

# From Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

Modern History Sourcebook: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/hobbes-lev13.html>

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**NOTE:** *These excerpts from Leviathan have been paraphrased in order to make the text more readable. Hobbes wrote in Elizabethan English, so his original text reads like Shakespeare or the King James Bible. I have attempted to make the text more readable while preserving Hobbes' message. If you would prefer to read the original text, you may do so by clicking the link above.*

## CHAPTER XIII:

### OF THE NATURAL CONDITION OF MANKIND AS CONCERNING THEIR FELICITY AND MISERY

NATURE has made men so equal in the talents of body and mind that, though one man is sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between men is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not also claim. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself....

From this equality of ability arise the quality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their goal, they endeavor to destroy or subdue one another. And from this, it comes to pass that where an invader has no more to fear than another man's single power, if one plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united to dispossess and deprive him, not only of the **fruit of his labor**, but also of his **life or liberty**. And the invader again is in the like danger of another....

Men have no pleasure (but on the contrary a great deal of grief) in keeping company where there is no power able to overawe them all. For every man wants others to value him to the same extent that he values himself, and upon all signs of contempt or undervaluing, he naturally endeavors, as far as he dares, to do damage to those who hold him in contempt, in hopes that others will see the example and fear him.

**So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel: First, competition; secondly, fear;<sup>13</sup> thirdly, glory.**

The first makes men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.

**Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man...** the nature of war consists not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace.

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth... no arts;

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<sup>13</sup> Hobbes uses "diffidence," which can mean fear and/or mistrust. If someone is described as diffident today, it usually means that someone is shy or hesitant

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.**

It may seem strange to some man that has not well weighed these things that Nature should thus dissociate and render men apt to invade and destroy one another: and he may therefore, not trusting to this inference, made from the passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience. Let him therefore consider with himself: when taking a journey, he arms himself and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him; what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow citizens, when he locks his doors; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions as I do by my words? But neither of us accuse man's nature in it. The desires, and other passions of man, are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions that proceed 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....

To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues. Justice and injustice are none of the faculties neither of the body nor mind. If they were, they might be in a man that were alone in the world, as well as his senses and passions. They are qualities that relate to men in society, not in solitude. It is consequent also to the same condition that there be no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct; but only that to be every man's that he can get, and for so long as he can keep it. And thus much for the ill condition which man by mere nature is actually placed in; though with a possibility to come out of it, consisting partly in the passions, partly in his reason.

The passions that incline men to peace are: fear of death, desire for a comfortable life, and the hope of attaining a comfortable life by hard work. And reason suggests convenient articles of peace upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles are also known as the laws of nature, where of I shall speak more particularly in the two following chapters.

## CHAPTER XIV

### OF THE FIRST AND SECOND NATURAL LAWS, AND OF CONTRACTS

THE **right of nature**, which writers commonly call *jus naturale*, is the liberty each man has to use his own power as he wills himself for the preservation of his own life; and consequently, of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be means by which to preserve it.

By liberty is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external impediments; which impediments may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left him according as his judgment and reason shall dictate to him.

A **law of nature**, *lex naturalis*, is a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do anything that would destroy his life, or take away his means of preserving it, or to neglect to do something that he thinks is necessary to preserve it...

And because the condition of man... is a condition of war of every one against everyone, in which case everyone is governed by his own reason, and there is nothing he can make use of that may not be a help unto him in preserving his life against his enemies; it follows that in such a condition every man has a right to everything, even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to everything endures, there can be no guarantee that any man, however strong

or wise he may be, will live a full life. And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of reason: that every man ought to seek peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war. The first branch of which rule contains the first and fundamental law of nature, which is: to seek peace and follow it. The second, the sum of the right of nature, which is: by all means we can to defend ourselves.

From this fundamental law of nature, by which men are commanded to seek peace, is derived this second law: that a man be willing, when others are also willing, as far as is necessary for his peace and self-defense, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself. For as long as every man holds the right to do anything he wants, all men in the condition of war. But if other men are not willing to join him in laying down their rights, then there is no reason for anyone to give up his own rights, for that were to expose himself to harm, which no man is bound to, rather than to dispose himself to peace. This is that law of the gospel, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And that law of all men, "What you would not wish done to yourself, don't do to another."<sup>14</sup> ...

A right is laid aside, either by simply renouncing it, or by transferring it to another. Someone simply renounces a right when he doesn't benefit from it and doesn't care who exercises it. When he transfers a right, he intends for a certain person or group to benefit from it. Once a man has abandoned a right by renouncing it or transferring it to another, then he is obligated not to hinder those to whom such right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it, and by duty, he ought not to make void his own voluntary act. He has no right to hinder another from exercising the rights he has renounced or transferred... These are the bonds by which men are bound and obligated: bonds that have their strength, not from their own nature (for nothing is more easily broken than a man's word), but from fear of some evil consequence upon the rupture.

Whenever a man transfers his rights, or renounces them, he does so believing that he will receive other rights or some other benefit in return. For it is a voluntary act: and every man who acts voluntarily seeks something good for himself. And therefore there be some rights which no man can be understood by any words, or other signs, to have abandoned or transferred... And lastly, the reason that someone renounces or transfers their rights is to maintain the security of one's person, in his life, and to improve one's quality of life...

The mutual transferring of right is that which men call contract.

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<sup>14</sup> For the latter phrase, Hobbes used the Latin, "quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris." This variation of the Golden Rule is most often attributed to Confucius, although several ancient philosophers have made similar statements.