

Thomas Hobbes and the External Relations of States

Author(s): Murray Forsyth

Source: *British Journal of International Studies*, Oct., 1979, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Oct., 1979), pp. 196-209

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20096866>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *British Journal of International Studies*

JSTOR

# Thomas Hobbes and the external relations of states

MURRAY FORSYTH

HOBBS' conception of relations between states has attracted attention from two directions. Students of political theory who have focused on Hobbes have from time to time looked beyond their central preoccupations and noted briefly the relevance of his doctrine for the international arena.<sup>1</sup> The external relations of Leviathan are for them on the fringe of Hobbes' theory. Students of international relations on the other hand invoke Hobbes' name frequently as a kind of shorthand for a particular approach to the international world, one that is also associated with Machiavelli, and usually called the 'realist' approach. By contrast with the political theorists, they tend to look from the outside *into* Hobbes' theory and to ask whether and how far the 'domestic' situation of individuals in a Hobbesian state of nature bears an analogy with the 'external' situation of states in relationship to one another.<sup>2</sup>

In this study I wish to try and take the discussion of Hobbes and the international world a little further. I do not propose to start from the outside looking in, nor from the inside looking out. I wish to argue that behind the question of whether there are analogies between the 'domestic' and 'external' worlds there lies the deeper question of why Leviathan has external relations at all. Hobbes, after all, never begins his political theory with this or that particular group of men, but always with a consideration of *man*. Why then is the political community that emerges in his theory a body designed for common defence against 'the invasion of foreigners'?<sup>3</sup> Why does not Leviathan logically embrace the whole of mankind? In other words the primary question is not one of analogies or parallels but one of the simultaneous

1. Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 118–20 and David P. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 207–212, provide good examples of this tendency. There is also a close similarity in the substance of their arguments.

2. For Hobbes' name used as a shorthand for the 'realist' approach see, for example, Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester, 1977), pp. 38–39; Geoffrey Stern in *The Bases of International Order* (ed.), Alan James (Oxford, 1973), p. 134; and Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London, 1977), pp. 24–27. For the best discussion of the 'domestic analogy' between Hobbes' state of nature and the condition of international relations, see Bull, *op. cit.* pp. 46–51, and also Bull's article, 'Society and Anarchy in International Relations', in *Diplomatic Investigations* (London, 1966), pp. 35–50.

3. *Leviathan*, Michael Oakeshott (ed.), (Oxford, 1960), p. 112.

emergence of 'inner' and 'outer', or 'us' and 'them' in the development of Hobbes' concept of the state.<sup>1</sup>

The search for the answer to this question leads, as might be expected, to a consideration of the process of generation of Hobbes' commonwealth, and more specifically of the way in which the state of nature is transformed into the state proper. This is a field well trampled over by political theorists, and it is difficult not to cover ground which has been explored before. If, however, attention is kept firmly fixed on the crystallization of man as originally conceived by Hobbes, into man divided into discrete groups facing one another, perhaps it is possible to say something fresh about this well-studied subject, and to illuminate not merely this or that side of Hobbes' teaching, but the central core of his theory.

Textual exegesis is unfortunately wearisome, and I shall therefore begin by sketching the general direction of the argument which I wish to develop. First, the subject obliges one to look with particular attention at two junctures in Hobbes' argument: the point at which he moves from a definition of the 'mere' or 'bare' state of nature to a definition of the natural laws, and the point at which he moves from a discussion of the natural laws to the situation that immediately precedes the creation of the commonwealth. Hobbes' argument at these points and elsewhere, I shall argue, make it necessary to differentiate the Hobbesian state of nature into two: a condition in which individual men are governed solely and entirely by self-directed passions, and by their own reason and judgement, and a condition in which the laws of reason, or reason as by definition the taking into account of the *other* person's rights as well as one's own, are immanently at work. Most important of all, this second condition is synonymous with one in which men are woven together into distinct groupings or confederations. It is a condition in which a differentiation between 'allies' and 'enemies' has taken place. Leviathan is the perfection of a discrete group of allies of this sort – it stands for the final expulsion of the right of war from *within* the group and the restriction of the exercise of the right of war to relations *between* groups.

Such is the broad outline of the argument. It is necessary now to show how it derives from Hobbes' own words. In reading Hobbes' three main political texts – *The Elements of Law*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan* – it is always difficult to be sure what is most impressive about his writing: the extraordinary tenacity with which he retains in each successive work the arguments of the preceding one, or the subtle changes that he makes in these arguments, accentuating a theme here and paring

1. This question must also be distinguished from the problem posed by Kant in his *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmo-political Point of View*. Kant here assumed that the same unsociability which forced men to create the state obtained between states, and argued that it was therefore essential to create an international federation in the likeness of a state. His later writings, however, show that he progressively modified this argument, and came to see that logically an international federation would have to be *different* from a state.

away another there. Both these characteristics strike the eye when one tries to follow the process of the crystallization of men into groups. The main line of differentiation would seem to run between the argument he develops in his two earlier works, and the one propounded in *Leviathan*. I shall therefore treat the former first, and then the latter. This division should not however be taken to imply that there is a total break in continuity.

*The discussion in the early works*

In the *Elements* and *De Cive* Hobbes gives the original or 'bare' state of nature a peculiarly sharp definition by attributing to man a natural underived right to all things. In the *Elements* he defines this right as follows:

Every man by nature hath right to all things, that is to say, to do whatsoever he listeth to whom he listeth, to possess, use, and enjoy all things he will and can. For seeing all things he willeth, must therefore be good unto him in his own judgement, because he willeth them; and may tend to his preservation some time or other; or he may judge so . . . it followeth that all things may rightly also be done by him.<sup>1</sup>

This original underived right of all to all – which I shall call hereafter the raw right to all – is not the only reason why the 'bare' state of nature is a state of war, but it is an important one. The other causes that Hobbes enumerates are the passions – vanity, competition, and appetite for the same thing – and the right to do what in one's own judgement is necessary for one's preservation. The latter right, it should be observed, is not contrary to "right reason", but is something "that all men account to be done justly, and with right".<sup>2</sup> It has an element of reciprocity in it. The raw right to all however is not, and cannot be based on right reason or reciprocity – to recognize the right of another to all things is necessarily to deny oneself this right. By making it an original element of man's nature Hobbes in effect makes each man a totally 'windowless' atom.

The peculiar characteristics of a state of nature founded on the raw right to all are worth dwelling upon. Such a state can only be described as a not-world, a fortuitous or Epicurean concurrence, a 'dissolution' rather than a 'resolution' of civil government. A plurality of men exist each of whom can claim and assert the right to exist *alone*. Each man – each state if we wish to transpose the notion to international affairs – may in other words act not as *a* representative of God, but as

1. *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, Ferdinand Tonnies (ed.), M. M. Goldsmith (second ed.) (London, 1969), p. 72. The corresponding definition in *De Cive*, for which I have used the translation entitled, *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society* in volume two of Hobbes' *English Works*, Molesworth (ed.), is on pp. 9–11. The footnote Hobbes added later to this passage in *De Cive* is already a modification of his original position, and prepares the way, like several of the other footnotes, for his ultimate standpoint in *Leviathan*.

2. *De Cive*, *op. cit.* pp. 8–9.

the representative of God, and may direct his or its actions so as to gain sole lordship over the world. Man is assumed to be free, but as free to pursue his welfare not as distinct from the welfare of others, but as if there were no others from whom 'his own' could be, or need be, differentiated. There is, there can be no notion of ownership either potential or actual in this condition. To talk of a distinct *ius belli* in this condition also seems inappropriate, for to exist is *necessarily* to fight, until at last fighting is unnecessary.

As these multiple 'jets' of blind freedom expand they encounter one another and mutual destruction results. Fear of such destruction, to revert to Hobbes' own words, provokes men to use their "right" or "true" reason to find a way out of this "estate". They consult the laws of nature. Before passing on to a discussion of the impact of the laws of nature on the bare estate of nature, however, it is worth considering the latter's significance and meaning. Why does Hobbes posit as a distinct "estate" something that is merely a not-world, a formless chaos, a buzzing, booming confusion that even the word "estate" distorts?

There would seem to be at least two reasons. The first is that Hobbes was concerned to combat the doctrine that man naturally sought society in the abstract, and followed reason in the abstract, as if the formation of one and the use of the other were disconnected from self-interest and passion. Against this he wished – rightly I think – to argue that society and reason were related to man's self-interest and passion, they did not exist in some pure ethereal world of their own. The positing of a not-world, or the 'position' of a 'negation', which provoked fear of destruction, and hence roused reason to its work, was a potent if crudely linear way of making plain the rootedness of both society and reason in self-interest and passion, or of showing that society and reason were both *will*.

The second reason for Hobbes' posited not-world is that it is an anatomy of the evil which he saw around him when he was writing. The 'bare' state of nature is not, as we have already noted, a resolution of civil government, it is the dissolution of civil government. More precisely, it is the dissolution of the dissolution of civil government. It is an anatomy, in other words, of religious – or as we might put it to-day – of ideological civil war. It portrays a situation in which not merely each sect or party but each man claims to possess absolute truth and absolute right, and feels justified thereby in smiting down his fellow men as mere obstacles to the spread of 'his' truth and right. Such men, as Hobbes put it in *Leviathan* betray "their want of right reason, by the claim they lay to it".<sup>1</sup> By pretending to be Gods, they reduce mankind to brutishness.

The positing of a not-world, an Epicurean concurrence of atoms, thus has its own logic. Let us now turn to the state of nature in its

1. *Leviathan*, *op. cit.* p. 26.

second guise, as it is moulded by the laws of nature. These laws prescribe the forms by which free beings establish relationships between themselves. They command men basically to exchange right – that is to engage in the mutual self-limitation of their original freedom. The use of right reason is hence synonymous with the voluntary establishment of relationship. Men are no longer ‘windowless’ atoms, they look out and recognize one another. They do not however establish relationships with everyone indiscriminately because reason commands it – that for Hobbes would be a destruction of the nexus between reason and interest on which he was so insistent. Rather men enter into exchange – or form pacts – with *some* men in order the better to meet the enmity of *others*. The awakening of reason means not the extinction of enmity, but the distinction of ‘enemies’ from ‘allies’, the ending of ubiquitous enmity.

To demonstrate this simultaneous process Hobbes’ own words must be quoted. In the brief passage in *De Cive* that succeeds his definition of the state of nature and precedes his exposition of the laws of nature, Hobbes makes two revealing statements. “No man”, he writes, “can esteem a war of all against all to be good for him”.

And so it happens, that through fear of each other we think it fit to rid ourselves of this condition, and to get some fellows; that if there needs must be war, it may not yet be against all men, nor without some helps. Fellows are gotten either by constraint, or by consent . . .<sup>1</sup>

Then, after showing the mechanism of constraint, or the right of irresistible power in the state of nature, he concludes that men cannot expect any lasting preservation by continuing in the state of nature. “Wherefore to seek peace, where there is any hopes of obtaining it, and where there is none, to enquire out for auxiliaries of war, is the dictate of right reason, that is, the law of nature . . .”<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from these two passages, that to search for “auxiliaries of war” is dictated at once by fear of destruction and by the laws of nature. In the section that comes after his exposition of the laws of nature, Hobbes again discusses this interconnection:

Since therefore the exercise of the natural law is necessary for the preservation of peace, and that for the exercise of the natural law security is no less necessary; it is worth the considering what that is which affords such a security. For this matter nothing else can be imagined, but that each man provide himself of such meet helps, as the invasion of one on the other may be rendered so dangerous, as either of them may think it better to refrain than to meddle.<sup>3</sup>

1. *De Cive*, *op. cit.* p. 12.

2. *Ibid.* p. 13. The ambiguity of these concluding paragraphs of Chapter One of *De Cive* lies in the fact that Hobbes sees the winning of fellows by constraint as part of the ‘bare’ state of nature and yet also sees the winning of fellows as the way *out* of the ‘bare’ state of nature. This ambiguity foreshadows that of the commonwealth by acquisition itself: is it but the state of nature congealed, or a genuine step beyond the state of nature? For Locke and Rousseau it was emphatically the former.

3. *Ibid.* pp. 64–65. The identity of the search for peace, or the exercise of the laws of nature, and the concrete creation of security is also indicated by the later passage in which Hobbes

From here Hobbes argues that the “consent of many” only to “direct all their actions to the same end and the common good”, or a “society proceeding from mutual help only”, is liable to fall apart once the common end goes. Something else must therefore be done “that those who have once consented for the common good to peace and mutual help, may by fear be restrained lest afterwards they again dissent, when their private interest shall appear discrepant from the common good”.<sup>1</sup> It is only at *this* point that Hobbes asserts that what is necessary in civil government is not merely “many wills concurring in one object”, but “one will”,<sup>2</sup> and proceeds to discuss the establishment of this one will, or the construction of the state proper.

In this survey of the argument in *De Cive* and the *Elements* I have tried to show that lurking within Hobbes’ state of nature there are not merely – as is so often imagined – a multiplicity of individuals engaged in a war of all against all, and vainly trying to follow the laws of nature. There are security-communities, confederations and alliances, forming and reforming as the pressure of a common enemy arises and subsides. Hobbes’ state is the perfection of a discrete confederation or security-community as much as it is a union of individuals.

#### *The discussion in Leviathan*

In *Leviathan* the argument that has been traced in the earlier works undergoes some interesting modifications. Perhaps the first thing to be noted is that in Hobbes’ description of the “natural condition of mankind” the raw right of all to all disappears as a cause of the war of all against all. The war is caused by men who are roughly equal in bodily and mental faculties seeking the same thing and struggling for it; seeking to avert such clashes by anticipatory force; and seeking glory. The war is inferred, writes Hobbes, from the passions. Insofar as right is being exercised in it, it would appear to be rational right or a right which men mutually acknowledge. Thus when a man takes measures of war that are “no more than his own conservation requireth,” it is “generally allowed”, and when augmentation of dominion over others is “necessary to a man’s conservation, it ought to be allowed him”.<sup>3</sup> The implication here is that some form of agreement between

---

wrote that “dominions (*imperia*) were constituted for peace’s sake, and peace was sought after for safety’s sake”, pp. 166–167. In stressing the identity of the exercise of the natural laws, the formation of pacts, and the creation of security I differ markedly from the position adopted by Howard Warrender in *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*. Warrender’s constant determination to abstract the purely personal essence of natural law both from its other-directed practical dictates, and from the “circumstances” of “sufficient” or “insufficient security” in which it operates, and to make the individual’s interpretation of this purely personal essence the constitutive ‘ground’ of all obligation seems to me to distort Hobbes’ doctrine. Hobbes was not concerned to reduce all obligation to its first starting point, he was concerned to show that the first starting point was *only* a starting point, that man had to act with his fellow men in order to make the reason that was part of his nature a real power.

1. *Ibid.* pp. 65–66.

2. *Ibid.* p. 66.

3. *Leviathan, op. cit.* p. 81.

men makes warlike measures that are necessary for survival permissible. Hobbes heightens this suggestion of reason at work in the original state of nature by indicating that men are capable of combining in it. In the very first paragraph he mentions “confederacy with others”<sup>1</sup> as a means of equalizing the strength of the weak with that of the naturally powerful, and later writes of men coming “with forces united”<sup>2</sup> to drive out the single settler. Hobbes also describes men endeavouring to win respect or esteem from others, and daring to go “far enough”<sup>3</sup> as to destroy some men to win this – which is hardly a description of a blind denial of others’ right to exist. Finally the passions driving men to peace in *Leviathan* are more positive than in Hobbes’ earlier works – the fear of destruction is joined by men’s “desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them”,<sup>4</sup> and Hobbes draws a peculiarly vivid picture of the positive benefits that men lose by engaging in war.

In sum the original state of nature in *Leviathan* has lost something of the bleak nothingness that characterized it in Hobbes’ earlier works. Reason seems more immanent in it. Men are capable of relating, if only in a limited way. Passions are pushing men into war but other passions are positively pushing men out. And yet there can be no denying that Hobbes calls it explicitly a “war of every man, against every man”,<sup>5</sup> a condition of multiple *solitude*.<sup>6</sup> He can only do this, it may be suggested, by putting all the factors on one side of his equation instead of placing them in dynamic interrelationship with one another. That is to say, instead of defensive unions *checking* aggressive individuals or confederacies *checking* the war relationship between their members – all measures to balance and combine forces are seen as but an extension of a primitive war produced by the passions.

When Hobbes proceeds to define the right of nature and the laws of nature in *Leviathan* it might seem as if the raw right of all to all characteristic of the *Elements* and *De Cive* re-appears. The position however is more complex than this. The right of nature in *Leviathan* is each man’s liberty to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, and to use his own judgement and reason to decide if, when, and how far measures to preserve himself are required. The laws of nature are once again, “right” reason, that is to say reason reaching out beyond oneself and telling one for one’s own good to engage in mutual exchange of right with others. What then is the “right to everything” which Hobbes also says “every man naturally has”? It would seem to be the right of nature as it is exercised *in* the state of nature that has already been defined. Thus, *in* a condition of universal war man is entitled by the right of nature to do anything he wants to his fellow man. His right

1. *Ibid.* p. 80.

3. *Ibid.* p. 81.

5. *Ibid.* p. 82 and p. 83.

6. *Ibid.* p. 82 (‘the life of man, solitary’), and p. 83.

2. *Ibid.* p. 81.

4. *Ibid.* p. 84.



reason shrivels into nothing. Total measures are permitted. But the shrivelling of right reason into nothingness is the same as man's total destruction. *Ergo* man has to exercise his right of nature in conjunction with right reason, to limit the total right to total war, if he is to continue to exist. The whole thrust of Hobbes' argument would seem to be that the use of right reason is neither merely technical nor merely spontaneous but existential – linked to man's very survival as man. Paradoxically Hobbes can only express this existentiality of right reason by placing man in an "estate" or condition, or supposing him to be able to exist, *without* right reason.<sup>1</sup>

That in *Leviathan* – as in *The Elements of Law* and *De Cive* – the awakening or application of right reason is synonymous with the making of confederacies or alliances by which one gains additional protection against the threat of enemies is plain from Hobbes' own words. One particular passage, in which he fiercely rebuts the Machiavellian argument that "there is no such thing as justice",<sup>2</sup> and that a man can do whatever he likes to gain his own advantage, making or unmaking covenants at whim, is worth quoting at length. In a condition of war, Hobbes writes,

wherein every man to every man, for want of a common power to keep them all in awe, is an enemy, there is no man who can hope by his own strength, or wit, to defend himself from destruction, without the help of confederates; where every one expects the same defence by the confederation, that any one else does: and therefore he which declares he thinks it reason to deceive those that help him, can in reason expect no other means of safety, than what can be had from his own single power. He therefore that breaketh his covenant, and consequently declareth that he may with reason do so, cannot be received into any society, that unite themselves for peace and defence, but by the error of them that receive him; nor when he is received, be retained in it, without seeing the danger of their error; which errors a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security: and therefore if he be left, or cast out of society, he perisheth; and if he live in society, it is by the errors of other men, which he could not foresee, nor reckon upon; and consequently against the reason of his preservation; and so, as all men that contribute not to his destruction, forbear him only out of ignorance of what is good for themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Nowhere does Hobbes argue more cogently than this that even

1. This paraphrase is intended to express the essence of the early paragraphs, and above all the fourth, of Chapter XIV, Part I, of *Leviathan*, i.e. pp. 84–5. There remains however an ambiguity which I feel is incapable of resolution, namely Hobbes' express statement that the right to all is a *result* of the condition of war, and his concomitant statement, a little later that "as long as every man holdeth this right, of doing any thing he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of war".

2. *Ibid.* p. 94.

3. *Ibid.* pp. 95–96. It is worth noting in this context that the very first law of nature (p.85) states that "every man, ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps and advantages of war". This is a highly 'circumstance-impregnated' injunction.

before the state proper is established the mere individual perishes and confederations alone exist, or, to put it differently, that the natural law of relationship is working and shaping the 'bare' state of nature before Leviathan. There are many other indications of this interpenetration in the chapters expounding the laws of nature – in particular statements making it quite clear that covenants are being made in the state of nature – but there is no need to cite them all.<sup>1</sup> What requires to be stressed is that these confederations or alliances are based solely on covenants or pacts. They do not abolish each individual's right to levy war, they only restrain it, or to put it differently, they make the right to war into a distinct right exercisable in specific circumstances. Thus in the last resort the partners to the covenants or pacts remain the judges of whether the pacts have been infringed, or whether the situation has altered to such a degree as to make them void. They retain the right to treat those with whom they have compacted once again as enemies. It is not difficult to see in such arrangements the essence of treaties and pacts between sovereign states and also – and this was surely Hobbes' main concern – of bodies politic which fall short of sovereign states, that is to say composite bodies politic, in which the right to *re-bellare* is still retained by the partners to them. Here it should be stressed that it was the general opinion that England was a 'mixed' or composite body politic which, in Hobbes' opinion, had

1. The kind of non-state allegiances or alliances that Hobbes discusses in Part I, Chapter X of *Leviathan* deserve to be mentioned, however. Hobbes here writes of the union of powers typified by the state or commonwealth, on the one hand, and "the power of a faction or of divers factions leagued" on the other (p. 56). In the latter, he points out, the power of the association depends on *the will of each particular*. Hobbes proceeds to describe in some detail the features of such factions, indicating that they exist *naturally*, though within commonwealths, sovereigns regulate, and if necessary outlaw them (p. 59, 118, 154). C. B. Macpherson, in his well-known book *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1962) considers that the associative relationships which Hobbes describes in this chapter demonstrate that Hobbes was "more or less consciously" taking the model of a modern exchange economy as his model for "society as such" (p. 46). Stressing Hobbes' use of words such as "value" and "price" in the chapter in question, Macpherson concludes that in the relationships characteristic of factions: "A man's power is treated as a commodity, regular dealings in which establish market prices" (p. 37). "We have here the essential characteristics of the competitive market" (p. 38) *etc.* Macpherson's interpretation here seems gratuitous, revealing more about his own convictions than those of Hobbes. The relationship characteristic of factions or leagues, as described by Hobbes, is essentially that of unequal or equal alliances, and has at its heart the reciprocal exchange of protection and allegiance. These are not the relationships typical of modern exchange economies, but are similar to those of protective associations like the Mafia (within states) or hegemonial or 'client' relationships, like that between the United States and Britain at this moment (between states). For "protection" or "allegiance" to be marketable "commodities" they would have to be either tangible objects existing outside persons, or intangible qualities offered for a monetary equivalent, and ideally *both* tangible objects *and* objects with a value expressed in monetary terms. While Hobbes uses the terms "price" and "value" in explaining the nature of the exchange characteristic of factions and leagues, he does not equate protection or allegiance with "commodities" and with good reason. Power in the sense of the power to protect is *not* the same as the material objects of power (guns, tanks *etc.*) bought and sold for a monetary equivalent. It is at heart the judged capacity of a person to protect in a given situation. Allegiance is likewise not at heart something sold for money, but the alignment of a person's will that is made in return for protection.

led to the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> For him such 'mixed' or composite bodies politic had not really left the 'state of war' behind, they were only quasistates.

When did the confederations, alliances or quasi-states of the state of nature qualify as true commonwealths or states? Hobbes put forward not one, but two criteria: size and unity. A small number of men did not provide the requisite security,

because in small numbers, small additions on the one side or the other, make the advantage of strength so great, as is sufficient to carry the victory; and therefore gives encouragement to an invasion. The multitude sufficient to confide in for our security, is not determined by any certain number, but by comparison with the enemy we fear; and is then sufficient, when the odds of the enemy is not of so visible and conspicuous moment, to determine the event of war, as to move him to attempt.<sup>2</sup>

Size, however, was not enough. There had to be a real unity of direction. In Hobbes' words:

And be there never so great a multitude; yet if their actions be directed according to their particular judgments, and particular appetites, they can expect thereby no defence, nor protection, neither against a common enemy, nor against the injuries of one another. For being distracted in opinions concerning the best use and application of their strength, they do not help but hinder one another; and reduce their strength by mutual opposition to nothing: whereby they are easily not only subdued by a very few that agree together; but also when there is no common enemy, they make war upon each other, for their particular interests. For if we could suppose a great multitude of men to consent in the observation of justice, and other laws of nature, without a common power to keep them all in awe; we might as well suppose all mankind to do the same; and then there neither would be, nor need to be any civil government, or commonwealth at all; because there would be peace without subjection.

Nor is it enough for the security, which men desire should last all the time of their life, that they be governed, and directed by one judgment, for a limited time; as in one battle, or one war. For though they obtain a victory by their unanimous endeavour against a foreign enemy; yet afterwards, when either they have no common enemy, or he that by one part is held for an enemy, is by another part held for a friend, they must needs by the difference of their interests dissolve, and fall again into a war amongst themselves.<sup>3</sup>

It is quite clear from this that there could be no question for Hobbes of all mankind coming together to form Leviathan, and that the latter was the heir of communities held together by awe of common external enemies. In fact Hobbes proceeds from this particular passage, by way of a polemic against Aristotle's doctrine of the 'naturalness' of

1. See especially *Leviathan*, *op. cit.* p. 119.

2. *Ibid.* p. 110.

3. *Ibid.* pp. 110-111.

political communities,<sup>1</sup> to his famous account of the covenant – the truly constitutive and transformatory covenant – which takes men finally and unequivocally out of the state of nature and into the state. The creation of the latter is identical with the abandonment by each individual of the *ius belli* itself; with the exercise of the latter solely by the sovereign against external enemies; and with the replacement of it internally by the *right of punishment* of the sovereign. The last inextinguishable residuum of the *ius belli* that is retained by the citizens is the famous right of individual self-defence against direct physical force. The converse of these changes is that right reason ceases to be merely immanent in the associated individuals and becomes an objective public reality governing them. The state, in the words used in *De Cive*, is the “empire of reason”.<sup>2</sup>

Hobbes’ account of the way the external factor influences the creation of Leviathan raises at least two interesting questions. It has been shown that the pressure that binds together the loose associations that precede Leviathan is fear of a common external enemy, and that Hobbes argues from this to the need for a more permanent source of fear. Is then Leviathan nothing other than the construction of a permanent common external enemy standing *over* the members of the association in place of the more mercurial common enemy that exists alongside them? Is the state really an ‘external’ relationship of two bodies, that are superimposed in the interest of peace on top of the other?

In the case of the commonwealth by acquisition this interpretation carries some weight. The commonwealth by acquisition is after all based on a mass of individuals fearful of one and the same man or group of men, and agreeing that henceforth he or they should rule them. The formation of the state is here little more than the conservation of an external relationship, the elevation of a powerful enemy into a ruler. But in the case of the sovereign by institution where there is a positive act of constitution and representation, an act in which the mass of the people identify themselves with the sovereign, the argument that Leviathan is nothing other than submission to a common enemy is far less tenable. Here the problem would seem to be rather different, namely that of the motive or interest that could push men to go beyond a loose association versus a common enemy to a genuinely unified community. Is it solely that peace is good and enmity or hostility is bad? In which case has not the connection between reason and interest,

1. A polemic which is repeated in almost identical language in all three of Hobbes’ political treatises. It is directed not only against the doctrine of the naturalness of political communities but also against the idea that they can be held together *merely* by covenant. Hobbes thus wants a covenant rather than nature, and a transformatory covenant rather than an ordinary one.

2. *De Cive* (*Opera Latina*, Molesworth (ed.), Vol. 2, p. 265) ‘*in civitate, imperium rationis, pax, securitas, divitiarum, ornatus, societas, elegantia, scientiarum, benevolentia.*’ As Schmitt observes (*Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin, 1963), p. 121), Hobbes, not Hegel, originated the formula of the state as the “empire of reason”.

on which Hobbes is so insistent, been snapped? Or is the interest simply that of meeting even more effectively the threat of the common enemy? Is the Hobbesian state merely a mechanism for pursuing a more efficient foreign policy? In which case, if the presence of a common enemy is sufficient in itself to force men to create fully fledged states, why is it necessary to think of this force creating intermediary situations, such as alliances and confederations? Something additional would seem to be required for Hobbes' logic to be secure, and this additional pressure would seem to be man's need to master and transform nature so as to improve the quality of his life – a factor upon which, as has been noted already, Hobbes harps with particular insistence in *Leviathan*. Thus a loose confederation may be sufficient to provide security against a common enemy, but in order to secure men "in such sort, as that by their own industry and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly"<sup>1</sup> something more highly and rationally organized is needed. The Hobbesian state thus rises from the dual need for security *and* welfare.

The argument that has been sustained here may be expressed in a compressed, schematic form by the following diagram that shows the three-stage evolution of the Hobbesian state.

*The formation of the Hobbesian state*

<i>Man prior to the state, or the state of nature or state of war in its broadest sense</i>		<i>The state or commonwealth</i>
<i>The original 'bare' state of nature</i>	<i>The state of nature modified by the laws of nature</i>	
Universal war, = to exist is to struggle with enemies, = religious or ideological civil war anatomised, = absurdity or self-destruction. No distinction between internal and external relationships.	Relationships established between men by pacts and confederations, = enemies and allies distinguished, = <i>ius belli</i> a discrete right exercised jointly against common enemies and held in reserve against confederates. Internal and external relationships different, but not completely distinct.	The individual <i>ius belli</i> finally abandoned by a transformatory pact, = externally, <i>ius belli</i> henceforth exercised exclusively by sovereign, = internally, <i>ius belli</i> replaced by sovereign's right of punishment. Distinction between internal and external relationships complete.
Right reason silent.	Right reason immanent	Right reason objective.

It is the ambiguous nature of the middle stage of development which perhaps deserves most to be emphasized. *Vis-à-vis* the 'bare' state of

1. *Leviathan, op. cit.* p. 112.

nature it is a genuine world, that is to say, relationships exist in it. *Vis-à-vis* the state however it is still, like the 'bare' state of nature, a condition of war.

Having traced in Hobbes' writings the evolution of man into discrete unities called commonwealths or states it is possible to define more clearly the relations that exist between these unities. In a well-known passage in *Leviathan* Hobbes, after acknowledging that men might never have been in an original condition of war, "one against another", wrote that persons of sovereign authority were, "because of their independency", in "a posture of war" – adding that because sovereigns upheld the "industry of their subjects"<sup>1</sup> the misery that accompanied the liberty of particular men did not accompany their liberty. Here it might seem as if sovereigns between themselves are in a condition identical with that between men in the 'bare' system of nature, with the one significant reservation about "industry". Again, in *De Cive*, Hobbes wrote bluntly that "the state of commonwealths, considered in themselves, is natural, that is to say, hostile",<sup>2</sup> and he pictured them, with their spies, like spiders sitting in their webs.

Despite these passages, however, it cannot surely be maintained that Hobbes believed that states *vis-à-vis* one to another were engaged in the blind, self-destructive struggle that characterized the original state of nature. States, as we have seen, were for him part of the very process by which man escaped his original condition. By banding together in political unities war, the original primordial condition, was reduced both internally, and, by lessening the risks of attack, externally. Part of the very essence of states was that they were balancing mechanisms. Logically it was impossible for them to be in the same position as that which they transformed.

Moreover, in all three of his works on political theory Hobbes expressly identified the laws of nature with the laws of nations, or the law governing the interaction of states. Thus in the *Elements* he wrote: "For that which is the law of nature between man and man, before the constitution of the commonwealth, is the law of nations between sovereign and sovereign after".<sup>3</sup> The point here is that it is only when human associations have grown into states, only when they have developed beyond mere aggregates into *persons* with a will of their own, that they become the *subjects* of natural law. The emergence of states proper is thus identical with the subordination of man's external relations as such to natural law. This law dictates, it will be recalled, that peace should be sought where there is hope of obtaining it, and that where peace cannot be obtained, it is permissible to seek and use all helps and advantages of war.<sup>4</sup> It thus does not abolish the right of war that states possess, but it dictates to them the mutual transfer of rights, or the making of pacts, the mutual recognition of equality, the

1. *Ibid.* p. 83.

3. *Elements, op. cit.* p. 190.

2. *De Cive, op. cit.* p. 169.

4. *Leviathan, op. cit.* 85.

granting of protection to messengers of peace, the submission of controversies to arbitrators, a willingness not to strive to retain those things which are superfluous to oneself but necessary to others, *etc.* It is hence not surprising that Hobbes considered that “leagues between commonwealths, over whom there is no human power established, to keep them all in awe, are not only lawful, but also profitable for the time they last”.<sup>4</sup> Spies too, in the blunt passage to which I have already referred, were not for him the signs of a blind, formless, self-annihilatory struggle, but basically insurance mechanisms, because “contracts are invalid in the state of nature, as oft as any just fear doth intervene”.<sup>5</sup>

It will be clear from this that Hobbes saw states as existing in what I have called the state of nature *modified by the laws of nature*. Reason was immanently at work in the interstate arena; states were capable of establishing relationships between themselves. Regarded in this light Hobbes does not stand in the ‘realist’ tradition with Machiavelli – who was not a natural law philosopher like Hobbes – but rather in the classical tradition alongside Pufendorf. The only reason why Hobbes cannot be unequivocally or completely identified with the ‘classical’ tradition, a reason to which I have drawn attention throughout this study, is that he tended constantly to see in a distinct ‘estate’ or ‘condition’ of total war the ‘cause’ of such pacts, treaties and agreements as were subsequently made between men and states in accordance with natural law. There was always a formless chaos of enmity generating and producing such humanity as existed. The latter never lost a derivative quality. It is, in other words, the proximity of the abyss in Hobbes’ theory, the constant intimation of a dark and horrific underworld of violence, that prevents us from removing him completely from the category of harsh realism in which he is so persistently placed. But then, who are we, in these troubled times, to deny that the abyss exists?

1. *Ibid.* p. 154.

2. *De Cive, op. cit.* p. 169.