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PAPER

**The Concept of Multitude and Thomas Hobbes's
Theory of International Relations / World Politics**

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1. The Concept of Multitude

What does the concept of multitude mean in Hobbes's political philosophy? The concept of multitude has several different connotations and it can be interpreted in various ways. A certain kernel of the concept is present in all the definitions, but there is, however, some variation within Hobbes's own usage of the concept. This paper makes a very short scratch on the ways in which Hobbes uses the concept of multitude, and it should clarify the restrictions and potentialities of that very concept.

Hobbes usually refers to the multitude as a plurality of men, living in the "state of nature" that is, without a political government. Here the multitude is simply a mass of human beings, individuals, who are not organized in a political way (that is, in a political way that Hobbes calls political). Multitude is an a-political plurality of human beings who are not capable of instituting a commonwealth (State) and who do not live under any sovereign power.

Entering to a commonwealth a multitude has to make a social contract where the multitude goes through a metamorphosis and transforms into a People. The People is a subject that gives the power to the sovereignty and citizens are subjects of this sovereignty. Hence, the multitude is a state of men without subjection to any power. In a sense, human beings living in the state of nature are as free as possible: they have all the liberty to do what ever they want to, or what they see best for their self-preservation.

Commonwealth restricts the natural freedom of people. In the commonwealth there exists a justice, since the sovereign power is an arbitrator. In the multitude everyone has a right to interpret the laws of nature (that is, the natural moral code defined by Hobbes) in a way that best suits him or her. In the commonwealth it is the sovereign who interprets the laws of nature (and gives them a proper "voice", since these moral codes are "silent" in the state of nature) and sets the civil laws. In a commonwealth a crime, defined by the sovereign as a legislator, is always punished while in a state of nature there is no such thing as crime.

Whatever human beings do in the state of nature is right, because the ultimate reason for every action is their self-preservation.

Multitude can also simply mean a plurality of people as a synonym for “many”. Multitude is something that one cannot count. According to an extreme, individualistic formulation of the multitude, there are always too many to call it an order or find hierarchies in it. In this sense, there is no criterion for who belongs to a multitude and who does not. Thus, the multitude is not an exclusive concept, but inclusive. On the contrary, the political terms such as State or Commonwealth are exclusive concepts for Hobbes. Not anyone can be a part of the State, but anyone can be a part of the multitude, and this is the very difference between the multitude and State. The aforementioned characters of multitude can be summarized by Hobbes’s own definition of the multitude in *De Cive* (1642):

Because multitude is a collective word, it is understood to signify more than one object, so that a multitude of men is the same as many men. Because the word is grammatically singular, it also signifies one thing, namely a multitude. Neither way of taking it implies that a crowd has one will given by nature, but each man has his own will. And therefore one must not attribute to it a single action [una actio] of any kind. Hence a multitude cannot make a promise or agreement, acquire or transfer a right, do, have, possess, and so on, except separately or as individuals, so that there are as many promises, agreements, rights, and actions, as there are men. For this reason a multitude is not a natural person. But if the same multitude individually agree that the will of some one man or the consenting wills of majority of themselves is to be taken as the will of [them] all, that number then becomes one person; for it is endowed with a will, and can therefore perform voluntary actions, such as command, make laws, acquire and transfer a right etc. and is more often called a people than a number. (Hobbes 2003, 76-77.)

English synonyms for the multitude are such words as ‘crowd’, ‘mob’ or simply ‘common people’.

It is difficult to determine who belongs to a crowd: for example, in demonstrations there is usually a sort of multitude on the streets. It is difficult to say who are parts of the demonstration and who are not. Such is also the case in big celebrations. It is almost impossible to count how many people, and what sort of people, were there on the streets to celebrate the New Year, for example. A metaphor that Hobbes uses while describing the multitude is the one of market place. In a market place there are

all sorts of men doing all sorts of business.

The metaphor of the market place and the multitude brings with it two interesting connotations. The first one is connected to Hobbes's idea of free movement. According to Hobbes, and many philosophers and scientists of the early modern age, the movement of a certain object is free when no other object restricts that movement. Hobbes transferred this original idea of the concept of inertia, developed by Galileo Galilei, to his political philosophy. According to him a person is free when there are no external impediments for his movement. Deriving from this, the metaphor of the market place reveals one paradoxical side of the multitude. Even though persons are in a sense free to do whatever they want in the state of nature, or in the market place, it is a fact that other persons restrict the very movement of a person. In a market place it is almost impossible to walk freely: one has to constantly watch out other persons, otherwise the whole market place might end up in a sort of traffic jam. Hence, the absolute liberty of people (in the state of nature) actually causes a state, where there is no liberty at all. This is one of the paradoxes that Hobbes uses efficiently while constructing his theory of Commonwealth.

Another connotation deriving from the market place is connected to the sound speech. In a market place it is impossible to distinguish what people are talking about. While everybody is engaged to his or her own private discussions in a public place, the outcome is simply noise. From this noise one can separate only a mood of the multitude: it may be anger, frustration or a tone of a peaceful conversation. This is quite similar with what Plato says about the "animal" of the society. An animal, that is the crowd or multitude of people, cannot form clear sentences or sound arguments. It can only express its satisfaction / dissatisfaction. Hence the demagogues who speak to the crowds and search for their reactions and applauses are political leaders who lead a political animal, a multitude, not a People. A People has one will and one voice, and it can express a deliberated, common will of the people. This is impossible for the multitude. As Aristotle said, animals have a voice, but only humans have a capability to speak. For the Greeks a political action is speech par excellence, as Hannah Arendt has emphasized. Even though Hobbes many times opposes the doctrines of the ancient writers, Aristotle most of all, in this case he is exactly on the same lines with Aristotle.

Hobbes often draws his language from the older political theory, that is, from the Ancient Greek, Roman and Christian sources. Such is the case with the concept of

multitude, and one can separate several concepts that refer to the concept of multitude. In the Greek political thought the multitude is usually called *hoi polloi*, that is common people or mob, or *plethos*, which means 'many'. Sometimes the Hobbesian concept of multitude can be understood as a similar expression as the *demos eschatos*, extreme democracy, that Aristotle uses and as *ochlocratia*, which is used by Polybius. All these terms refer to a mass of people that tends to destroy the political order, or who are in a way or another dangerous to the political order. In the Roman political thought similar examples can be found from their term of *plebeius*, meaning belonging to the common people, *plebs*. Of course, the English word multitude derives directly from the Latin word *multitudo*, meaning somewhat the same thing as the multitude in English.

In the Christian tradition the multitude is a term that is usually used to describe a mass of people who become to destroy normal order. Usually this kind of multitude is described as a monstrosity that rips someone in pieces or demands the death of some person. In the Roman history there are similar examples of a multitude that comes and rips innocent men to pieces in their rage. All these examples refer to the loss of political order and justice. Hobbes uses these connotations when formulating his theory of the sovereign power that opposes the anarchy, the absence of power, of the multitude.

While in the classical thought the concept of multitude refers to a mob or *plebs*, who do not have a proper place in the political hierarchy or who threat this very order, Hobbes widens the semantics of the multitude in his political vocabulary. In some cases the Greek term of *stasis*, for example, can be understood as equivalent of what Hobbes means with the concepts of state of nature and multitude. However, the ancient political theory knows only few cases where the idea of civil strife becomes close to the Hobbesian concept of multitude.

Most of these examples derive from Thucydides' *The History of Peloponnesian War*, which Hobbes translated into English in 1629. It is evident that Hobbes was impressed about Thucydides' *History*, especially concerning the views that neglected the Athenian democracy and favoured a political order based on some kind of monarchy. However, Hobbes goes even further than Thucydides in describing the antagonist differences and civil strife caused by the lack of sovereign political power. In *Leviathan* he defines the multitude in a following way:

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 observation of justice, and other laws of nature, without 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. (Hobbes 1998, 112.)

This fragment clarifies what sort of an a-political entity the multitude is for Hobbes. As one can note here, the multitude is full of differences that cannot be solved without social contract and subjection of the people. Everyone in multitude seeks for their own interest, which ultimately destroys all the possibilities to any co-operation and development. Hence the outcome is the stasis, a civil strife, which also leads to a static state where human knowledge and experience do not accumulate, but instead, all human efforts are in vain.

Unlike the classical and Hobbes's own extremely individualistic or atomized conception of multitude, for Hobbes the multitude can also consist of several factions, parties and cities. Families and kingdoms can be likewise regarded as constitutive parts of multitude. Here Hobbes departs from the classical understanding that sees the multitude mainly as a common people or plebs. He also brings another, much wider perspective to his own definition of the multitude. The multitude does not only mean a mass of individuals although the Hobbesian concepts of the state of nature and multitude are sometimes conceived this way. It is instead more like a society, or plurality of societies, without a sovereign power.

Following from this it can be claimed that there is, after all, some organization in the multitude. It seems that the truly distinctive character between the multitude and the People is that in the multitude every individual has a right of nature to do whatever he sees best. This leads to uncertainty and precarity, which concerns all those living in the state of nature. For example, a father can never be sure if his son is willing to kill him, and a king can never be sure if his trusted man is the one who

deceives him. In a multitude, there is no trust and people are conspicuous towards each other. This can lead to a sudden flash of violence and anger, to the state of total war, where all the restrictions and humanity vanishes, and men become brute beasts just like many stories and myths from the Antiquity describe.

As a conclusion it can be stated, that the multitude is a multileveled concept for Hobbes. It carries with it relics of classical and Christian political thought, but connects to these older components some new elements that Hobbes found from the contemporary politics and physics of his time. The Hobbesian concept of multitude criticizes the classical myths of the “golden age”, described for example by Hesiodos, Plato and the Old Testament. For Hobbes, the state of men without civil government is very problematic. He does not see how human beings could naturally form such an organization that would make the good life possible, or the endurance of life all together. Hence, with his concept of multitude Hobbes attacks against the Aristotelian and scholastic ideas of politics. He also opposes several forms of democratic governments, which he understands to be too close to becoming a multitude.

There are, however, some democratic elements in his political thought, and they can be found from his theory of social contract. What is important in the social contract is the transformation of a multitude into a People, that is the true source of the sovereignty. The Sovereign’s principal task is to defend the People as Hobbes states following Cicero: *Salus populi suprema lex*. This leads him to conclude, that States are in a state of nature, and hence form a multitude as human beings without a common power that keeps them all in awe. There are however some major differences between a multitude formed by individuals and a multitude formed by states. The next chapter will analyze more subtly the peculiarities and special character of the multitude of states.

2. Hobbes’s theory of International Relations / World Politics

Hobbes’s theory of state of nature, the state of war, has become one of the cornerstones of the realist view of international relations. According to it, the States are in hostile, although latently violent relations with each other. Not a single State has a reason to trust another State, since all the States are driven by their self-interest and need to protect their people. *Salus populi suprema lex* implies that all contracts and covenants can be broken at the international level. This seems to implicate that there is no such dimension as international politics in the Hobbesian view, since the state of sovereigns is a state of nature, a state of multitude.

Hobbes constructs this argument by equating the law of nations, that is, the law concerning the relations between nations, to the laws of nature that primarily concern the moral of individuals. In *Leviathan* this is put in the following words:

Concerning the offices of one sovereign to another, which are comprehended in that law, which is commonly called the law of nations, I need not say any thing in this place; because the law of nations, and the law of nature, is the same thing. And every sovereign hath the same right, in procuring the safety of his people, that any particular men can have, in procuring his own safety. And the same law, that dictateth to men have no civil government, what they ought to do, and what to avoid in regard of one another, dictateth the same to commonwealths, that is, to the consciences of sovereign princes and sovereign assemblies; there being no court of natural justice, but in the conscience only; what not man, but God reigneth; whose laws, (such of them as oblige all mankind,) in respect of God, as he is the author of nature, are natural; and in respect of the same God, as he is King of kings, are laws. (Hobbes 1998, 235.)

Now, it is good to remember what Hobbes says about the fundamental law of nature:

A LAW OF NATURE, (lex naturalis,) is a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved. (Hobbes 1998, 86.)

This follows from the fact that people live in the state of war:

And because the condition of man, (as hath been declared in the precedent chapter) is a condition of war of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemies; it followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a right to every thing; even to one another's body. [...] And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of reason, 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. (Hobbes 1998, 860-87.)

According to the fragments above, it is quite understandable that a realist view of international relations has argued that Hobbes is, reasonably enough, a forefather of the realist view and, besides this, that the world system of state resembles the Hobbesian idea. In this world system the basic unit of the international relations is the

sovereign State. In fact, all the other kinds of political constellations are usually left out of attention since attention is focused on the relations between the sovereign states. For example, what does Russia think of this or that foreign policy of a certain state, or what about the opinion of the United States on some internal matter of some other State.

However, Hobbes's theory of international relations is not as straightforward as the realist school "straw-man Hobbes" lets one to believe. Hobbes's political theory was not, in fact, about the international relations, but his political dilemma was more one of the internal order. He is also much more verbal about the different elements and aspects of a multitude than the realist school writers have noticed. One of the reasons why the realist school interprets Hobbes's view of international relations somewhat narrowly may be that some the basic works, such as *Behemoth*, have not been analyzed from the viewpoint of international relations. Thus, there are some major contributions to the international politics in Hobbes's texts that have mostly been neglected in Hobbes studies and definitely by the realist school of international relations.

What are the points in Hobbes's political writings that one should emphasize if one wants to say something new about his view on international relations?

First of all, one should note the tension between two interpretations concerning the international relations. The first one of these underlines the fact that States are in a hostile relation to each other as presented above. The second one suggests instead that even though the States may in principle become enemies, there is after all some correspondence and co-operation between the States. For example, States may make contracts, do business together and negotiate about allying against their common enemy. These relations are not stable and they change all the time, but they are however relations. A state of nature between Commonwealths does not mean a war, but simply autonomy of every single Commonwealth.

In fact, Hobbes states very clearly that the state of nature between Commonwealths does not produce the same kind of chaos and total war as the state of nature between individuals. When there are sovereigns, it means that these sovereigns develop and keep up the good, or at least the best possible, living standards for their citizens. Philosophical, that is, scientific development is interconnected to the existence of the Commonwealth. Commonwealths produce goods, they construct infrastructure, build massive buildings and start projects that would not be possible by individual

entrepreneurs. Hence, even though a Commonwealth ends up to an actual war with some enemy, as long as this enemy is a foreign enemy, it will keep up, or even develop the well being of the Commonwealth.

Secondly, Hobbes's metaphors of body politic and especially his understanding of the body politic as a person causes some real problems for an over-simplified interpretation of Hobbes's international relations. This follows from the aforementioned fact that sovereign States are not as disposed to end up to a war of every State against every State, that is to total chaos and anarchy, as individuals are. Unlike the individuals in the state of nature, the commonwealths usually act according to long processes of deliberation. In a commonwealth, be it democracy, aristocracy or monarchy, the decisions are made according to reason. In the state of nature action of individuals is caused by the direct reaction to sense experience and one's passions. Hence, sovereigns do not act as irresponsibly as individuals. Sovereign states may have interests, but they do not have the sort of passions, or at least they should not have according to Hobbes, that cause inconsiderate action.

Something is, however, similar between individuals and public persons. One of the clearest examples is the case of mimesis, the imitation. Individuals end up to troubles by imitating each other's gestures, language, rhetoric etc. Commonwealths may end up to a similar state, if the imitation of other nations and historical modes of governments is tolerated.

Commonwealths should concentrate on their own development and their own ideas, that is to use their common sense, which was the ideal of the scientific revolution, and they should not seek inspiration from history or manners of foreign nations. The imitation of foreign nations causes internal conflicts in the State and, again, this is the worst thing that can happen to a State. It seems that the international relations between sovereigns is not in fact Hobbes's primary concern. For Hobbes the international affect of other States is worrying only if the other States foment internal dissonances and factions against one another. The true danger for Hobbes is always the internal dissolution of the State, the civil war, not the war of the State against other States.

Hence, body politic should stay somewhat consistent and not swell as a monster that has colonies around the world. Hobbes calls colonies a cancer that should be cut out of the body politic to save the person. He also calls the imperialism with the word 'bulimia', which follows from overeating. It seems that the same virtues that are

good for an individual, are good for a Commonwealth: Modesty, sound reason and good manners are expected both from sovereigns and individuals.

Thirdly, Hobbes's description of the multitude and the state of nature, if it is taken as analogous to the international relations, is much more colourful than the simplistic view of the realist school lets one to think. According to Hobbes there are several other political powers in the state of nature between Commonwealths, as sovereign States. One example of this is large cities. Hobbes describes for example the growth of London as problematic, since a large city like it can effect to the domestic politics too much. The same can be said about the foreign cities, too. In the state of nature kingdoms and cities are problematic, because one cannot control their action. In a sense, they are too independent economically and militarily. This problem follows to a state of nature between States, since it is not clear if all the commonwealths are able to prevent the growth of big cities. This kind of cities, if they detach from the political guidance of the State, may be dangerous.

This can also be said about the big corporations. Hobbes saw already in the 17th century that capital does not have a homeland. Hobbes defines corporations as "worms", which tend to eat up the Body Politic from inside. The corporations do not have loyalty to the Commonwealth and hence, they are dangerous international actors. In the worst case, they might betray their sovereign, which leads to troubles.

Among the cities and corporations there are also universities that should not be counted on, unless they are under a strict governmental guidance. In an example given in Behemoth, Hobbes tells that the universities have been to England like the Trojan horse was to the Greeks. He saw the university as an international conspiracy of Papal powers that aimed to epistemologically and scientifically control the education of civil servants in England. This kind of action corrupts the State and transfers the intellectual power to foreign hands. Hence, the universities should be in strict guidance of the sovereign himself, which means that the sovereign should be as "enlightened" as James I was according to Hobbes.

Religion causes the same kind of problems as university. Hobbes opposes the Catholic religion and Papal power, because they corrupt the State and make it almost impossible to organize governance of the subjects. The religion should be subjugated under the sovereign power and only the kind of things should be accepted that benefit sovereign and the Commonwealth. Hence, the religion, like culture and science, should be censored by the sovereign power. Without censorship, the religious,

cultural and scientific sects can bring enemy to the State by poisoning the thoughts of the citizens. This is a quite sophisticated view of international relations that Hobbes offers, but it is often forgotten.

3. Re-Thinking Hobbes's view on the International Relations

The aim of this paper has been to analyze Hobbes's view of international relations and especially the international politics by elaborating his conception of the multitude. While multitude is usually neglected as an a-political concept, this re-reading of Hobbes's international relations aims to demonstrate that there are political elements in the "state of nature" and secondly, that there is, after all, a possibility for the international politics in Hobbes's paradigm that derives from a wide understanding of Hobbes's conception of the multitude.

A short grasp to examples such as given above make it clear, that Hobbes's description of the international relations is much more realistic and useful for the analysis of the contemporary world system, than the interpretation provided by the realist school. This does not, however, mean that the realist school approach should be abandoned. Instead, it makes it possible to update the realist school views on Hobbes as well as the views on international relations.

The discussion of the international politics that draws from the Hobbesian theory is often too attached to the States as the only actors at the international level. This seems to be a kind of methodological and rhetorical problem since at the same time, at least in the contemporary research on international relations, it is acknowledged that the States are only one part of the international action: corporations, NGO's, churches of different religions, military coalitions, United Nations, EU, ASEAN, large metropolitan areas etc. shape the international field. It is also sometimes difficult to say who acts through the State and who does not. In the Western Europe it is for example quite evident, that the States are led by politicians who have deep connections to the economic and financial elite of the world. Do these politicians represent the people, as they should according to the constitutions of democratic Commonwealths, or are they representing some other instances. Using the Hobbesian vocabulary one should ask, who has a Trojan horse and where? And what is most important: are the people coming out of the Trojan horse willing to destroy the enemy, as the story told by Homer tells us, or are they more willing to negotiate and do business instead?

An updated Hobbesian approach to the international relations is very useful when

analyzing several contemporary international phenomena. For example, it makes it possible to distinguish, and politically withdraw from the actions that are not done with the mandate of the State. For example, a person or a group of persons may have a private agenda, which makes them violate some international contracts. There is no need to interpret those actions as declarations of war by States, but it should instead be recognized how the arbitrary borders, for every border is always arbitrary, make some actions difficult. States have several possibilities to react to this kind of action, some negative, some positive. From the Hobbesian perspective it is easy to understand that the subjects usually do not want to cause trouble, since they understand that sovereign, and sovereigns, are always more powerful than individuals. Not every citizen is a tool of sovereign States, but instead they make their own decisions that may cause some problems to States. They prove at the same time that the States cannot totally capture the living powers of the individuals. At the same time it is clear that States should restrict power of let's say, private military troops, since it would be very difficult to live in the world where anyone can have a right to kill.

What is more important is that the analysis done from the basis of multitude, not by sovereignty, brings to the surface the multiplicity of all political relations. Even if this reading may be against Hobbes's own political aim (which was to establish an absolute sovereignty), it helps to understand the constantly shifting border between the political and a-political phenomena. The analysis done from the basis of the concept of multitude does not exclude the States out of the analysis, but it gives more possibilities to understand the political and a-political chains of actions that make up the field of international, or to be more precise, world politics.

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