

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Excerpts from Leviathan

By Thomas Hobbes  
1651

*Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was an English political philosopher. His 1651 book, Leviathan, established the theory of the "social contract," which establishes the idea that man benefits from a common rule of law. As you read, determine how, according to Hobbes, people behave without laws and government.*

[1] Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties<sup>1</sup> of the body and mind, as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. For, as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination<sup>2</sup> or by confederacy<sup>3</sup> with others that are in the same danger with himself.



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And, as to the faculties of the mind, setting aside the arts grounded upon words and especially that skill of proceeding upon general and infallible rules called science, which very few have and but in few things, as being not a native faculty born with us, nor attained, as prudence,<sup>4</sup> while we look after somewhat else, I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength. For prudence is but experience, which equal time equally bestows on all men in those things they equally apply themselves unto. That which may perhaps make such equality incredible is but a vain conceit<sup>5</sup> of one's own wisdom, which almost all men think they have in a greater degree than the vulgar, that is, than all men but themselves, and a few others whom by fame or for concurring with themselves they approve. For such is the nature of men that, howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty or more eloquent or more learned, yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves, for they see their own wit at hand and other men's at a distance. But this proveth rather that men are in that point equal than unequal. For there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of anything than that every man is contented with his share.

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1. **Faculties (noun):** inherent or natural abilities
  2. **Machination (noun):** the act of scheming or plotting usually toward an evil end
  3. **Confederacy (noun):** a group with a common purpose
  4. **Prudence (noun):** good or cautionary judgment
  5. **Conceit (noun):** too much pride in one's own self-worth

From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore, if any two men desire the same thing which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and, in the way to their end, which is principally their own conservation and sometimes their delectation<sup>6</sup> only, endeavour to destroy or subdue one another. And from hence it comes to pass that, where an invader hath 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.

And from this diffidence<sup>7</sup> of one another there is no way for any man to secure himself so reasonable as anticipation, that is, by force or wiles to master the persons of all men he can so long till he see no other power great enough to endanger him; and this is no more than his own conservation requireth and is generally allowed. *Also, because there be some that, taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than their security requires, if others, that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within the modest bounds, should not be invasion increase their power, they would not be able long time, by standing only on their defence, to subsist.*<sup>8</sup> And by consequence, such augmentation of dominion<sup>9</sup> over men being necessary to a man's conservation, it ought to be allowed him.

- [5] Again, 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 looketh that his companion should value him at the same rate he sets upon himself, and, upon all signs of contempt or undervaluing, naturally endeavours as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other) to extort<sup>10</sup> a greater value from his contemnners by damage, and from others by the example.

So that in the nature of man we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.

The first maketh man 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. For 'war' consisteth not in battle only or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known, and therefore the notion of 'time' is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain but in an inclination thereto of many days together, so the nature of war consisteth 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.'

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6. **Delectation** (*noun*): pleasure or enjoyment
  7. **Diffidence** (*noun*): lack of confidence; discomfort around other people; shyness
  8. **Subsist** (*verb*): to exist; to survive
  9. **Dominion** (*noun*): power to rule; control
  10. **Extort** (*verb*): to get something through force or threat

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time or 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 navigation nor use of the commodities that may be 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.

- [10] 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.

It may peradventure be thought there was never such a time nor condition of war as this; and I believe it was never generally so over all the world, but there are many places where they live so now. For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small families the concord whereof dependeth on natural lust, have no government at all, and live at this day in that brutish manner as I said before. Howsoever, it may be perceived what manner of life there would be where there were no common power to fear, by the manner of life which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government use to degenerate into, in a civil war.

But, though there had never been any time wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another, yet in all times kings and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies and in the state and posture of gladiators, having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another, that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns, upon the frontiers of their kingdoms, and continual spies upon their neighbours: which is a posture of war. But because they uphold thereby the industry of their subjects, there does not follow from it that misery which accompanies the liberty of particular men.

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 of such things as are necessary to commodious living, and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles are they which otherwise are called the Laws of Nature, whereof I shall speak more particularly in the two following chapters.

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Review paragraphs 1-2. Which of the following statements best summarizes the central idea of these paragraphs? [RI.2]
  - A. All men are drawn to violence and war; it is in their very nature.
  - B. Men are essentially equal to one another (in their abilities and/or potential).
  - C. Only few foolish men believe themselves to be smarter than others.
  - D. If man applies himself through hard work along, he will be more successful than his neighbors.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of the body and mind... when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he." (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "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." (Paragraph 1)
  - C. "And, as to the faculties of the mind, setting aside the arts grounded upon words and especially that skill of proceeding upon general and infallible rules called science, which very few have and but in few things, as being not a native faculty born with us, nor attained, as prudence...." (Paragraph 2)
  - D. "For such is the nature of men that, howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty or more eloquent or more learned, yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves...." (Paragraph 2)
  
3. PART A: Which of the following best states what Hobbes believes to be man's natural state of existence? [RI.2]
  - A. Man's natural state of existence is pure equality in every sense.
  - B. Man's natural state of existence is that of conflict, or "war."
  - C. Man's natural state of existence is in civilization; it is only without it that man becomes something else.
  - D. Man's natural state of existence is paranoia and jealousy, causing him to compete and argue with his neighbor.
  
4. PART B: What prevents or alters this natural state for mankind? [RI.3]
  - A. It is money which tempts men and provokes them into states of envy and greed, thus creating conflict.
  - B. It is industry that removes man further from the natural equilibrium.
  - C. It is compassion for others that prevents men from harming one another and falling into a state of "war."
  - D. It is a common compelling power that keeps men in order and prevents them from devolving into war.

5. Explain the following lines from paragraph 13, as well as how they contribute to [RI.5] [RI.4] the passage's overall meaning: "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."

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. In the context of this text, which is more important: freedom or security? According to Hobbes, are both possible? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art or literature in your answer.
2. Hobbes was considered a monarchist (a person that believes in the rule of people by a king or queen). What do you think the advantages and disadvantages are of rule by a king or queen? (Compare with current forms of government like democracy).
3. What are the benefits of government and law? What evidence do you see of this in the world around you today?
4. Do you think that Hobbes's idea of man's nature has changed over time? How do you believe people would behave without the rule of a governing body (anarchy)?
5. According to this text, how can peace be achieved? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art or literature in your answer.