

Hobbes's Political Philosophy: A Methodological Conundrum?

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Abstract

The quest for a viable government institution, which could effectively pledge security to every private citizenry, is among the innermost concerns of all states. However, the central problem is the way how such a common institution could be rationalized. In this regard, among other, Thomas Hobbes came up with his own model of social contract theory to justify the vitality of an absolute government institution. In 1651, his work, the Leviathan therefore conveyed his political thought by focusing on the natural conditions of individual human beings prior to the formation of common government institution identified as the sovereign. Accordingly, he described that human beings are naturally driven by their egos, are anti-social, and indifferent to conventional morality and religion. For him, therefore, through social contract, after the delegation of some of their basic rights to an absolute sovereign, members of the community ultimately expect the formation of a common and absolute security structure or government institution. Given his preceding premises, however, his absolute epistemological appeal to empiricism, historical evidence, and mechanistic premises to investigate state-society as well as interstate relationships could be contested as over simplified and over generalized. Moreover, his mere empirical, physical, biological assertions and rationalizations of human nature by detaching it from its normative, qualitative, and subjective essences had been his prime methodological dearth. Hence, this article critically investigated and analyzed the pertinent epistemological implications and relevancies of the Leviathan to contemporary societies. In doing so, philosophical methods of conceptual clarification, critical analysis and synthesis were employed to examine his political theory.

Keywords: Hobbes, Empiricism, Leviathan, Rationalism

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