

The Citizen (De Cive) by Thomas Hobbes, 1651

From Chapter One: “Of the state of men without Civill Society”

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: 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 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....

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 evils, 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. ...

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

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...