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Thomas Hobbes vs. Carl Schmitt

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Carl Schmitt is referred to as the Thomas Hobbes of the 20th century due to his tendencies to base his philosophies on the 17th century realist. In the following essay, it will be explained how the realist philosophies of both, the more modern, and the original Thomas Hobbes hold not only similar views but also contrast on key international relations topics. To start off, Thomas Hobbes's theories on international relations, particularly his theory of Natural Law will be broken down to better understand the historical realist thinker. Carl Schmitt and his famously controversial 'concept of the political' will then be analyzed in order to comprehend his view of the international arena. To gain a further understanding of why Hobbes and Schmitt are called 'parallel thinkers in different centuries,' their philosophies on non-state actors in international relations system will be compared and examined. Lastly, to gain more of an appreciation for the originality of each theorist, their views on the justification of conflict in the international system will be explained and observed. Essentially, the composition will look to prove that although Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt are classed together as realist, they are nonetheless completely dissimilar on how they define the international system.

Thomas Hobbes is mistaken to be classified by many as an 'extreme realist,' or rather 'some who regard the international arena as pure anarchy in which law could have no meaning and aggression could always be justified by the dictates of self interest.' [1] He should be more considered a rationalist since his views tend to lean against the unchanging pessimism of the typical realist school of thought. The reason why most find Thomas Hobbes to be such an extreme realist is due to his famous theory the 'Laws of Nature,' or Natural Law. Hobbes' Natural Law applies to a society in which there is an absence of a sovereign to compel order among individuals. [2]

He then proceeds to say that parallelism exists between the individual man and the individual state and that no matter, all individuals are equal. Hobbes states that Natural Law is brought about by the absence of peace; which he defines as the best situation where men can be assured that their death can be prolonged the longest, since life is man's greatest possession. Basically, he explains men, in a state without peace, will defend themselves by any means possible, that defense is a right of man that cannot be taken away, and that all covenants made by men are binding since men only make covenants to ensure security. Essentially, Thomas Hobbes believes that since a state of peace is the ultimate goal for all men, a world of peace is the ultimate goal for all states. Natural Law is simply the way individuals act when anticipation of conflict can be foreseen. Thus, to Hobbes, anarchy and lawlessness do exist in the international system but are nonetheless conditional. Also Thomas Hobbes relies very heavily on the philosophies and teachings of the classic realist Thucydides. Like Thucydides' theory that the pressures from war and civil unrest would create the same circumstances no matter the situation, Thomas Hobbes believes Natural Law can be applied to any part of the history of humanity. Essentially, Hobbes, like Thucydides, simplifies man to be a predictable self interest based actor in the anarchic system of international politics. [3]

Carl Schmitt holds the basic notion that the international system is controlled by the political. He defines the political to be any force that will bring about the conflict of friend against foe. Through the use of various antitheses, such as the aesthetic controversy of beautiful versus ugly, the moral dilemma good versus evil, and the economic thought over profit versus loss, Schmitt claims that the only antithesis in the world that holds the possibility to bring about an existential result is the predicament of friend versus foe. Schmitt states that the willingness to die and to kill will present itself only in a situation of friend versus foe. Thus he moves on to point out that any group that is willing to allow its members to die or to kill for the sake of cause enters 'the political.' Hence, it can be simply observed that

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Schmitt sees politics as simply a synonym for the preemptive thought of war. In his own theory, he believes the only actors in the international system are friends and enemies.

Schmitt continues on by stating his abhorrence for ideal ideologies such as liberalism and pacifism. As a stark patron of the political himself, he believes that liberal ideologies negate the political and make it harder to observe politics. Schmitt favors politics so much because it is the source of seriousness in life and allows one to sacrifice one's life or to kill for the sake of a group's cause. Thus, he states that liberalism only hinders the world from observing politics as it provides temporary cooperation as opposed to conflict.[4] Schmitt believes that the only reason as to why alliances, international organizations and pacts are formed is out of self interest to ensure security against a state's foes. Thus, liberalism to Schmitt is nothing more but the cause of mere delays in 'politics.' In fact, under the definition of Schmitt, natural law is and forever will be the political.[5]

When examining the role of non-state actors in the eyes of both Hobbes and Schmitt, it can obviously be seen that they hold parallel views that can be seen to coincide with modern day structural realism. To properly explain Thomas Hobbes's view on non-state actors, his theory of the Laws of Nature must be taken into consideration. His third Law of Nature addresses that the individual will enter into a contract only for security purposes. 'Men shall keep their agreements or promises is only binding in conditions of security and security only exists where there is a power to coerce possible defaulters into keeping their contracts.' [6] Thus, Hobbes argues that contracts created by individuals are solely conditional based on their needs for security and are not symbols of international cooperation. Henceforth, Hobbes sees such non-governmental organizations, international treaties, and other non-state actors as provisional and in, what he considers to be, a system of anarchy individual states are the sole actors and decision makers.

Similar to Hobbes' perspective, Schmitt sees third party pacts in his political system of friend versus foe as useless and a simple waste of time. As previously stated with Carl Schmitt, liberal based international organizations and treaties who strive for a world order are simply a delay to political forces. In resemblance to the Hobbesian view on conditional agreements, Schmitt views non-state organizations as just a different means to ensuring state security and building up against 'the enemy.' For example, Schmitt was an admirer of the American 'Monroe Doctrine' not because of its protection of Central and South American states against European powers, but because it was a form of American imperialism in the form of an international treaty.[7] Hence, it can be seen that both realist thinkers believe that, like most structural realists, the anarchic system is composed solely of state based actors.

In order to see contrasting views of the great realist thinkers, justified warfare needs to be examined on each account. Much like Thucydides classical account on the nature of man, Hobbes believes that competition, glory and diffidence make up the causes of conflict. Competition is driven by man's need for gain in order to build up their own security while glory is chased for the reason of reputation so that an image of power can be built for a defense against threat. However in the end, fear is the sole key factor that gives a state to justification to engage in war and is the only justification to take life.

Mutual fear, according to Hobbes, is not just a fear of an individual of another, but rather is the fear of the anticipation of violence and death.[8] As a result, man's natural right to life and self defense comes into play and gives the individual the legitimate right to fight until threat of death is cleared from sight. It is out of fear that individuals form commonwealths and enter into covenants to ensure self security. 'Covenants undertaken through fear, like other acts undertaken through fear and threats...are still morally significant.' [9] Furthermore, the state, formed by the agreement or covenant of man, has an obligation to ensure that death be prolonged as long as possible. Although Hobbes does believe that individuals do hold the rationality to obtain peace, all men are evil by nature and cooperation is nothing more than a farce.

While on the contrary, Carl Schmitt surrounds the fact that justified warfare arouses from a state's sole desire to maintain a way of life. Unlike Hobbes's theory that the state exists through the mutual agreement of individual men to prolong life, Schmitt believes the state is formed by mutual agreement in order to consecrate the pact to fight common enemies who threaten their way of life. In Schmitt's Just-War Theory, he explains that the state will foster the notion that the enemy is morally evil and that in justified warfare, state's should disregard *jus in bello* or conduct acceptable to wartime conflict. Essentially, in the eyes of Carl Schmitt, members of groups hold the responsibility to

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not only kill for the sake of a way of life but also are expected to risk their life as well for the cause; thus going against Hobbes's opinion that justified war should have the moral basis to protect life. In the political, the antithesis of friend versus foe is justification enough to enter into conflict.[10] Nonetheless, Schmitt holds a firm disagreement with Hobbes that justified war is not only immoral but will eventually lead to world mass destruction.

The both extremely controversial and widely praised philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt can be viewed as both radically contrasting and corresponding. Thomas Hobbes's reliance on the classical realist theories of Thucydides as well as his commended more contemporary theory on the Laws of Nature make his position on the realist spectrum very questionable. However, it is clear that Carl Schmitt's extremist view of the international system as a war driven world of friends versus foes reveals him as an extreme realist. It is clearly seen that both Hobbes and Schmitt's theories closely resemble modern day structural realist philosophies on the anarchy of the world and the existence of only state-based actors. On the contrary, when it comes to the question of morality in the system of international relations, Hobbes and Schmitt could not be more divergent. Although Hobbes holds a firm notion that law and morality cannot exist outside the state, he nonetheless believes that the reason for a state to go to war is to preserve the lives of individuals; as opposed to Schmitt's believe that the cause of the group demands life sacrifice from the individual in order to preserve a way of life. Henceforth, although Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt's realist philosophies are seen as fundamentally similar, Schmitt's typical realist-pessimistic view on human nature is more of an antithesis than a similarity to Hobbes's rationalistic and somewhat hopeful view of the individual's conquest for peace.

[1] Noel Malcolm, "Hobbes's Theory on International Relations," in *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003-2007) <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780199247141> (accessed October 18, 2009), (431-435)

[2] Iain Hampsher-Monk, "Thomas Hobbes," in *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), (27-33)

[3] David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), (50-60)

[4] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), (50-61)

[5] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), (80-96)

[6] Iain Hampsher-Monk, "Thomas Hobbes," in *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 34

[7] William E. Scheuerman, *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1999), (150-156)

[8] David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), (150-160)

[9] Iain Hampsher-Monk, "Thomas Hobbes," in *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), (25-35)

[10] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), (80-96)

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