De Cive*

Chapter One- Of the state of men without Civill Society

Thomas Hobbes

1651

I. The faculties of Humane nature may be reduc'd unto four kinds; Bodily strength, Experience, Reason, Passion. Taking the beginning of this following Doctrine from these, we will declare in the first place what manner of inclinations men who are endued with these faculties bare towards each other, and whether, and by what faculty, they are born apt for Society, and so preserve themselves against mutuall violence; then proceeding, we will shew what advice was necessary to be taken for this businesse, and what are the conditions of Society, or of Humane Peace; that is to say, (changing the words onely) what are the fundamentall Lawes of Nature.

II. The greatest part of those men who have written ought concerning Commonwealths, either suppose, or require us, or beg of us to believe, That Man is a Creature born fit for Society[1]: The Greeks call him Zoon politikon, and on this foundation they so build up the Doctrine of Civill Society, as if for the preservation of Peace, and the Government of Man-kind there were

*Edited to restore footnotes. Marxists.org full source: https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/politics/hobbes/index.htm

[1]Since we now see actually a constituted Society among men, and none living out of it, since we discern all desirous of congresse, and mutuall correspondence, it may seeme a wonderfull kind of stupidity, to lay in the very threshold of this Doctrine, such a stumbling block before t he Readers, as to deny Man to be born fit for Society: Therefore I must more plainly say, That it is true indeed, that to Man, by nature, or as Man, that is, as soone as he is born, Solitude is an enemy; for Infants have need of others to help them to live, and those of riper years to help them to live well, wherefore I deny not that men (even nature compelling) desire to come together. But civill Societies are not meer Meetings, but Bonds, to the making whereof, Faith and Compacts are necessary: The Vertue whereof to Children, and Fooles, and the profit whereof to those who have not yet tasted the miseries which accompany its defects, is altogether unknown; whence it happens, that those, because they know not what Society is, cannot enter into it; these, because ignorant of the benefit it brings, care not for it. Manifest therefore it is, that all men, because they are born in Infancy, are born unapt for Society. Many also (perhaps most men) either through defect of minde, or want of education remain unfit during the whole course of their lives; yet have Infants, as well as those of riper years, an humane nature; wherefore Man is made fit for Society not by Nature, but by Education: furthermore, although Man were born in such a condition as to desire it, it followes not, that he therefore were Born fit to enter into it; for it is one thing to desire, another to be in capacity fit for what we desire; for even they, who through their pride, will not stoop to equall conditions, without which there can be no Society, do yet desire it.

nothing else necessary, then that Men should agree to make certaine Covenants and Conditions together, which themselves should then call Lawes. Which Axiom, though received by most, is yet certainly False, and an Errour proceeding from our too slight contemplation of Humane Nature; for they who shall more narrowly look into the Causes for which Men come together, and delight in each others company, shall easily find that this happens not because naturally it could happen no otherwise, but by Accident: For if by nature one Man should Love another (that is) as Man, there could no reason be return'd why every Man should not equally Love every Man, as being equally Man, or why he should rather frequent those whose Society affords him Honour or Profit. We doe not therefore by nature seek Society for its own sake, but that we may receive some Honour or Profit from it; these we desire Primarily, that Secondarily: How by what advice Men doe meet, will be best known by observing those things which they doe when they are met: For if they meet for Traffique, it's plaine every man regards not his Fellow, but his Businesse; if to discharge some Office, a certain Market-friendship is begotten, which hath more of Jealousie in it then True love, and whence Factions sometimes may arise, but Good will never; if for Pleasure, and Recreation of mind, every man is wont to please himself most with those things which stirre up laughter, whence he may (according to the nature of that which is Ridiculous) by comparison of another mans Defects and Infirmities, passe the more currant in his owne opinion; and although this be sometimes innocent, and without offence; yet it is manifest they are not so much delighted with the Society, as their own Vain glory. But for the most part, in these kind of meetings, we wound the absent; their whole life, sayings, actions are examin'd, judg'd, condemn'd; nay, it is very rare, but some present receive a fling before they part, so as his reason was not ill, who was wont alwayes at parting to goe out last. And these are indeed the true delights of Society, unto which we are carryed by nature, (i.e.) by those passions which are incident to all Creatures, untill either by sad experience, or good precepts, it so fall out (which in many never happens) that the Appetite, of present matters, be dul'd with the memory of things past, without which, the discourse of most quick and nimble men, on this subject, is but cold and hungry.

But if it so happen, that being met, they passe their time in relating some Stories, and one of them begins to tell one which concernes himselfe; instantly every one of the rest most greedily desires to speak of himself too. if one relate some wonder, the rest will tell you miracles, if they have them, if not, they'l fein them: Lastly, that I may say somewhat of them who pretend to be wiser then others; if they meet to talk of Philosophy, look how many men, so many would be esteem'd Masters, or else they not only love not their fellowes, but even persecute them with hatred: So clear is it by experience to all men who a little more narrowly consider Humane affaires, that all free congress ariseth either from mutual poverty, or from vain glory, whence the parties met, endeavour to carry with them either some benefit, or to leave behind them that same some esteem and honour with those, with whom they have been conversant: The same is also collected by reason out of the definitions themselves, of Will, Good, Honour, Profitable. For when we voluntarily contract Society, in all manner of Society we look after the object of the Will, i.e. that, which every one of those, who gather together, propounds to himselfe for good; now whatsoever seemes good, is pleasant, and relates either to the senses, or the mind, but all the mindes pleasure is either Glory, (or to have a good opinion of ones

selfe) or referres to Glory in the end; the rest are Sensuall, or conducing to sensuality, which may be all comprehended under the word Conveniencies. All Society therefore is either for Gain, or for Glory; (i.e.) not so much for love of our Fellowes, as for love of our Selves: but no society can be great, or lasting, which begins from Vain Glory; because that Glory is like Honour, if all, men have it, no man hath it, for they consist in comparison and precellence; neither doth the society of others advance any whit the cause of my glorying in my selfe; for every man must account himself, such as he can make himselfe, without the help of others. But though the benefits of this life may be much farthered by mutuall help, since yet those may be better attain'd to by Dominion, then by the society of others: I hope no body will doubt but that men would much more greedily be carryed by Nature, if all fear were removed, to obtain Dominion, then to gaine Society. We must therefore resolve, that the Originall of all great, and lasting Societies, consisted not in the mutuall good will men had towards each other, but in the mutuall fear they had of each other.[2]

III. The cause of mutuall fear consists partly in the naturall equality of men, partly in their mutuall will of hurting: whence it comes to passe that we can neither expect from others, nor promise to our selves the least security: For if we look on men fullgrown, and consider how brittle the frame of our humane body is, (which perishing, all its strength, vigour, and wisdome it selfe perisheth with it) and how easie a matter it is, even for the weakest man to kill the strongest, there is no reason why any man trusting to his own strength should conceive himself made by nature above others: they are equalls who can doe equall things one against the other; but they who can do the greatest things, (namely kill) can doe equall things. All men therefore among themselves are by nature equall; the inequality we now discern, hath its spring from the Civill Law.

IV. All men in the State of nature have a desire, and will to hurt, but not proceeding from the same cause, neither equally to be condemn'd; for one man according to that naturall equality which is among us, permits as much to others, as he assumes to himself (which is an argument of a temperate man, and one that rightly values his power); another, supposing himselfe above others, will have a License to doe what he lists, and challenges Respect, and Honour, as due to him before others, (which is an Argument of a fiery spirit:) This mans will to hurt ariseth from Vain glory, and the false esteeme he hath of his owne strength; the other's, from the necessity of defending himselfe, his liberty, and his goods against this mans violence.

[2]It is objected: It is so improbable that men should grow into civill Societies out of fear, that if they had been afraid, they would not have endur'd each others looks: They Presume, I believe, that to fear is nothing else then to be affrighted: I comprehend in this word Fear, a certain foresight of future evill; neither doe I conceive flight the sole property of fear, but to distrust, suspect, take heed, provide so that they may not fear, is also incident to the fearfull. They who go to Sleep, shut their Dores; they who Travell carry their Swords with them, because they fear Theives. Kingdomes guard their Coasts and Frontiers with Forts, and Castles; Cities are compast with Walls, and all for fear of neighbouring Kingdomes and Townes; even the strongest Armies, and most accomplisht for Fight, yet sometimes Parly for Peace, as fearing each others Power, and lest they might be overcome. It is through fear that men secure themselves, by flight indeed, and in corners, if they think they cannot escape otherwise, but for the most part by Armes, and Defensive Weapons; whence it happens, that daring to come forth, they know each others Spirits; but then, if they fight, Civill Society ariseth from the Victory, if they agree, from their Agreement.

V. Furthermore, since the combate of Wits is the fiercest, the greatest discords which are, must necessarily arise from this Contention; for in this case it is not only odious to contend against, but also not to consent; for not to approve of what a man saith is no lesse then tacitely to accuse him of an Errour in that thing which he speaketh; as in very many things to dissent, is as much as if you accounted him a fool whom you dissent from; which may appear hence, that there are no Warres so sharply wag'd as between Sects of the same Religion, and Factions of the same Commonweale, where the Contestation is Either concerning Doctrines, or Politique Prudence. And since all the pleasure, and jollity of the mind consists in this; even to get some, with whom comparing, it may find somewhat wherein to Tryumph, and Vaunt it self; its impossible but men must declare sometimes some mutuall scorn and contempt either by Laughter, or by Words, or by Gesture, or some signe or other. then which there is no greater vexation of mind; and then from which there cannot possibly arise a greater desire to doe hurt.

VI. But the most frequent reason why men desire to hurt each other, ariseth hence, that many men at the same time have an Appetite to the same thing; which yet very often they can neither enjoy in common, nor yet divide it; whence it followes that the strongest must have it, and who is strongest must be decided by the Sword.

VII. Among so many dangers therefore, as the naturall lusts of men do daily threaten each other withall, to have a care of ones selfe is not a matter so scornfully to be lookt upon, as if so be there had not been a power and will left in one to have done otherwise; for every man is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns what is evill, but chiefly the chiefest of naturall evills, which is Death; and this he doth, by a certain impulsion of nature, no lesse then that whereby a Stone moves downward: It is therefore neither absurd, nor reprehensible; neither against the dictates of true reason for a man to use all his endeavours to preserve and defend his Body, and the Members thereof from death and sorrowes; but that which is not contrary to right reason, that all men account to be done justly, and with right; Neither by the word Right is any thing else signified, then that liberty which every man hath to make use of his naturall faculties according to right reason: Therefore the first foundation of naturall Right is this, That every man as much as in him lies endeavour to protect his life and members.

VIII. But because it is in vaine for a man to have a Right to the end, if the Right to the necessary meanes be deny'd him; it followes, that since every man hath a Right to preserve himself, he must also be allowed a Right to use all the means, and do all the actions, without which He cannot Preserve himself

IX. Now whether the means which he is about to use, and the action he is performing, be necessary to the preservation of his Life, and Members, or not, he Himself, by the right of nature, must be judg; for say another man, judg that it is contrary to right reason that I should judg of mine own perill: why now, because he judgeth of what concerns me, by the same reason, because we are equall by nature, will I judge also of things which doe belong to him; therefore it agrees with right reason (that is) it is the right of nature that I judge of his opinion, (i.e.) whether it conduce to my preservation, or not.

X. Nature hath given to every one a right to all. That is it was lawfull for every man in the bare state of nature, or before such time as men had engag'd themselves by any Covenants, or Bonds, to doe what hee would, and against whom he thought fit, and to possesse, use, and enjoy all what he would, or could get. Now because whatsoever a man would, it therefore seems good to him because he wills it, and either it really doth, or at least seems to him to contribute toward his preservation, (but we have already allowed him to be judge in the foregoing Article whether it doth or not, in so much as we are to hold all for necessary whatsoever he shall esteeme so) and by the 7. Article it appeares that by the right of Nature those things may be done, and must be had, which necessarily conduce to the protection of life, and members, it followes, that in the state of nature, To have all, and do all is lawfull for all. And this is that which is meant by that common saying, Nature hath given all to all, from whence we understand likewise, that in the state of nature,[3] Profit is the measure of Right.

XI. But it was the least benefit for men thus to have a common Right to all things; for the effects of this Right are the same, almost, as if there had been no Right at all; for although any man might say of every thing, This is mine, yet could he not enjoy it, by reason of his Neighbour, who having equall Right, and equall power, would pretend the same thing to be his.

XII. If now to this naturall proclivity of men, to hurt each other, which they derive from their Passions, but chiefly from a vain esteeme of themselves: You adde, the right of all to all, wherewith one by right invades, the other by right resists, and whence arise perpetuall jealousies and suspicions on all hands, and how hard a thing it is to provide against an enemy invading us, with an intention to oppresse, and ruine, though he come with a small Number, and no great Provision;. it cannot be deny'd but that the naturall state of men, before they entr'd into Society, was a meer War, and that not simply, but a War of all men, against all men; for what is WAR, but that same time in which the will of contesting by force, is fully declar'd either by Words, or Deeds? The time remaining, is termed PEACE.

XIII. But it is easily judg'd how disagreeable a thing to the preservation either of Man-kind,

[3]This is thus to be understood: What any man does in the bare state of Nature is injurious to no man; not that in such a State he cannot offend God, or break the Lawes of Nature; for Injustice against men presupposeth Humane Lawes, such, as in the State of Nature there are none: Now the truth of this proposition thus conceived is sufficiently demonstrated to the mindfull Reader in the Articles immediately foregoing; but because in certaine cases the difficulty of the conclusion makes us forget the premises, I will contract this Argument, and make it most evident to a single view; every man hath right to protect himself, as appears by the seventh Article. The same man therefore hath a right to use all the means which necessarily conduce to this end by the eight Article: But those are the necessary means which he shall judge to be such by the ninth Article. He therefore hath a right to make use, of and to doe all whatsoever he shall judge requisite for his preservation: wherefore by the judgement of him that doth it, the thing done is either right, or wrong; and therefore right. True it is therefore in the bare State of Nature, &c but if any man pretend somewhat to tend necessarily to his preservation, which yet he himself doth not confidently believe so, he may offend against the Lawes of Nature, as in the third Chapter of this Book is more at large declar'd. It hath been objected by some: If a Sonne kill his Father, doth he him no injury? I have answered, That a Sonne cannot be understood to be at any time in the State of Nature, as being under the Power and command of them to whom he ownes his protection as soon as ever he is born, namely either his Fathers, or his Mothers, or his that nourisht him, as is demonstrated in the ninth Chapter.

or of each single Man, a perpetuall War is: But it is perpetuall in its own nature, because in regard of the equality of those that strive, it cannot be ended by Victory; for in this state the Conquerour is subject to so much danger, as it were to be accounted a Miracle, if any, even the most strong should close up his life with many years, and old age. They of America are Examples hereof, even in this present Age: Other Nations have been in former Ages, which now indeed are become Civill, and Flourishing, but were then few, fierce, short-lived, poor, nasty, and destroy'd of all that Pleasure, and Beauty of life, which Peace and Society are wont to bring with them. Whosoever therefore holds, that it had been best to have continued in that state in which all things were lawfull for all men, he contradicts himself; for every man, by naturall necessity desires that which is good for him: nor is there any that esteemes a war of all against all, which necessarily adheres to such a State, to be good for him. And so it happens that through feare of each other we think it fit to rid our selves of this condition, and to get some fellowes; that if there needs must be war, it may not yet be against all men, nor without some helps.

XIV. Fellowes are gotten either by constraint, or by consent; By Constraint, when after fight the Conqueror makes the conquered serve him either through feare of death, or by laying fetters on him: By consent, when men enter into society to helpe each other, both parties consenting without any constraint. But the Conqueror may by right compell the Conquered, or the strongest the weaker, (as a man in health may one that is sick, or he that is of riper yeares a childe) unlesse he will choose to die, to give caution of his future obedience. For since the right of protecting our selves according to our owne wills proceeded from our danger, and our danger from our equality, its more consonant to reason, and more certaine for our conservation, using the present advantage to secure our selves by taking caution; then, when they shall be full growne and strong, and got out of our power, to endeavour to recover that power againe by doubtfull fight. And on the other side, nothing can be thought more absurd, then by discharging whom you already have weak in your power, to make him at once both an enemy, and a strong one. From whence we may understand likewise as a Corollarie in the naturall state of men, That a sure and irresistible Power confers the right of Dominion, and ruling over those who cannot resist; insomuch, as the right of all things, that can be done, adheres essentially, and immediately unto this omnipotence hence arising.

XV. Yet cannot men expect any lasting preservation continuing thus in the state of nature (i.e.) of War, by reason of that equality of power, and other humane faculties they are endued withall. Wherefore to seek Peace, where there is any hopes of obtaining it, and where there is none, to enquire out for Auxiliaries of War, is the dictate of right Reason; that is, the Law of Nature, as shall be shewed in the next Chapter.