

Social Contract Theory

- I. Overview of Social Contract Theory
- II. Hobbes' enterprise – what a “science” of political behavior would be.
- III. Hobbes' specific theory of political behavior.
 - a. Our condition as Men (natural or acquired)
 - b. Our motivation to accept civil authority
 - c. What our Social Contract should be

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(4th c. BCE)

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Thomas Hobbes

(1588–1679)

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chs. 10–13; "Of Commonwealth," chs. 17–24

Bibliography:

John Locke

(1632-1704)

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"Of the State of War," "Of Property"

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(1712-1778)

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John Rawls

(1921–2002)

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I. Principal Tenets of SCT

1. Political authority derives from the consent of the governed, and this consent can be understood on the model of a contract, a mutual agreement.
2. There must be some motivation for making this agreement: fear, industriousness, a sense of justice...
3. Consent is given as a consequence of having assessed our situation and having made a rational choice about which agreements are in our individual best interests. (Questions: Whose consent is at issue?; What counts as "rational"?; What counts as a "choice"?)

II. Hobbes' enterprise: a
"science" of political
behavior

Hobbes' view of science

- The explanandum must be deduced from postulates that are undeniably certain. Each step in the explanans must be deductively valid.
- How systems of things change must be explained by (postulated) changes in the elements that constitute the system.
- "Motion" is the key theoretical concept, or construct, and "Motion" is inertial, i.e. unchanging motion need not be explained; rather, changes in motion, e.g. coming to rest, must be explained.
- This model is general and can be applied to human behavior in political systems.

Hobbes' methodological postulates

How we interact with one another can be analyzed as the outcome of the ways in which we act as individuals.

How we act as individuals, our outward "motions," can be analyzed as the outcome of "elementary motions" of body and mind.

Argument for Power

P1: Men are (variously) moved by appetites and aversions.

P2: "The Power of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good." [Ch. 10, p. 150]

So: Men will always seek Power (in various ways and in varying degrees).

Hobbes' Analysis of Power

"Naturall Power, is the **eminence** of the Faculties of body, or Mind..." [Ch. 10, p. 150]

"... a man's present means to obtain future apparent good consists of the amount by which his faculties, riches, reputation, etc. exceed those of other men." [Macpherson, Intro., p. 34]

Hobbes' Analysis of Human Value

"The Value or Worth of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power; and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependant on the need and judgement of another." (Ch. 10, pp. 151-152).

IIIa.-Hobbes' Big Idea: our condition of Perpetual Competition (A consequence of Nature or Nurture?)

"...I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death. And the cause of this, is [not simply that he wants more and better]...but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath at present, without the acquisition of more." [Ch. 11, p. 161]

IIIb. Our motivation to be governed.

1. By "nature" men are equal in their capacities, constant in their desires, and actively engaged in gaining acquisitions, dominion and glory.
2. In the absence of civil authority, every man has a "right" to everything and anything that will further his ends, "even to another's body."
3. But, we are in a condition of Perpetual Competition.

Therefore, we are motivated by fear to give our consent to civil authority.

The Fundamental Law of Nature (or general rule of Reason)

“That every man, ought to endeavor Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seem, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre.”

[Ch. 14, p. 190]

The second law of Nature (rule of reason)

“...that a man be willing to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with as much liberty against all men as he would allow against himself.” [Ch. 14, p. 190]

The Third law of Nature (Justice)

“That men performe their covenants made.”

IIIc. The Ensuing Social Contract

- Society is fragmented and we are driven into the struggle of each against all.
- This struggle is relentless and will be without limit until an opposing force constrains it.
- The only sure way to set such limits is agree to an all powerful, absolute civil authority.

Coming attractions:

John Locke: one week from today