

THE WOLFISH TENDENCIES OF HUMAN NATURE: HOBBS'S LEVIATHAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RELATIONS

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Abstract

This research explores the concept of "Homo Homini lupus: Man is a wolf to man" in Thomas Hobbes's philosophy, examining its implications for understanding human nature, society, and governance. By analyzing Hobbes's Leviathan, this study investigates the intersections between his views on human nature, melancholy, and animality. Hobbes's pessimistic account of human nature, marked by self-interest and the pursuit of power, is scrutinized in relation to its implications for human behavior in a state of nature. The social contract theory, which posits that individuals surrender certain rights to a sovereign authority in exchange for protection and security, is also examined. Additionally, criticisms of Hobbes's ideas, including concerns about the potential for abuse of power and the neglect of human capacities for cooperation, are assessed. By evaluating the ongoing relevance of Hobbes's ideas in modern society, this research provides insight into the complexities of human nature and the role of governance in maintaining social order. Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing debates in political theory, ethics, and philosophy, highlighting the enduring significance of Hobbes's thought in understanding human society and governance.

Introduction

Hobbes's famous assertion "Homo homini lupus: Man is a wolf to man" encapsulates the core of his political philosophy, particularly enlarged in his famous work "Leviathan." In this compact phrase, Hobbes captures his bleak view of human nature and its implications for society.

Hobbes contends that without the constraints of a strong central authority, human beings are driven by their inherent self-interest and competitiveness. In the absence of governance, individuals are prone to conflict and aggression, metaphorically behaving like beast to one another. This perspective contrasts sharply with the optimistic views of human brutish nature found in earlier philosophical traditions, such as Aristotle's notion of humans as naturally social beings.

The implications of Hobbes's assertion extend far beyond mere description; they form the basis of his argument for the necessity of a powerful sovereign to maintain order and prevent the descent into a state of perpetual warfare. According to Hobbes, the social contract arises from individuals' rational calculation of their self-interest, leading them to relinquish some freedoms in exchange for security and stability provided by a Leviathan-like authority. Critics of Hobbes have raised numerous objections to his characterization of human nature and the necessity of absolute sovereignty. Some argue that his portrayal of humans as intrinsically selfish and aggressive overlooks the capacity for cooperation, empathy, and moral reasoning present in human societies. The concerns about the potential abuse of power by an unchecked government, challenge the desirability of Hobbes's political arrangements.

Despite these criticisms, Hobbes's assertion continues to provoke thought and debate on fundamental questions about human nature, society, and governance. Whether one fully accepts or rejects his conclusions, "Homo homini lupus" serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring relevance of Hobbes's ideas in political theory and philosophy.

According to Hobbes, in a state of nature, individuals are driven by their natural right of self-preservation, which leads them to prioritize their own interests and security above all else (Hobbes, 1651). This pursuit of self-preservation is fueled by the desire for power and the need to protect oneself from harm. In this state, individuals are seen as equal, with each person having the right to everything, including other people's bodies (Hobbes, 1651). This leads to a war of "all against all," where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1651, p. 89). Hobbes argues that individuals will eventually realize that this state of nature is unsustainable and that a strong central authority is necessary to maintain order and protect individuals from harm. This leads to the formation of a social contract, where individuals surrender some of their natural rights to a sovereign authority in exchange for protection and security. Hobbes' ideas on the individual's pursuit of self-preservation in a state of nature have been influential in shaping modern political philosophy, particularly in the areas of social contract theory and the role of government in maintaining order and protecting individual rights.

Hobbes and the wolf-man: Melancholy and Animality in modern Society

Hobbes was renowned for his profound impact on political thought, particularly as expounded in his great work "Leviathan," published in 1651. He was born in 1588, Hobbes lived through a period of significant political turmoil in England, including the English Civil War, an experience that profoundly shaped his philosophical outlook (Skinner, 2008).

Hobbes's philosophy is characterized by his pessimistic view of human nature, which he believed was inherently self-interested and driven by the pursuit of power. According to Hobbes, the state of nature is a condition of perpetual conflict and competition, where individuals are driven by their basic desires and engage in a "war of all against all". In this state, life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1651, p. 89).

To escape this state of nature, Hobbes argues that individuals must enter into a social contract, surrendering some of their freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for protection and security (Hobbes, 1651). This sovereign, or Leviathan, exercises absolute power to maintain order and prevent conflict within society. Hobbes's concept of the social contract laid the groundwork for modern social contract theory and had a profound influence on subsequent political thinkers, including John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant (Gauthier, 1969).

In addition to his political philosophy, Hobbes made significant contributions to various other fields, including ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. His materialist worldview and mechanistic conception of nature were groundbreaking in the seventeenth century and anticipated many developments in modern science and philosophy (Tuck, 1989). Hobbes's ideas continue to evoke debate and controversy, with some critics arguing that his emphasis on absolute sovereignty and his pessimistic view of human nature are excessively authoritarian (Pateman, 1985).

Despite these criticisms, Hobbes's work remains essential reading for anyone interested in political theory, ethics, and the foundations of modern society. His emphasis on the importance of social order, the role of the state, and the complexities of human nature continues to with contemporary discussions about power, governance, and morality.

Hobbes and "Man as a Wolf to Man"

The connection between Hobbes's concept of "man as a wolf to man" and notions of melancholy and animality in modern society offers a rich avenue for philosophical inquiry. According to Hobbes (1651), human nature is characterized by self-interest and competition, where individuals are driven by their basest desires and engage in a perpetual struggle for power. This Hobbesian view of humanity resonates with existential themes of alienation, melancholy, and the struggle for meaning in contemporary life (Kristeva, 1989).

In a world marked by uncertainty and existential angst, individuals may find themselves adrift, prioritizing their own interests above communal well-being (Hobbes, 1651). The dissolution of traditional social structures can trigger feelings of isolation and competition, leading to a sense of disconnection and melancholy. This theme is echoed in the works of philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued that human beings are condemned to be free, and that this freedom brings with it a sense of responsibility and anxiety (Sartre, 1946).

The association of humans with animality in Hobbes's metaphor raises questions about the nature of humanity itself. Are humans fundamentally distinct from other animals, as traditional humanism posits, or are we merely another species driven by instinctual urges and survival mechanisms? This question has profound implications for how we understand our place in the natural world and our responsibilities towards other beings (Midgley, 1978). Moreover, the theme of melancholy intersects with Hobbes's depiction of human nature in intriguing ways. Melancholy, often associated with a sense of loss, alienation, and existential despair, mirrors the bleakness of Hobbes's vision of humanity (Kristeva, 1989). In a world where individuals are perceived as self-interested and driven by fear of one another, the possibility of genuine connection and fulfillment may seem increasingly remote. However, it is essential to recognize the limitations of Hobbes's perspective and to engage critically with his ideas. While his portrayal of human nature resonates with certain aspects of modern life, it overlooks the complexities of human psychology and the capacity for empathy, cooperation, and moral reflection (Gauthier, 1969). Additionally, the emphasis on competition and self-interest neglects the importance of social bonds, community, and solidarity in shaping human behavior (Putnam, 2000).

Exploring the intersection of Hobbesian philosophy with themes of melancholy and animality in modern society invites us to reconsider fundamental questions about human nature, society, and the search for meaning in an increasingly complex world. By critically engaging with these ideas, we can gain deeper insights into the challenges and possibilities of contemporary existence.

Hobbes's political theory

Thomas Hobbes's political theory, as articulated in his seminal work "Leviathan" (1651), is grounded in his pessimistic view of human nature and his belief in the necessity of a strong, centralized authority to prevent the chaos of the state of nature. According to Hobbes, the state of nature is a condition of perpetual conflict and competition, where individuals are driven by their self-interest and the pursuit of power (Hobbes, 1651, p. 89). In the absence of a common authority to adjudicate disputes and enforce laws, life in the state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1651, p. 89).

To escape this state of nature, individuals enter into a social contract with one another, surrendering some of their natural rights in exchange for protection and security provided by a sovereign authority (Hobbes, 1651). This social contract forms the basis of political obligation and legitimacy, as individuals submit to the authority of the sovereign in order to maintain peace and security. The sovereign, or Leviathan, is an absolute and indivisible authority vested with the power to maintain order and prevent conflict within society (Hobbes, 1651).

Hobbes argues for the necessity of absolute sovereignty to ensure the effectiveness of political authority and prevent factionalism and rebellion (Hobbes, 1651). The primary role of government, according to Hobbes, is to maintain social order and security, which entails the establishment of laws, the administration of justice, and the protection of individuals' life, liberty, and property (Hobbes, 1651). Hobbes emphasizes the need for a strong, centralized government capable of exercising decisive authority.

While Hobbes acknowledges the existence of natural rights, such as the right to self-preservation, he contends that these rights are best preserved through the establishment of civil society and the surrender of certain liberties to the sovereign authority (Hobbes, 1651). In Hobbes's view, the state of nature is characterized by a war of all against all, where natural rights are constantly threatened. Despite advocating for absolute sovereignty, Hobbes acknowledges certain limitations on the power of the sovereign, including the requirement that the sovereign's authority be derived from the consent of the governed and that its legitimacy be contingent upon its ability to maintain social order and protect the common good (Hobbes, 1651).

Hobbes's political theory has had a profound impact on subsequent political thought and continues to be the subject of debate and interpretation in contemporary political philosophy (Skinner, 2008). While some have criticized Hobbes's authoritarian tendencies and pessimistic view of human nature, his emphasis on the importance of social order and the role of government in maintaining stability remains influential in discussions about governance and political authority.

Hobbes's shock therapy: leaving Animality behind

Hobbes's shock therapy: leaving animality behind is an intriguing phrase that encapsulates the essence of Hobbes's political philosophy in a modern context. According to Hobbes (1651), the state of nature is a realm dominated by animality, where individuals are driven by their primal, instinctual nature, competing for survival and engaging in a perpetual struggle for dominance. In this state, humans are akin to animals, driven by base desires and self-interest.

Hobbes's concept of shock therapy can be seen as a radical or transformative approach to governance, where individuals are forcibly removed from the state of nature and compelled to enter into civil society (Hobbes, 1651). This transition involves a departure from the chaotic and brutish tendencies of the state of nature toward a more civilized and orderly existence under the rule of law. By establishing a strong central authority, individuals are shocked out of their primal instincts and into a structured and orderly society.

The idea of leaving animality behind implies a transformative process wherein individuals transcend their primal nature and adopt more civilized behaviors (Hobbes, 1651). This process involves a radical reorientation of human behavior, from instinctual self-preservation to adherence to societal norms and obedience to authority. In a modern context, this concept could be applied metaphorically to situations where societies undergo rapid political or social transformations, often characterized by the imposition of strong central authority or drastic measures to restore order and stability.

While Hobbes's ideas have been critiqued for their authoritarian implications, they continue to provoke thought and debate about the nature of power, governance, and human behavior in society (Skinner, 2008). The concept of Hobbes's shock therapy: leaving animality behind highlights the tension between individual freedom and the need for social order, and raises important questions about the role of authority and governance in shaping human behavior.

The Question of Animality and melancholy

The intertwining of animality and melancholy in philosophical discourse presents a rich terrain for exploration, touching upon questions of human nature, existence, and the human condition. According to Hobbes (1651), animality often refers to the primal, instinctual aspects of human nature shared with other animals, including drives for survival, reproduction, and self-preservation. This perspective is echoed in the works of philosophers who depict the state of nature as a realm dominated by animality, where individuals are driven by their basest desires and engage in a perpetual struggle for dominance.

Melancholy, on the other hand, evokes a sense of sadness, despair, or existential angst, often associated with a feeling of disconnection or alienation from oneself, others, or the world at large (Kristeva, 1989). Philosophers from various traditions have explored the existential dimensions of melancholy, probing its relationship to the human condition and the search for meaning in life. The question arises: how do animality and melancholy intersect in the human experience?

One perspective suggests that melancholy can arise from a recognition of the animalistic aspects of human nature, coupled with a sense of disillusionment or despair at the human condition (Freud, 1917). This recognition may lead to feelings of alienation or existential angst as individuals grapple with the tension between their primal instincts and higher aspirations. Alternatively, some philosophers have explored the idea that melancholy can serve as a catalyst for transcending animality and embracing higher forms of existence (Nietzsche, 1883).

By confronting the existential void and grappling with the limitations of human nature, individuals may undergo a process of self-transformation, leading to greater self-awareness, empathy, and moral insight. Moreover, the relationship between animality and melancholy raises questions about the nature of human freedom and agency. Are humans simply bound by their animalistic instincts, or do they possess the capacity to transcend their primal nature and strive for greater self-realization? This tension between determinism and freedom lies at the heart of many philosophical debates about human nature and the human condition.

In sum, the question of animality and melancholy invites us to explore the complex interplay between our primal instincts, existential struggles, and the quest for meaning and transcendence in the human experience. By engaging with these themes, philosophers seek to shed light on fundamental questions about what it means to be human.

Lycanthropy and the Animalistic tendencies in Man

Lycanthropy, the mythical condition of humans transforming into wolves or wolf-like creatures, offers a fascinating lens through which to explore the animalistic tendencies of humanity. This concept has long been a potent symbol in folklore, literature, and popular culture, representing the primal, untamed aspects of human nature (Bettelheim, 1976). The transformation into a wolf is often associated with a loss of rationality and self-control, as the individual succumbs to their baser instincts and primal urges.

Throughout history, humans have grappled with their dual nature—striving for civilization and rationality while contending with their primal instincts and desires (Hobbes, 1651). Philosophers like Thomas Hobbes depicted humans in a state of nature as driven by their animalistic tendencies, engaging in a perpetual struggle for survival and dominance. This perspective highlights the tension between our civilized selves and our primal instincts, a theme that is often explored in literature and popular culture.

From a psychological perspective, lycanthropy can be seen as a metaphor for the unconscious forces that shape human behavior (Jung, 1968). Carl Jung, for example, explored the concept of the "shadow," representing the repressed aspects of the psyche that often manifest in irrational or destructive behavior. Lycanthropy could thus symbolize the eruption of these primal urges into consciousness, highlighting the complex and often contradictory nature of human psychology.

In literature and film, lycanthropy is often used to explore themes of identity, duality, and the struggle between civilization and wilderness (Wood, 1986). Characters afflicted with lycanthropy grapple with their animalistic impulses, often leading to inner conflict and moral ambiguity. This theme is particularly evident in horror fiction, where the werewolf is often depicted as a symbol of the monstrous "other," representing the fears and anxieties of human society.

The concept of lycanthropy raises profound questions about the nature of humanity and the boundaries between civilization and savagery. It prompts us to reflect on the ways in which our animalistic tendencies manifest in our behavior and societal structures, and the challenges of reconciling our primal instincts with our aspirations for higher moral and ethical ideals (Midelfort, 1996). By exploring this mythological motif, we can gain deeper insights into the complexities of human nature and the perennial quest for self-awareness and self-mastery.

In folklore and mythology, lycanthropy is often associated with certain symptoms or behaviors, including physical transformation, behavioral changes, psychological disturbances, social withdrawal, and obsessive behavior (Barber, 1988). While lycanthropy is not a recognized medical condition, individuals who exhibit symptoms suggestive of lycanthropy may be experiencing psychiatric disorders such as delusional disorder or schizophrenia (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is essential to approach discussions of lycanthropy with sensitivity and understanding, recognizing that beliefs in such phenomena often stem from cultural traditions, folklore, and psychological factors rather than medical reality.

Thomas Hobbes and De Cive

"De Cive", Latin for "On the Citizen," is a significant work by Thomas Hobbes, published in 1642, that explores the foundations of civil society, authority, and governance. According to Hobbes (1642), human nature is characterized by self-interest, fear, and a desire for power, which can lead to conflict and instability in the absence of effective governance.

In "De Cive", Hobbes introduces the concept of the social contract, arguing that individuals in the state of nature would naturally come into conflict with one another due to their competing desires and lack of trust (Hobbes, 1642). To avoid this state of perpetual war, individuals enter into a social contract, surrendering some of their freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for security and protection.

Hobbes emphasizes the importance of sovereignty as the ultimate source of political authority, arguing that the sovereign must possess absolute power to maintain order and prevent factionalism within society (Hobbes, 1642). This idea foreshadows his famous depiction of the Leviathan, or the all-powerful sovereign, in his later work "Leviathan" (Hobbes, 1651).

In "De Cive," Hobbes also discusses the rights and obligations of citizens, arguing that individuals have a natural right to self-preservation, which forms the basis of the social contract (Hobbes, 1642). However, individuals must also recognize their obligations to the sovereign authority and abide by its laws in order to maintain social order. Overall, "De Cive" offers valuable insights into Hobbes' political thought and provides a precursor to many of the ideas he would later develop in "Leviathan" (Skinner, 2008). By examining Hobbes' ideas on human nature, the social contract, and sovereignty, we can gain a deeper understanding of the foundations of modern political philosophy.

Leviathan

"Leviathan," Thomas Hobbes' most famous work, published in 1651, is a foundational text in modern political philosophy that has had a profound influence on Western political thought. According to Hobbes (1651), the state of nature is a condition of perpetual conflict and competition, where individuals are driven by their self-interest and the pursuit of power. In the absence of a common authority to adjudicate disputes and enforce laws, life in the state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1651, p. 89).

To escape this state of nature, Hobbes argues that individuals enter into a social contract with one another, surrendering some of their natural rights in exchange for protection and security provided by a sovereign authority (Hobbes, 1651). This social contract forms the basis of political obligation and legitimacy, as individuals submit to the authority of the sovereign in order to maintain peace and security.

The sovereign, or Leviathan, is an absolute and indivisible authority vested with the power to maintain order and prevent conflict within society (Hobbes, 1651). Hobbes argues for the necessity of absolute sovereignty to ensure the effectiveness of political authority and prevent factionalism and rebellion. The primary role of government, according to Hobbes, is to maintain social order and security, which entails the establishment of laws, the administration of justice, and the protection of individuals' life, liberty, and property (Hobbes, 1651).

While Hobbes acknowledges the existence of natural rights, such as the right to self-preservation, he contends that these rights are best preserved through the establishment of civil society and the surrender of certain liberties to the sovereign authority (Hobbes, 1651). Individuals inherently right to self-preservation, which forms the basis of the social contract, but they have to align with the sovereign authority and must abide by the laws.

Despite advocating for absolute sovereignty, Hobbes acknowledges certain limitations on the power of the sovereign. The sovereign's authority is derived from the consent of the governed, and its legitimacy is dependant on its ability to maintain social order and protect the common good (Hobbes, 1651). However, Hobbes does not recognize a right to rebellion against the sovereign, arguing that such actions would only lead to greater chaos and insecurity.

"Leviathan" remains essential reading for anyone interested in political theory, philosophy, and the foundations of modern society. Its emphasis on the importance of social order, the role of the state, and the complexities of human nature continues to shape contemporary discussions about governance, authority, and the nature of power (Skinner, 2008).

Thomas Hobbes' magnum opus, "Leviathan," and his earlier work, "De Cive" ("On the Citizen"), offer profound insights into human nature, governance, and the role of authority in maintaining social order. According to Hobbes (1651), human nature is characterized by self-interest and competitiveness, which can lead to conflict and instability in the absence of effective governance. This idea was born out of the experiences of many African countries, including Nigeria, where the absence of effective governance or the breakdown of social order can lead to chaos and conflict (Ake, 1985). For instance, the Niger Delta region in Nigeria has witnessed decades of unrest and militancy, partly due to the perceived neglect and exploitation by the government and corporations (Okonta, 2008).

Hobbes social contract theory posits that individuals surrender some of their freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for protection and stability (Hobbes, 1642). In Nigeria, the social contract between the government and citizens is often tenuous, with many citizens feeling disconnected from the decision-making process and skeptical of the government's ability to protect their rights and interests (Osaghae, 2006). This can lead to a lack of trust in government institutions and a sense of disillusionment among citizens. Hobbes argues for the necessity of a strong, centralized authority to maintain peace and security (Hobbes, 1651). In Nigeria, the debate over the most effective form of governance continues, with some advocating for a more decentralized approach to address the country's diverse needs and challenges (Suberu, 2001). While Hobbes' ideas were developed in a different historical and cultural context, they remain relevant to understanding the complexities of human nature, governance, and social order in Africa.

The relevance of Hobbes' ideas to the African context lies in their ability to inform discussions on state-building, security, and development (Bayart, 2009). His emphasis on the importance of a strong authority and the need for individuals to surrender some freedoms for the greater good can provide valuable insights into the challenges of governance in Africa. However, it is also important to contextualize and adapt Hobbes' ideas to the specific needs and challenges of African countries, taking into account their unique cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Mamdani, 1996).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Hobbes' works offer valuable insights into the complexities of human nature, governance, and social order, which can inform discussions on state-building, security, and development in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. By understanding the relevance of Hobbes' ideas to the African context, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges of governance and the importance of effective institutions in maintaining social order.

"De Cive" (On the Citizen), a significant work by Thomas Hobbes, published in 1642, explores the foundations of civil society, authority, and governance. According to Hobbes (1642), human nature is characterized by self-interest and competitiveness, necessitating a strong governing authority to maintain order. This idea is central to Hobbes' philosophy, as he argues that individuals surrender some freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for protection and stability, a concept known as the social contract (Hobbes, 1642).

Hobbes further emphasizes the importance of a powerful and undivided sovereign authority in ensuring peace and security within a state (Hobbes, 1642). This idea is developed more extensively in his magnum opus, "Leviathan," published in 1651. In "Leviathan," Hobbes (1651) posits that the social contract is a fundamental aspect of human society, where individuals submit to a sovereign authority to escape the state of nature, characterized by war and insecurity.

The concept of sovereignty is also a crucial aspect of Hobbes' philosophy, as he argues that a strong and centralized authority is necessary to maintain order and protect citizens (Hobbes, 1651). "Leviathan" is considered a foundational text in modern political philosophy, influencing Western political thought and theory (Skinner, 2008). To gain a comprehensive understanding of Hobbes' political philosophy and its relevance to modern governance, it is essential to read both "De Cive" and "Leviathan." By analyzing the contemporary relevance of Hobbes' ideas, we can gain valuable insights into the complexities of human nature, governance, and social order. For instance, applying Hobbes' ideas to issues such as state-building, security, and development can help us better understand the role of government and authority in society (Held, 2006).

A critical evaluation of Hobbes' ideas, considering both their strengths and limitations, can also help develop a better understanding of the role of government and authority in society. By examining the historical context in which Hobbes wrote, we can gain a deeper understanding of the development of his ideas and their relevance to modern governance (Tuck, 1989).

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