the study of the laws of nature is, indeed, to be “the true moral philosophy”, which is the science of good and evil. But “private appetite is the measure of good and evil”¹¹; and the only reason why the laws of nature are to be called good or, as Hobbes puts it, “moral virtue”, is that men’s private appetites happen to agree in desiring security. “All men agree on this, that peace is good; and therefore also the way or means of peace.”¹²

The laws of nature are unable to achieve the desired and by themselves alone, that is, unless there is coercive power able to enforce their observance by sanctions. For these laws, though dictates of reason are contrary to man’s natural passions. “And covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all.”¹³ It is necessary, therefore, that there should be a common power or Government backed by force and able to punish.

Locke on the State of Nature and the Natural Moral Law

Locke starts, as did Hobbes, with the idea of the state of nature; and in his view “all men are naturally in that state and remain so till by their own consents they make themselves members of some politic society”.¹⁴ But his idea of the state of nature is very different that of Hobbes. Indeed, Hobbes is evidently the chief opponent whom he has in mind in the second Treatise, though he does not say so explicitly. There is a radical difference, according to Locke, between the state of nature and the state of war. “Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth with authority to judge between them, is properly the state of nature.”¹⁵ Force, exercised without right, create a state of

⁹ - *Ibid.*, P. 117

¹⁰ - *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹¹ - *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹² - *Ibid.*

¹³ - *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁴ - *Two Treatises of Civil Government*, 2, 15.

¹⁵ - *Ibid.*, 3, 19.

war; but this is not to be identified with the state of nature, since it constitutes a violation of the state of nature; that is, of what is ought to be.

Locke can speak of what the state of nature ought to be because he admits a natural moral law which is discovered by reason. The state of nature is the state of liberty but not of licence. “The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone; and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.”¹⁶ For all men are the creatures of God. And though a man may defend himself against attack and punish aggressors on his private initiative, since, as is supposed, there is no common temporal sovereign or judge, his conscience is bound by the natural moral law which obliges all independently of civil society and its legal enactments. Natural law, therefore, means something quite different for Locke from what it meant for Hobbes. For the latter it meant the law of power and force and fraud, whereas for Locke it meant a universally obligatory moral law promulgated by the human reason as it reflects on God and His rights, on man’s relation to God and on the fundamental equality of all men as rational creatures.

The Origins of Political Society; the Social Compact

Although the state of nature is a condition of affairs in which men have no common authority over them, God “put him (man) under strong obligations of necessity, convenience and inclination to drive him into society”.¹⁷ We cannot say, therefore, that society is unnatural to man, and civil or political society is natural in the sense that it fulfils human needs. For although men, considered in the state of nature, are independent of one another, it is difficult for them to preserve their liberties and rights in actual practice. For from the fact that in the state of nature all are bound in conscience to obey a common moral law it does not follow that all actually obey this law. And from the fact that all enjoy equal rights and are morally bound to respect the rights of others it does not follow that all actually respect the rights of others. It is in man’s interest, therefore, to form an organized society for the more effectual preservation of their liberties and rights.

Although, therefore, Locke painted a different picture of the state of nature from that painted by Hobbes, he did not look on this state as an ideal condition of affairs. In the first place, “though the law of nature be plain and intelligible to all rational creatures, yet men being biased by their interest, as well as ignorant for want of studying it, are not apt to allow of it as a law binding to them in the application of it to their particular cases”.¹⁸ It is desirable, therefore, that there should be a written law to define the natural law and decide controversies. In the second place, though a man in the state of nature enjoys the right to punish transgressions, men are only too apt to be over-

¹⁶ - *Ibid.*, 2, 6.

¹⁷ - *Ibid.*, 7, 77.

¹⁸ - *Ibid.*, 9, 124.

zealous in their own cause and too remiss in the cause of others. It is desirable, therefore, that there should be an established and commonly recognized judicial system. In the third place, in the state of nature men may often lack the power to punish crimes, even when their sentence is just. “Thus mankind, notwithstanding all the privileges of the state of nature, being but in an ill condition while they remain in it, are quickly driven into society.”¹⁹

According to Locke, “The great and chief end of men’s uniting into commonwealths and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property”.²⁰ But this assertion is misinterpreted if we take the word “property” in the ordinary restricted sense. Men join together in society “for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and states, which I call by the general name, property”.²¹

Now, Locke is concerned to show that political society and government rests on a rational foundation. And the only way he can see of showing this is to maintain that they rest on consent. “Men being, as has been said, by nature all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent. The only way whereby anyone divests himself of his natural liberty and puts on the bonds of civil society is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties and a great security against any that are not of it.”²²

¹⁹ - *Ibid.*, 9, 127.

²⁰ - *Ibid.*, 9, 124.

²¹ - *Ibid.*, 9, 123.

²² - *Ibid.*, 8, 95.