Hobbes on the Citizen

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“Government is necessary, not because man is naturally bad, but because man is by nature more individualistic than social.”

-Thomas Hobbes

The following paper analyzes “On the Citizen,” written by Thomas Hobbes; the book was originally titled “De Cive” and published in 1651. The book depicts Hobbes’ political perceptions and conceptions in their entirety. “On the Citizen” is based on a precise, uncomplicated, and expository approach and offers a substantially significant insight. Throughout its content, Hobbes attempts to present the challenges encountered by human nature and asserts that man carries a powerfully positive proclivity regarding the communal lifestyle. Hobbes’ innovative perspective modifies the conventional dogma of natural law by keeping the language of nature’s laws; however, he revises their essence.

An Italian priest named Thomas Aquinas and his scholastic followers believe that natural law is an accumulation of moral principles which are inscribed on the hearts of humans by Almighty God, and humans realize them through the exposition of conscience and, in turn, opt for the path of prosperity and enlightenment. Hobbes argues this idea by describing contrasting natural laws. According to Hobbes, natural laws guide a human regarding what should be done or not for a prolonged probable defence of “life and limb.” (Hobbes, 1651) In the light of Thomas Hobbes’s subject proposition, God is present in the role of promulgator; meanwhile, conscience becomes the foundation, and human beings’ prosperity is the outcome of natural law. Furthermore, he refers to the arguments provided in Leviathan and refuses to accept nature’s laws as an actual set of rules.

In due course, Hobbes incorporates a few underlying traditional aspects of natural law by altering their conventional meanings. While considering the theory of Hobbes, it becomes evident that nature’s laws are all about the natural right to preserve oneself. Nevertheless, the concept of self-preservation is present in the theoretical framework of other philosophers, including Thomas Aquinas, but it is rather based on higher purposes and, therefore, is subject to being foregone on some occasions. In this context, the eradication of higher ends and the element of sacrifice from the principles of natural laws add a distinct characteristic to the theory of Hobbes and make it different

from other traditional standpoints.

Hobbes' analytical findings explicate that the fundamental law of nature is hidden in the presence of oneself, and therefore, humans seek peace whenever they are capable of it. Meanwhile, in the absence of peace, humans look forward to help from the war. Consequently, the remaining natural laws, which are about twenty-one in the count, are derived from this rule and based on the commands on the source of either protecting self-defence or peace. Through further delving, it becomes clear that the most imperative law of nature is extracted from a rule that stresses the need to transfer and abandon certain things so the right of that thing could be shared among many. This law can effectively be implemented in the fields of politics and economics and will augment the efficacy of the overall system by implementing an equal distribution of rights. Furthermore, historically, it has been proven that resistance to giving up rights often ends up in the form of war, and therefore, perpetual peace can be acquired through the adequate distribution and transmission of certain rights.

Hobbes describes the second law of nature by underlining the importance of abiding by one's agreements and pacts. This law of Hobbes elaborates on the fact that a person can only have the power to do wrong with the persons or entities he is contracted with. Lawful justice can only take place if positive contractual treaties between two individuals are elicited. Through this proposition, Hobbes rebuts the theories of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and believes that justice and lawful practices emerge synthetically out of humanly made conventions. Forcefully, Hobbes declares that fulfilling agreements and promises is the moral onus of a human and affirms that obligations are based on the element of caution. He further explains that one is obligated to abide by the agreement because one cannot break the promises without causing perilous outcomes, and such risks can be short and long-term in nature. On the other hand, in the absence of any legal agreement, one can cease the obligation after confirming the lack of bargaining agreement with another party. By making this point, Hobbes denies the natural law rules of Thomas Aquinas, which makes nature's law more conditional than categorical.

Human beings have an instinct that naturally leads them to seek goodness, and therefore, all humans want to augment their power in the search for subjective goodness. In turn, this power-hunt leads them to conquer other humans. Throughout this book, Hobbes identifies several laws of nature and their implications and ignores the logic of keeping agreements to endure the power of such forces which daunt humans from doing so. Additionally, he says that such passions, therefore, should be offset by more extreme ardour and must be tackled with violent demise and terror. These extremities and intensities of Hobbes's propositions about nature's law make them unsatisfactory and impractical for establishing and sustaining peace in a society. For these reasons, an adequately constituted power of sovereignty is indispensable for the development of the Commonwealth.

Work Cited

Hobbes, Thomas. *On the Citizen*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.