

The Impact of Thucydides on Hobbes's Conception of the State of Nature

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April 1, 2004
HAB Capstone Required Thesis

Introduction

Thucydides greatly impacted how Thomas Hobbes conceived the state of nature. The object of this paper is to show how Thucydides impacted Hobbes, particularly in his conception of the state of nature and human nature in general. The first section describes Hobbes's conception of the state of nature and human nature; the second section focuses on specific events and concepts found in Thucydides that impacted Hobbes; and the third section shows how Hobbes's interpretation has impacted later interpretations of Thucydides and provides criticisms of the Hobbesian interpretation. The extensive work Hobbes had done on Thucydides in his earlier years went on to influence his political theory.

Hobbes's first publication was his translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in 1629. Hobbes's undertaking of such a task showed his respect for Thucydides' work. He says in his introduction to the text that he chose to translate Thucydides because "These virtues of my author did so take my affections that they begat in me a desire to communicate him further; which was the first occasion that moved me to translate him."¹ What Thucydides did in his history was of such importance to Hobbes that he wanted to translate him into English so that future generations could learn from him. Up to that point, people of the English language had only one translation if they desired to read Thucydides in English, which was the Thomas Nicholls translation in 1550 of the French Text of Seyssel, which had been translated from Laurentius Valla's Latin translation.² Hobbes discussed the inaccuracies in the translation in his

¹ Schlatter, Richard, ed. *Hobbes's Thucydides*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1975, 7.

² *Ibid* xii.

introduction to the *History*, and commented that the Nicholls translation was more “traded” than translated into English.³ Although one could understand the Nicholls translation, Hobbes thought it was important to have an accurate translation. Hobbes’s translation was arguably the best translation long after it was published; his contribution to the legacy of the work he found so important.⁴

According to Hobbes in the introduction to his translation, “The principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future.” No one “more naturally and fully perform it, than this of my author.”⁵ Thucydides in the *History*, not only describes the events of the war, but also instructs future generations on the mistakes that caused such a massive war. In Hobbes’s biography of Thucydides, Hobbes praises Thucydides for having two specific qualities in his history: truth and elocution. They are particularly important because “in *truth* (sic) consisteth the *soul* (sic), and in *elocution* (sic) the *body* (sic) of history. The Latter without the former, is but a picture of history; and the former without the latter, unapt to instruct.”⁶ His emphasis on truth was in regard to how Thucydides interviewed witnesses and investigated claims as objectively and thoroughly as possible. Elocution refers to Thucydides’ method of narration describing events only after introducing their causes, either in narration or with an oration. Hobbes praises Thucydides for not using digressions to instruct his audience, rather he instructs them through the events themselves. He values Thucydides because he did not write a history to defend his people, the Athenians; rather, Thucydides’ history

³ *Ibid* 8.

⁴ *Ibid* xvii-xviii.

⁵ *Ibid* 6.

⁶ *Ibid* 16.

objectively instructs his audience in the events of the past so that people may be prepared to act in the future. Hobbes despised the people of his day who desired to learn only to show off their intellect rather than to learn in order to not make the same mistakes as in the past.⁷ It was important for Hobbes not only to know the *History*, but also to use it. That is why Hobbes notes and emphasizes that the *History* is a possession for all time.⁸

Hobbes's State of Nature

Hobbes first began to discuss man's natural condition in literary form in 1640 when he published his work *The Elements of Law*. This work was published around the time the British Parliament was meeting in the Long Parliament in what would eventually force the King of England, Charles II, into exile in France. Hobbes also went into exile in Paris around this time and would not return to England until after his work *Leviathan* had been published in 1651. Hobbes had been to the continent and in particular France earlier in his life, and had been in contact with Galileo, Descartes, and other contemporary scientists who were revolutionizing their respective fields of study.⁹ This scientific revolution was quite different from Hobbes's experience and he did not favor much the "medieval science and Aristotelianism still lingering at Oxford when he was an undergraduate."¹⁰ The Scientific Revolution of his day brought a method "free from

⁷ Ryan, Alan. "Hobbes's Political Philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell 208-245. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996, 214.

⁸ Schlatter 17.

⁹ Bobbio, Norberto. *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*. Translated by Daniela Gobetti. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1993. Page 28 lists the years he spent on the continent 1610-13, 1629-30, and 1634-37.

¹⁰ Hobbes, Thomas. *The Elements of the Law, Nature, and Politic: Part 1, Human Nature; Part 2, De Corpore Politico; With Three Lives*. Edited by J.C.A. Gaskin. Oxford; Oxford UP, 1999. Introduction XIV. Hereafter *Elements*.

controversies and dispute, because it consisteth in comparing figures and motion only; in which things truth and the interest of men, oppose not each other.”¹¹ Something so certain created an incentive for Hobbes to apply it to matters which were not so clearly certain, political science. His political philosophy was “distinctive in its ambition to be a science of politics.”¹² In order to understand Hobbes’s conception of the state of nature, it is important to first understand the method he takes in his political philosophy.

In Galileo’s resolute-compositive method, natural science “feigns the world to be annihilated.”¹³ Hobbes adopted this method by imagining “the factors of authority and justice to be reduced to zero.”¹⁴ He creates a hypothetical society connected by no common power. Men, in this condition, are in what he later terms the state of nature. Hobbes is making a blueprint of nature: “The blueprint sets out what rational individuals *must* (sic) do if they are to form a political society; it does not predict that they *will* (sic) do.”¹⁵ Staying consistent with his scientific method, Hobbes attempts to create empirical evidence for his analysis of the state of nature through experience. In this analysis, “Political philosophy is independent of natural science because its principles are not borrowed from any science, but are provided . . . by the experience which everyone has of in himself . . . [in the] self-knowledge and the self-examination of every one.”¹⁶ He

¹¹ *Ibid.* ep ded. Pg. 19.

¹² Ryan, Cambridge 212.

¹³ Ashcraft, Richard. “Hobbes’s Natural Man: A Study in Ideology Formation.” *The Journal of Politics* 33, No. 4 (Nov., 1971), 1076-1117. 1086.

¹⁴ Leshen, Joel. “Reason and Perception in Hobbes: An Inconsistency.” *Nous* 19, No. 3 (Sep., 1985), 435.

¹⁵ Ryan 213.

¹⁶ Strauss, Leo. *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*. Translated by Lesa Me. Sinclair. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952.

views mankind individually in this state as if they sprung out of the ground in full maturity.¹⁷ His analysis of the state of nature begins with the analysis of man himself.

Although men and beasts have natural appetites, they themselves are different from each other because of their foresight and reason.¹⁸ Animals seek to satisfy their appetites as they arise. If, for example, an animal is thirsty, the animal will look for water to satisfy this thirst. Man, on the other hand, will do the same, but he knows that he will be thirsty in the future and therefore desires infinitely. This idea of infinite desire appears in *The Elements of Law* as the definition of felicity. Felicity, “therefore (by which we mean continual delight) consisteth not in having prospered, but in prospering.”¹⁹ The infinite desire focuses on the process more than the results because once someone has achieved or gained something, naturally men will seek to achieve or gain something else. It is an infinite desire to achieve and gain more and more.

Consequently, this leads to the *Leviathan*’s statement that “in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in death.”²⁰ Once man has achieved a certain level of power, it is in his inclination to seek power elsewhere where someone exceeds him. Leo Strauss discusses this desire in terms of the natural appetite, the first postulate of human nature, as an irrational striving of power, “for the rational striving after power rests on already rational reflection and is for that very reason not natural, i.e. not innate, not in existence

¹⁷ Leshen 435.

¹⁸ Ahrendorf, Peter J. “The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Nature and the Problem of Anarchy.” *The American Political Science Review* 94, No. 3 (Sep., 2000), 579-593. 581.

¹⁹ *Elements* VII.7 pg. 45.

²⁰ Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Richard Tuck. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991. 70 XI.

prior to all external motivations, to all experience and education.”²¹ That which is created out of rational reflection is artificial and not natural.

Along with their appetites, “during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man.”²² Men have the right to all things in nature since there is no entity there to stop them, a concept known as *ius in omnia*. Because of this, there are three reasons for a man to invade another man: competition, diffidence, and glory. Competition forces people to fight for gain, for if there is something desired by more than one person that cannot be shared, they will fight to see who can get it. Men in competition “use Violence, to make themselves Masters of other mens persons, wives, children, and cattell.”²³ Competition is an offensive, pro-active means of gaining what one needs.

On the other hand, diffidence implies preemptive strikes on one’s opponent in defense of one’s needs and safety, for “there is no way for any man to secure himselfe, so reasonable, as Anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him.”²⁴ Hobbes’s use of the word diffidence comes from the fact that Hobbes believes that man in the state of nature cannot naturally trust others. This lack of trust creates in them a fear of the potential of others to murder them and therefore they seek to murder before they themselves are murdered. There is no sanctioning body active in the state of nature to prevent or punish such action. Anticipation becomes important because of all of the

²¹ Strauss 10.

²² Leviathan XIII pg. 88.

²³ *Ibid* XIII pg. 88.

²⁴ *Ibid* XIII pg. 88.

tactical advantages involved in anticipating and preemptively striking one's opponent since even one who is not physically strong can kill someone strong if by no other means than his will.²⁵ Therefore, a spiral of killing exists in the state of nature because everyone kills or tries to kill in order to prevent themselves from being killed.

Last of all, after competition and diffidence the cause of quarrels is glory. Glory involves one's opinion and the opinions of others of himself. It causes men to quarrel "for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their Persons, or by reflexion in their Kindred, their Friends, their Nation, their Profession, or their Name."²⁶ This type of cause differs from the previous two causes because of human nature. Glory implies some sort of insatiable desire to be on "top of the heap, and the criterion of success is universal envy; vainglory cannot be slaked by prosperity, and it creates a competition that security cannot defuse."²⁷ It creates competition between men that is absolute because only one man can be on top. Besides the causes of quarrel, there are certain assumptions that Hobbes makes about humans in the state of nature.

First, people have a natural equality. If people are not relatively equal in strength, then they have the mental capacity to compensate.²⁸ Second, there are conflicting desires either physical objects or glory that are coveted by multiple persons. Third, everyone in the state of nature has the ability to look toward the future; it is what separates man from beast. Gregory Kavka draws out from Hobbes a fourth quality in the advantage of anticipation. This is because "the primary means of gathering power that Hobbes

²⁵ *Ibid* XIII pg. 87..

²⁶ *Ibid* XIII pg. 88.

²⁷ Ryan Cambridge 221.

²⁸ Kavka Gregory S. "Hobbes's War of All Against All." *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (Jan., 1983), 292-3.

discusses is conquering others so as to put *their* (sic) power at *your* (sic) disposal, it is clear that anticipation generally involves the use (or threats) of force.”²⁹ Lastly, there is what Kavka called a limited altruism, which is that people value their survival over others. There are no conventional laws in the state of nature since there is no government and so there is no protection. The lack of protection creates a solemn outlook for the condition of mankind in the state of nature

Since everyone is in competition and at war with each other, no progress can be made. No one is willing to produce anything through industry because he does not know if he will be able to enjoy the fruits of his labors. There is no art, letters, or civil society. People constantly seeking further gain and power makes life in the state of nature “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”³⁰ According to Hobbes, what is “worst of all,” is the “continuall feare, and danger of violent death.”³¹ This fear of death leads to the “fundamental desire of the human animal,” which is, “the unlimited desire for self-preservation.”³²

Accordingly, as Strauss explains it, this is the second of the postulates of human nature, which is natural reason. Self-preservation becomes the central focus of this postulate because death, being the *summum malum*, stands in front of the fulfillment of any desire. Since desires cannot be fulfilled when a man is dead, self-preservation becomes the primary good.³³ The primary good and the greatest good, the *summum bonum*, are completely different because there is no one *summum bonum*. Death in the state of nature is the greatest evil because it is at the hands of another man. In the *De*

²⁹ *Ibid* 293.

³⁰ *Leviathan* XIII pg. 89.

³¹ *Ibid* XIII pg. 89.

³² Ahrens Dorf 581.

³³ Strauss 15.

Corpore, Hobbes comments “mortem violentam tanquam summum naturae malum studet evitare.”³⁴ Hobbes says that people fear death in place of using the positive term “desire for life,” because the fear of death is an immediate reaction whereas the desire for life comes only after rational reflection. Therefore, combined with human reason “we fear death infinitely more than we desire life.”³⁵ Hobbes uses the principal of self-preservation “to deduce natural right, natural law, and all the virtues.”³⁶

When one considers the condition of nature, Hobbes asserts in the *Elements*, people will naturally seek peace; for “since it is supposed from the equality of strength and other natural faculties of men, that no man is of might sufficient, to assure himself for any long time, of preserving himself thereby, whilst he remaineth in the state of hostility and war; reason therefore dictateth to every man for his own good, to seek after peace.”³⁷ In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes continues this discussion from the *Elements* in his fundamental laws of nature. First is the Right of Nature, which states that people have the right to act in the preservation of his own nature in any way he deems fit to do so. This right gives man the right to everything, *ius in omnia*, because he has the right to anything that will preserve his nature.³⁸ This right is seen as a natural right connected to but distinct from natural law.

Therefore, it is a different concept from the Law of Nature which 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.” This law of nature is not a law in the

³⁴ Quoted from Strauss 16.

³⁵ *Ibid* 16.

³⁶ *Ibid* 15.

³⁷ *Elements* XIV.14 pg. 81.

³⁸ *Leviathan* XIV pg. 91.

traditional sense of the word because a law normally implies some guiding force that commands people to act according to that rule. Rather, this law of nature is more of a “theorem” or “conclusion” about the conservation of mankind.³⁹ It differs from the Right of Nature because the Right of Nature simply states a man’s natural right in the state of nature, whereas the Law of Nature is determined out of reason. Hobbes continues from the Law of Nature to discuss the Fundamental Law of Nature.

In accordance with what has been seen before, there is an overriding negativity from these passages that describe the Fundamental Law of Nature and the second Law of Nature based on self-preservation. First, the Fundamental Law of Nature is “to seek Peace, and follow it.”⁴⁰ As was explained in the *Elements*, this is only natural because of the toll of constant war on a person. The Fundamental Law of Nature is not an arbitrary rule that he laid down so people could follow them and preserve themselves. He only is proposing “that we should successfully coordinate our judgments about what conduces to our preservation.”⁴¹ The second Law of Nature is that there is the ability in the pursuit of peace “to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himselfe.”⁴² Hobbes says not so much that one actively seeks peace but that he lays down his right to things he wants others to lay down their right to. He states later in the same paragraph the golden rule “Whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them,” and follows it

³⁹ Ryan Cambridge pg. 223.

⁴⁰ *Leviathan* XIV pg. 92.

⁴¹ Tuck, Richard. “Hobbes’s Moral Philosophy.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell 175-207. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996, 191.

⁴² *Leviathan* XIV pg. 92.

with the “Law of all men, Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris;” the negative image of it.⁴³

In the laying down of one’s rights, one is saying that he does not have a right to something. This is to say that one gives up some of his liberty, for Hobbes defines liberty as “the absence of externall Impediments.”⁴⁴ So in essence, when someone lays down a right to something, one is creating an impediment to his right to all things; the Right of Nature. This laying down of one’s right can be done either by renouncing or transferring: Renouncing involves laying down the right to no one in particular, whereas transferring is laying down one’s right to a certain person or persons.⁴⁵ The transferring of a right is the definition of a contract.⁴⁶ The difference between a contract and a covenant is that a contract describes a concurrent transfer such as purchasing goods, but a covenant is one in which one performs his part and trusts that the other will perform his.⁴⁷ The concept of the covenant is critical to justice and the creation of the state.

In the third Law of Nature lies the definition of justice: “That men performe their Covenants made.” Justice is only a negative expression of this. To break a covenant once it is made is to act unjust; therefore to fulfill it is to be just.⁴⁸ This is important to the state of nature because in the state of nature, men have the right to all things; that is part of a definition of it. So once people create a covenant, they have given up that right to everything and left the state of nature per se. Until covenants are made, there cannot be an unjust action because the “not Performance of [a] Covenant” is the definition of

⁴³ *Ibid* XIV pg. 92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* XIV pg. 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid* XIV pg. 92.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* XIV pg. 94.

⁴⁷ *Ibid* XIV pg. 94.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* XV pg. 100.

injustice. Since Covenants do not exist in the state of nature, neither does the concept of justice and injustice.⁴⁹

Consequently, covenants and the performance of them are critical to the creation of the state. Just as the Fundamental Law of Nature relies on self-preservation as a motive for seeking peace, the creation of the state likewise requires “the foresight of their own preservation,” for “Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all.”⁵⁰ That is to say, that with no guarantor, it is not certain that covenants will be performed. People therefore need some common power to rule them: “The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of Forraigners, and the injuries of one another . . . is, to conferre all their power and strength upon on Man, or upon on Assembly of men.”⁵¹

Although men seek to create some sort of peace and agree to transfer their rights to a sovereign, the condition of the state of nature will always exist. In chapter XIII, Hobbes says that the state of nature will continue to exist in civil war and amongst sovereigns, and that it existed in his time in certain tribes of the Americas.⁵² The Law of Nations is the same as the Law of Nature: sovereigns have the same right of “procuring the safety of his people that any particular man can have, in procuring his own safety.”⁵³ Sovereigns are in a perpetual state of nature because there is no governing body to which they transfer their right as the common voice of the people.

Particularly important to Hobbes are the conditions of nature brought about by civil war. Hobbes exiled himself during a civil war in England, so these concerns were

⁴⁹ *Ibid* XV pg. 100.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* XVII pg. 117.

⁵¹ *Ibid* XVII pg. 120.

⁵² *Ibid* XIII pgs.89-90.

⁵³ *Ibid* XXX pg. 244.

very real in his eyes. He says in chapter XVIII of the *Leviathan* that civil war comes from the view of the subjects that they are miserable and that it is the fault of the government. He describes the conditions of civil war as “that dissolute condition of masterlesse men, without subjection to Lawes, and a coercive Power to tye their hands from rapine, and revenge.”⁵⁴ He defends those in charge by saying that they are not looking to act out of profit or delight, but rather out of the need to protect themselves from the international state of nature that always exists. People in general “are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses, (that is their Passions and Selfe-love,) through which, every little payment appeareth a great grievance; but are destitute of those prospective glasses . . . to see a farre off the miseries that hang over them. . . .”⁵⁵ Passions and self-love make the present conditions seem unbearable, but people lack the foresight to see that the alternative of anarchy is worse than their present condition.

The Impact of Thucydides on Hobbes

Hobbes not only translated Thucydides, he interpreted him as well. His interpretation of Thucydides shows the impact of Thucydides on Hobbes. In the examination of Hobbes’s texts, when trying to show a direct connection between him and Thucydides, it is important to show not only where they relate in their texts, but also what Hobbes thought of Thucydides and the text. This analysis does not, however, set out to show what Thucydides truly believed, as may determine from the instances where he speaks in the first person, but rather, it sets out to determine what Hobbes believed

⁵⁴ *Ibid* XVIII pg. 128.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* XVIII pg. 129.

Thucydides was trying to say through the examples Thucydides gives in the historical account of the Peloponnesian War.

Particularly important are Hobbes's introduction to the translation, his notes to the translation, his autobiography, and his biography of Thucydides because they have proven invaluable in trying to see what Hobbes truly believed and how Thucydides impacted those beliefs. Throughout this section, references to all four sources are made in connection with sections of their texts that show this relationship between Thucydides and Hobbes. There are two important concepts which are critical to the understanding of Hobbes and the understanding of the impact of Thucydides on Hobbes: *stasis* (factionalization) and justice: *stasis* appears in events such as the Plague and the Civil War in Corcyra; justice or a lack of it is prevalent in the Melian Dialogue. The concept of justice in the state of nature does not exist, but in its place is the view that justice is the advantage of the stronger over the weaker. In the discussion of their power, The Athenians give a similar definition of what they believe justice is. Their concept of the conflict, the Athenian thesis, echoes in the works of Hobbes on the state of nature.

In 1.76, Athenian ambassadors, who were in Sparta while the Corinthians and others of the Peloponnesians were appealing to the Spartans to join them in war against the Athenians, decided to join in the discussion and defend the Athenian position in the Spartan assembly. Their basic line of defense was that they were given this empire after the victory over the Persians, and that they have done nothing more than accept it and fulfill its purpose moderately. The discussion lists three reasons for the acceptance of rule: "So that, though overcome by three the greatest things, honour, fear, and profit, we have accepted the dominion delivered us and refuse again to surrender it, we have therein

done nothing to be wondered at nor beside the manner of men.”⁵⁶ Honor, fear, and profit are the causes that put men to action. As Thucydides said, “we have therein done nothing . . . beside the manner of men.” The Athenians acquired their power out of a fear of another Persian war, and it is because of this that they are feared. In a Hobbesian sense, accumulation of power is natural out of the concern for self-preservation, but the accumulation of power makes a state the center of attention and they are attacked out of envy.⁵⁷ “The resemblance is clear,” Pouncey states about the connection between this passage and the passage in Hobbes where Hobbes explains the three principal reasons for quarrels: “So that in the nature of men, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.”⁵⁸ Considering Hobbes explains competition further in terms of “gain”, it appears that Hobbes reversed the order, but maintained the same basic principles as Thucydides.

But, this is more than just an echo when the whole of the state of nature is taken into consideration. Pouncey comments that “Human nature for Thucydides, as for Hobbes, is *essentially* (sic) in conflict.”⁵⁹ The state of nature is the anarchy that exists without a governing body. Thucydides through the voice of the Athenians says that these are the three factors that provoke men to action. Hobbes uses these as the three principal causes of the conflict which is the state of nature. Considering that conflict is the core of the state of nature because competition, diffidence, and glory-seeking put everyone in the

⁵⁶ All quotes from Thucydides come from the Schlatter’s text of Hobbes’s translation. This quote comes from 1.76.2 70.

⁵⁷ Kateb, George. “Thucydides’ History: A Manual of Statecraft.” *Political Science Quarterly* 79, No. 4 (Dec., 1964), 496.

⁵⁸ Pouncey, Peter R. *The Necessities of War*. New York: Columbia UP. 1980, 152.

⁵⁹ *Ibid* 152.

fear of violent death, immediately the impact of Thucydides can be seen in Hobbes's view of human nature.

In the same passage as Thucydides lists the three reasons why the Athenians acquired their empire, there is another quote that bears a striking resemblance to a concept of Hobbes: "Those men are worthy of commendation, who following the natural inclination of man in desiring rule over others are juster than for their own power they need."⁶⁰ Hobbes says similarly, "in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in death."⁶¹ Human nature, according to this quote from Thucydides and Hobbes, consists of a "natural inclination" of men to seek power. Hobbes puts primary emphasis on this desire in the state of nature. He takes this concept of human nature from the macrocosm of the Athenian empire seeking more power, and places it in his thesis of human nature. The view of justice that comes from Hobbes and this passage is better seen in Hobbes's interpretation of the Melian Dialogue.

In Book V, sometime during the Peace of Nicias, the Athenians approached the island of Melos with the demand to join the Athenian empire or die. The Melian Dialogue ensued and displayed many similarities of Thucydides and Hobbes.⁶² The Melians asked the Athenians to accept them as a neutral, friendly island, rather than as enemies. The Athenians responded to their request saying, "Your enmity doth not so much hurt us, as your friendship will be an argument of our weakness, and your hatred of our power, amongst those we have rule over."⁶³ Essentially, they are saying that they did

⁶⁰ Schlatter 1.76.3 pg. 70-71.

⁶¹ *Leviathan* XI pg. 70.

⁶² Melian Dialogue 5.84 – 5.116 pgs.377-385

⁶³ Schlatter 5.95 pg. 379-380.

not want to allow them to be neutral because if they did, it would be a sign of weakness. Since they rule over their empire because of their power, it would disrupt the fabric of its existence. They needed to maintain the command of their empire by showing that it still deserved the respect of its power.

When the Melians continued to question the Athenians of their actions, the Athenians reveal something of their nature. They say, “They think they have reason on their side . . . and that such as are subdued, are subdued by force, and such as are forborne, are so through our fear. So that by subduing you, we shall assure [our dominion] more over those we had before.”⁶⁴ Fear or diffidence already has been displayed to be a principal cause of conflict. It is also critical in the controlling of others. The Melians appeal to a concept of justice when they deal with the Athenians, but the Athenians always divert their questions of justice and say basically that justice is to them the advantage of the stronger over the weaker. They said that they think,

“That for certain by necessity of nature they will every where reign over such as they be too strong for. Neither did we make this law, nor are we the first that use it made: but also as we found it, and shall leave it to posterity for ever, so also we use it: knowing that you likewise and others that should have the same power which we have, would do the same.”⁶⁵

The logic of this argument is that the Athenians use their power to maintain it as well as because they have it. If the Melians were in the position of the Athenians, they surely would have acted the same. It is not by choice that they act, but out of the necessity of nature that compels them. They are merely following the laws of nature.

To this action, Hobbes has nothing less than approval. He says in his biography of Thucydides, “if the Athenian people gave in charge to these their captains, to take in

⁶⁴ *Ibid* 5.97 pg. 380.

⁶⁵ *Ibid* 5.105 pg. 381.

the island by all means whatsoever . . . I see then no reason the generals had to enter into disputation with them, whether they should perform their charge or not, but only whether they should do it by fair or foul means; which is the point treated of this dialogue.”⁶⁶

Hobbes believes that the state of nature exists eternally in international affairs. Justice in the state of nature does not exist. In its place is the view that the ones that are stronger get their way over the weaker. Hobbes believes that the generals cannot be called unjust on account of their actions because they were fulfilling their orders, orders given by the Athenian Assembly. Since it is not unjust in the state of nature for the stronger to conquer the weaker, the generals were acting in full accordance with the state of nature. Along with a lack of justice in the state of nature that exists in international affairs, Hobbes’s perception of fear plays a major role in his perception of power.

Psychologically, fear is a natural part of Hobbes. There is more than just a connection between him and Thucydides because fear dominates their works. In John Aubrey’s biography of Hobbes, it is said that, “his mother fell in labour with him upon the freight of the invasion of the Spaniards.”⁶⁷ In Hobbes’s verse autobiography, he said, “for Fame had rumour’d, that a Fleet at Sea; Wou’d cause our Nations Catastrophe; And here upon it was my Mother Dear; Did bring forth Twins at once, both Me, and Fear; For this, My countries Foes I e’r did hate; with calm Peace and my Muse associate.”⁶⁸

Hobbes readily acknowledged how important fear was to him and the greatest fear of all to Hobbes was the fear of violent death. Fear dominated his life and his conception of the state of nature.

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 25.

⁶⁷ *Elements* 232.

⁶⁸ *Ibid* 254.

Although fear dominated his life ever since he was born, it does not mean that Thucydides had no influence on his conception of the role of fear. Fear comes out in Thucydides in other passages than as one of the motivators of human action. In fact, Thucydides says that the cause of the war was Sparta's fear of Athenian growth.⁶⁹ This comment was so important to Hobbes that he made a note about it, saying, "Fear necessitates the war in the Lacedaemonians."⁷⁰ He was stressing this comment to emphasize the cause of the war, which was harmonious with his own perception. Even if modern interpretations speak of what Thucydides says differently, it is critical to understand the bond Hobbes felt with Thucydides and his ideas, particularly with fear and discord.⁷¹ According to Hobbes, fear both unites and destroys because the fear of violent death is the worst evil, but it is eventually what makes people come together.⁷² Under the head of government, the lack of fear provides a problem in the maintenance of order.

Once under the safety of a sovereign, fear of violent death is replaced with vanity. As soon as people begin to lose their fear of violent death because they have not experienced a condition similar to the state of nature, they begin to act hostile to each other out of vanity. The artificial state that replaces the state of nature is still subject to civil war because people forget or do not know the horrors of the state of nature and believe that their present condition is the worse than their current condition. The goal, therefore, of their education is to "make human beings who are secure feel insecure, so that they may properly appreciate their security and thereby continue to be secure."⁷³

⁶⁹ Schlatter 1.23 pg. 42.

⁷⁰ Schlatter Endnote 23 of Book 1 pg. 577.

⁷¹ Some scholars discuss the real cause of the war in different terms citing event that led to the war that Thucydides discusses in the first book and do not say that the cause of the war only was the fear of Athenian growth.

⁷² Pouncey 155, also noted in De Cive 1.2 44.

⁷³ Ahrens Dorf 583 De Homine 11.14

Since the state takes away the fear of violent death with its safety, it is the job of the sovereign to recreate at least knowledge of the fear of death through education. If one continually feels the fear of a violent death, then he will cherish every moment spent under the sovereign. This concept draws similarities to Thucydides' assessment of Pericles when he discussed the role of Pericles over his people. Pericles, "therefore, whensoever he saw them out of season insolently bold, he would with his orations put them into a fear" ⁷⁴ Whenever the Athenians were feeling proud and secure, Pericles was not afraid to address them harshly, and when the Athenians lost confidence in themselves, Pericles would make an oration like the Funeral Oration to lift their spirits. Fear and *stasis* come together in the Plague and the Corcyraean Civil War, both of which impacted Hobbes in his conception of the state of nature dramatically.

In both descriptions, what stood out most to Hobbes was how the lack of law and an effectively governing body influenced men's behaviors. The Plague of Athens occurred during the Archidamian War, which was the first portion of the Peloponnesian War when Archidamus, a Spartan king, led attacks in Attica. The attacks forced the people inside the city walls and so when the plague struck, it spread quickly without discrimination. ⁷⁵ People noticed how it did not matter if one was rich or poor, their moment of death could strike at any moment. People came to neither fear "the gods, nor laws of men. . . : not the former, because they concluded it was alike to worship or not to worship, from seeing that alike they all perished: nor the latter, because no man expected that lives would last till he received punishment of his crimes by judgment." ⁷⁶ People saw that those who worshipped the gods still died, so that did not matter; and people who

⁷⁴ Schlatter 2.65 148.

⁷⁵ *Ibid* 2.47 pg. 137.

⁷⁶ *Ibid* 2.53 pg. 141.

committed crimes would not have to face trial because the people involved would probably perish before then. Therefore, “before which fell, they thought to enjoy some little part of their lives.”⁷⁷

In Thucydides’ narration of the events of the Plague, he describes a scene of hedonistic debauchery coupled with a disregard for the future. Temples were filled with bodies of the dead, but people disregarded them. They disregarded the laws of burial and funerals. They in essence “grew careless both of holy and profane things alike.”⁷⁸ They would either bury people anywhere they could or they would find a pyre with or without a body on it and add their friends or relatives to it. Also, people became instantly wealthy because they inherited property from those who had died. This led people to spend their fortunes as if there were no tomorrow, especially since that was a distinct reality. It is evident from this description alone how people act without an effective system of law to check their behavior.

At least it appears this way to Hobbes. Hobbes saw in the presentation, the state of nature. The state is an artificial construct designed to protect against the ills of the state of nature. If this is true, it failed to do so in the state of nature of the Plague because people were still dying and the threat of punishment could not deter people from crime since they may not live to be sentenced. There no longer is any benefit in serving the gods and obeying the laws of men.⁷⁹ People are thus motivated by their self-interest and their fear of death. As soon as people recognize no benefit in believing and performing ceremonies for gods or acting obedient to laws out of a fear of punishment, society breaks down into a state of nature in which all people act out of the basic motivations of

⁷⁷ *Ibid* 2.53 pg. 141.

⁷⁸ *Ibid* 2.52. pgs. 140-1

⁷⁹ Johnson 36.

mankind. Amongst the three motivators, diffidence, or fear, keeps people obedient to laws. Once that is removed, people move to a fear of death, and their self-interest guides their actions. The Corcyraean Civil War demonstrates this characteristic of Hobbesian interpretation rather well.

Quite possibly the most Hobbesian passage in the *History* is the account of the Corcyraean Civil War. Schlatter adds in an explanatory note of Hobbes, that “these famous paragraphs on the horrors of war and the revolutionary spirit are pure Hobbes and might have come from the pages of the *Leviathan*.”⁸⁰ Hobbes drew a connection to Thucydides because of their similar circumstances of war. Civil war was very prevalent in the life of Hobbes, and it was something he abhorred. Civil war was a state where people were unhappy with their current state and sought something better, forgetting that they must experience the state of nature in order to try to attain their desired state. Hobbes probably saw this passage as speaking directly to himself.

In Book 3 of the *History*, Thucydides lays down the model of civil wars. The narration of the Corcyraean Civil War begins in 3.70 and ends roughly at 3.85. It occurred because the Corinthians bribed and released prisoners from the sea battles over Epidamnus in order to take Corcyra.⁸¹ Athenians and Corinthians sent ships to convince Corcyra to join each city-state’s respective side. Corcyra decided to become an Athenian ally, but to remain friends with the Peloponnesians. Peithias, the leader of a democratic party was put on trial on the accusation that he was trying to enslave Corcyra to Athens. He was acquitted and immediately brought charges against the five richest men for the practice of cutting “certain stakes in the ground belonging to the Temples both of [Zeus]

⁸⁰ Schlatter 580

⁸¹ *Ibid* 3.70 pg. 217.

and [Alkinoos].”⁸² This time the wealthiest men were convicted and fined one stater for every stake. The magnitude of the fine and the fact that as long as Peithias was on the council, the current practices would continue, motivated men, specifically of the oligarchic parties, into killing Peithias and sixty other people who shared his views.

Following the assassinations, the Corcyraeans under the rule of the oligarchic assassins told the people that this was in their best interest and sent an envoy to Athens to inform them of their neutrality as well as deliver a message to the refugees telling them not to act.⁸³ The Athenians arrested the envoys as soon as they arrived.⁸⁴ A battle between the democrats and oligarchs ensued. The democrats were initially defeated, but they consolidated their position on the acropolis; from there, took key positions such as the agora and the Hyllaic harbor; and recruited slaves with the promise of freedom. They continued to fight until the superior numbers and positions of the democrats forced the oligarchs to flee to the mainland.⁸⁵ Intervention by both the Athenians and the Peloponnesians caused this situation to heighten into a full civil war of tremendous magnitude.

After the defeat of the oligarchs, the Corinthian ship left and an Athenian ship arrived. The Athenians convinced them into a pact and told them to bring the ten men most responsible to trial. The Corcyraeans convinced the Athenians to leave five ships and take the same number of ships manned by Corcyraeans. The democrats manned those ships with their opponents who took sanctuary in the temple of Dioskouroi out of

⁸² *Ibid* 3.70 pg. 217.

⁸³ *Ibid* 3.71 pg. 217.

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 3.72 pg. 218.

⁸⁵ *Ibid* 3.74 pg. 218.

the fear of being sent to Athens.⁸⁶ The Corcyraeans sent the rest of the oligarchs to an island away from Corcyra. After the Athenians left, the Peloponnesians sent ships to Corcyra, and the Corcyraeans against the advice of the Athenians engaged them in a sea battle.⁸⁷ The *stasis* that existed on the ships between the two parties fighting with each other led to their defeat. The Peloponnesians instead of taking Corcyra attacked Leucimna. The democrats were confused and invited the exiled oligarchs back to protect the city.⁸⁸

When they learned the Athenians were sending sixty ships, the Peloponnesians left causing complete anarchy.⁸⁹ The oligarchs they convinced to come back were taken off the ship and killed. They convinced fifty people who had taken sanctuary in the temple of Hera to go to trial, who were condemned to death. The others heard what had happened and they committed suicide. The Athenian general was there for seven days while the killing continued; fathers killed sons, men were dragged out of sanctuaries and killed, and others were left to starve in the temple of Dionysos.⁹⁰

During the slaughter of the civil war, many actions occurred that continued to occur in civil wars, “which though they have been before, and shall be ever as long as human nature is the same. . . .”⁹¹ This condition of war, “taking away the affluence of daily necessity, is a most violent master, and conformeth most men’s passions to the present occasion.” There was no justice except the justice each man felt through his passion. Here the virtues of peace became the vices of war: “inconsiderate boldness, was

⁸⁶ *Ibid* 3.75 pg. 219.

⁸⁷ *Ibid* 3.76-3.77 pg. 219.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 3.80 pgs. 220-221.

⁸⁹ *Ibid* 3.81 pg. 221.

⁹⁰ *Ibid* 3.81 pgs. 221-222.

⁹¹ *Ibid* 3.82 pg. 222.

counted true-hearted manliness: provident deliberation, a handsome fear: modesty, the cloak of cowardice: to be wise in every thing, to be lazy in every thing. A furious suddenness was reputed a point of valour”⁹² The description of the lack of virtue and the prominence of *stasis* connected with the slaughter of hundreds of people mirrors the horrors of the state of nature. Performing crimes was routine and was even made into a pseudo-sport: “In brief, he that could outstrip another in the doing of an evil act, or that could persuade another thereto that never meant it, was commended.”⁹³

Although it is not difficult to see a connection to this passage and the description of the state of nature, Thucydides’ further discussion of it sounds almost as if Hobbes had written it originally. The way Thucydides setup this event shows the war going from the macro level to the micro level. *Stasis* now existed not just in the Hellenic world, but in city-states themselves, very similar to how the two most important instances of the state of nature in Hobbes are civil war and international relations. Thucydides says that “the cause of all this *desire to rule* (sic), out of *avarice* (sic), and *ambition* (sic); and the zeal of contention from those two proceeding . . . striving by whatsoever means to overcome, both ventured on most horrible outrages, and prosecuted their revenges still further, without regard of justice or the public good.”⁹⁴ Justice, religion and virtue were relative to each person. The war made men conform their values to the situation. Therefore, whatever people deemed good was what they did.

Such a condition would certainly make life solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short; a key to understanding the state of nature. Hobbes describes a situation in the state of nature that mankind certainly would want to avoid at all costs. Thucydides’

⁹² *Ibid* 3.82 pg. 222.

⁹³ *Ibid* 3.82 pgs. 222-223.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* 3.82 pg. 223.

description of the Corcyraean Civil War is comparable to the state of nature in its brutality. Nothing is sacred in both accounts and it appears that every situation is life and death since even the neutral parties in Corcyra were brought into the slaughter. Scholars who write about the connection between Hobbes and Thucydides always comment on the *stasis* and its reflection in the state of nature. Although this along with the other examples displayed a connection on the topic of human nature, these examples and other display an even greater connection on topics such as piety, the best regime, etc.

The Impact of Hobbes on the Interpretation of Thucydides

When scholars examine Thucydides today, they are heavily impacted by the interpretation of Thucydides from a Hobbesian view.⁹⁵ Hobbes saw the phrase, “a possession for all time,” to mean that Thucydides’ explanation was for people to see how people act and what motivates them to act at all times.⁹⁶ What people actually examine are the actions of the Athenians which is termed the Athenian thesis. One part of the Athenian thesis is the interpretation that was discussed last section: Justice is the advantage of the stronger over the weaker in international relations. Since there is no supra-national organization or entity that states must follow, the only rules states have are their own rules based on their national interests. States being sovereign entities by definition have no one to answer to but themselves. On the macrocosmic level, the Melian Dialogue displays this perfectly when the Athenians explained to the Melians that it was in their best interest to follow the orders of the Athenians because they are stronger. On a microcosmic level, Hobbes saw this in motion when society fell apart and

⁹⁵ Johnson 3.

⁹⁶ Pouncey 21.

there was no governing body controlling both the Athenians during the Plague and the Corcyraeans during their civil war, but this is not necessarily what Thucydides had intended to say. Alternative visions of Thucydides' message have arisen over the centuries that are contrary to the Athenian thesis and Hobbes's interpretation.⁹⁷ Some of these views look at what Thucydides said in the first person and how that relates to the underlying message. The most famous passage in which Thucydides speaks in the first person, besides the first book where he explains his method, is 2.65, his assessment of Pericles.

In 2.65, Thucydides explains that Pericles died two years and six months after the war began, but "his foresight in the war was best known after his death."⁹⁸ Thucydides portrays Pericles as a virtuous man; a man that could have saved the empire had he continued to live and lead the Athenian people. Thucydides explains that later leaders were the opposite of Pericles and ruled the city-state in their own interests to the detriment of the city-state. This eventually led to the downfall of Athens, but Athens was so great that even after the defeat at Sicily, they still had enough resources to last many more years. Hobbes saw Pericles and the passage of 2.65 as a comment against democracy in favor of monarchy.⁹⁹ Even though Hobbes's political philosophy and his preference for monarchy is beyond the scope of this paper, the virtues of pericles speak much about what Thucydides saw as human nature and justice.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Johnson 61. It is not saying that Hobbes was completely incorrect in his interpretation of Thucydides. It must be continually stressed that Hobbes viewed Thucydides with the intention of curing mankind of its problems forever, but this was not necessarily true to Thucydides.

⁹⁸ Schlatter 2.65 148.

⁹⁹ *Ibid* 14. Hobbes notes this along with the fact that Thucydides was from "regal descent" when he explains his opinion on the best regime. Also, Hobbes italicized the phrase "one man" in his translation.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson 166. The emphasis on the personality of Pericles is contrary to Hobbes who believes the success of Athens was due to the type of regime that was in force.

According to Hobbes, man is primarily motivated by his self-interests. The Realist position adopts this view of Thucydides and states that human behavior can be predicted because the motivation of humanity is the same. The conception for human nature assumes that people can be broken down into their most basic state and that their interests can be determined by it. Hobbes discussed the motivators of action, which he pulled from Thucydides, as the principal causes of conflict; competition, diffidence, and glory. An alternative interpretation has Thucydides attempting to say that it was not that “human beings are not in control of events or are mere slaves to their impulses or circumstances. It means, instead, that given human fallibility we cannot expect the right choices to be made or the right attitude to be adopted all the time.”¹⁰¹ Humans are not motivated by these causes all the time, but they can be and his examples show it.

One example against this thesis in the interpretation of Thucydides is Pericles.¹⁰² He does not fit the pattern because he is motivated by some sense of virtue. The leaders that followed him were too interested in their own needs, which caused the downfall of Athens. Johnson states that the Athenians were capable of winning the war, it was a failure of leadership that ended up defeating them: “That much is crystal clear in the *History*.”¹⁰³ According to Thucydides, Pericles was not the type of man motivated by self-interest, and under his guidance, Athens thrived. It was not until after he died and Athens began to follow the interests of the new leaders that Athens began its decline. Expansion into Melos was contrary to the defense policy of Pericles, whose foresight was commended by Thucydides. Should it then follow that Thucydides was advancing his view of justice in the Melian Dialogue as Hobbes said, or that its straying from Periclean

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* 42.

¹⁰² *Ibid* 214.

¹⁰³ *Ibid* 214.

virtue altogether makes this action and conception of justice condemnable to Thucydides?

On a different level, the interpretation has been said that states' actions are relatively predictable. There were only three places in which the state of nature was said to exist in Hobbes's time: in civil war, international relations, and among some Native American tribes in the Americas. States as well as people could be broken down into their motivations. The question becomes, are states' motivations really shown in the Melian Dialogue? The weakest link in the Athenian thesis and its ability to predict states' actions is precisely because it is only one example of a state's actions. Throughout the entire *History*, Thucydides displays the difference of national character between the two city-states. While Athens acts with "an itch for expansion," Sparta acts contrarily with "an excessive craving for tranquility."¹⁰⁴ The other city-states went to Sparta to seek Spartan participation in war because Sparta had not been willing to go to war in the first place, even though it was of her vital interest to do so.

Besides this fact, there are several other instances and examples that show the differences between the characters of Sparta and Athens. These go beyond the obvious differences such as regime type, population size, primary source of power, etc. One of them is how Athens is always willing to expand at the expense of Athenian blood whereas Sparta always tries to minimize its losses. This is an example of what Clifford Orwin calls their civic solidarity.¹⁰⁵ This same solidarity makes incidents such as the *stasis* Athens eventually plunges into in Book 8 of the *History* and the mutilation of the Herms which ended with many of the best Athenians tried and executed, not likely to

¹⁰⁴ Orwin, Clifford. *The Humanity of Thucydides*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994, 75.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid* 76 referenced at 2.64.3

happen. Sparta does not lead the Peloponnesian forces against Athens out of Spartan interests for expansion, but out of the interest that the Greek city-states remain independent. Part of Sparta's greatness lies in its avoidance of troubles.¹⁰⁶ The interpretation of different examples of *stasis* can be different.

In the interpretation of the Plague, Hobbes translated, "Neither the fear of gods, nor law as of men awed any man . . . the latter, because no man expected that lives would last till he received punishment of his crimes by judgment."¹⁰⁷ People lived in a lawless state because it did not matter if they followed the laws or not, but Thucydides does not say they kill each other in a state of nature, he says they live hedonistically. From a Hobbesian perspective, society breaks down and people are guided merely by the fear of a violent death and self-interest. This episode displays a tendency of people to follow laws, whether human or divine, for utility, but this is not the only reason. Johnson cites the example of 2.59, when she says that the Athenians even during the Plague had some thoughts concerning politics and religion.¹⁰⁸ They sent embassies to Sparta to hopefully end the war. They caused a stir with Pericles and eventually removed him from office. But, as Hobbes translated, they let him back into office a little later, "as is the fashion of the multitude."¹⁰⁹ The Athenians were still highly engaged in political activity when the plague broke out and the same can be said about religious activity.

During the Plague, the Athenians never completely stopped believing in the divine.¹¹⁰ They were certainly thinking about the gods when they recited the oracle

¹⁰⁶ Orwin, Clifford. "Stasis and Plague: Thucydides on the Dissolution of Society." *The Journal of Politics* 50, No. 4 (Nov., 1988), 840.

¹⁰⁷ Schlatter 2.53 pg. 141.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson 37

¹⁰⁹ Schlatter 2.65 pg. 148.

¹¹⁰ Johnson 36.

which said, “A Doric war shall fall, And a great plague withal.”¹¹¹ Hobbes leaves Thucydides’ explanation untranslated when he says that it was based on the interpretation of the word λοιμός (plague). For if a famine broke out during the Doric war, they would be saying the word was λιμὸς. It was not as if people stopped believing in and caring for the gods. They molded their interpretation to their present situation. They stopped performing the rituals associated with the worship of the gods because they saw that it did not matter whether they did them or not; death was upon them.

Thus, the interpretation of the Plague in the view of a Hobbesian incorrectly tries to establish a basic motive of human nature. People did fear death and the law system did break down because no one feared punishment. But instead of a bloody civil war where people killed each other in anticipation out of the imminence of a violent death without any regard to punishment, people acted hedonistically. Hobbes and Thucydides are in agreement that a lack of government will turn some people into people acting out of self-interest, but Hobbes creates a condition based on a fear of other people; something that does not exist in the account of the Plague.¹¹² This breakdown of order did not cause the *stasis* seen in the Corcyra because “there is no mention of greed, ambition, lust to rule, or of settling scores with (human) enemies.”¹¹³

Although this form of *stasis* found in the state of nature does appear in the Corcyraean Civil War, it must not be taken out of context in its interpretation. As soon as the civil war broke out, people acted as they would in war, as “shall ever be as long as human nature is the same.” Hobbes’s interpretation of the events at Corcyra shows people completely overtaken by their passions. During this time, what was once known

¹¹¹ Schlatter 2.54 pg. 141.

¹¹² Johnson 65.

¹¹³ Orwin, “Stasis and Plague” 843.

as virtue was known as vice, and the opposite was true. When one examines the Corcyraean Civil War in itself, one may see the nature of man; Hobbes did. When taken in the context of the *History*, people see the dangers of the war. The civil war was the micro version of the macro war. War became the way of life, but this is not saying that this is human nature and people should cling onto their government for protection. It appears that throughout the *History*, it is the lack of control over the passions that caused *stasis*. That is what Thucydides claims in 2.65 is the reason for Athens' decline.

Once someone looks at the civil war, the model of all civil wars at that time, one should see how opposite this state is to the one guided by the virtue of Pericles. The failure of Athens was a failure of leadership in that all leaders after Pericles guided the city out of their self-interest. The leaders failed to control their passions and Athens in its pride overestimated itself.¹¹⁴ During both the civil war and the Plague, it was a matter of people being overtaken by their passions. Further analysis of this in respect to the responsibilities of a monarch to Hobbes is beyond the scope of this paper, but as for human nature, this is seen as the model of the state of nature. As shown before, Pericles is one example of a virtuous man that was not overtaken by his passions. In the Coryraean Civil War, not everyone went into a state of *stasis*. Thucydides uses those people as the antithesis to the disorder caused by those who did fall victim to their passions, e.g. the ones who acted without thinking were seen as good, whereas the ones who thought before acted were seen as suspicious. In his description, he says those who did not take a side usually fell victim because of that, but there was a portion significant enough to mention, who did not fall victim to their passions.¹¹⁵ It could not be simply

¹¹⁴ Johnson 66.

¹¹⁵ Schlatter 3.82 pg. 223.

said that once law and order broke down, everyone acted similarly out of a fear of death and in their self-interest. It was those who fell victim to their passions that committed the atrocities and were responsible for the fall of the Athenian empire. Those who did not fall victim to their passions were virtuous; one has to look no further than to Pericles for an example of this.

Conclusion

Hobbes attempted to create a model of human nature that would serve as a scientific tool for future generations as well as his own generation. The model was scientific in nature and was proven as a scientific model would be proven with the application of the virtues of science, revolutionized in his day, to the nature of man. The state of nature started with the very notion that people have basic faculties which guide them. They are exactly like animals in some respects, but they differ in a very important point: they have human reason. People, though, are lodged in the state of nature with no real hope of exit without the social contract. The social contract is critical to the understanding of Hobbes's political philosophy. The conception of the state of nature has its roots in Hobbes's attachment to Thucydides.¹¹⁶

Throughout this paper, the affinity between Thucydides and Hobbes and their ideas as interpreted by Hobbes were shown. Events starting in the beginning of Book 1 of Thucydides' *History* can be seen in Hobbes's own writings. The connection between the two cannot only be seen in the influence of the particular events that have parallels in Hobbes's writings. Hobbes's opinions and interpretations are evident in his biography of

¹¹⁶ Schlatter says that he saw his ideas in Thucydides and in geometry his way to prove it. Pg. xx.

Thucydides as well as his autobiographical works. The combination of these sources shows a strong source of influence of Thucydides on Hobbes. Scholars since Hobbes have taken a similar interpretation of Thucydides as Hobbes. Simply to take certain events and phrases out of context damages the interpretation of the *History* as a whole.

At the same time, it is difficult to know exactly what point Thucydides was trying to make. Hobbes saw in Thucydides a model for human nature. He lived in a time of civil war, and always had the hope “that he [could] bring about the same resolve within states [to unify] by presenting individual citizens with just as tangible a threat: true knowledge of themselves.”¹¹⁷ Thucydides, according to an alternative interpretation, saw the events of the *History* as a warning to future generations of the possibility of a conflict of this magnitude as well as to record the events of one of the greatest events in Greek History, not exactly as a model of human nature for all time. He was showing that there is an “inversion, or perversion of human nature that nevertheless will occur from time to time,” not necessarily that this is the normal manner of existence for humans, a scientifically proven model of the state of nature.

¹¹⁷ Johnson 67-68.

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