



Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury Society

www.thomashobbesofmalmesbury.org

To apply for membership please email your name, address and phone number to hobbesofmalmesburysoc@gmail.com, and send £5 via bank transfer to:

Bank name: Lloyds Bank
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Account to which payable: Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury Society
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Account number: 00679806

Alternatively, to apply for membership please fill out the form below and post it, along with a £5 cheque made payable to "Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury Society", to:

Ms. Rhiannon Parry
26 Burnham Road
Malmesbury
Wiltshire SN16 0BH

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ABOUT THOMAS HOBBS

Thomas Hobbes is by general consensus England's most important philosopher and a founder of modern political philosophy. Born in Malmesbury, at the age of 14 he went to study at Magdalen Hall in Oxford. After graduating he became the private tutor to William Cavendish, (later to become the second Earl of Devonshire). His association with the Cavendish family gave him an entrée into the upper echelons of society. Because he had allied himself with the royalist faction in the clashes between the king and Parliament and had defended the monarch's prerogative powers, in 1640 before the outbreak of the Civil War, he went to France where he lived until 1651 – the year he published *Leviathan*, one of the most influential books ever written on political theory, ranking on par with Machiavelli's *The Prince* as a treatise on statecraft. He was one of three main authors collectively known as social contract theorists, who tried to understand how and why human beings ceased to live in an essentially lawless 'State of Nature' and chose to establish a Government. Hobbes's starting point is an analysis of human nature.

For him man is a selfish being and concerned above all else with self-preservation. As a result, everyone lived in a world that was a constant war of all against all so that life was 'nasty, brutish and short'.

The only way out of this situation was for people to say 'I give up my right of governing myself to this man or this assembly of men on condition that you give up your rights'. In other words, men surrender all their rights to the sovereign, who Hobbes preferred to be a monarch rather than an assembly. The power of the sovereign is absolute, because being sovereign is not held 'on condition': the sovereign is the result of the pact, not a party to it. Ultimately, the psychological basis of Hobbes's theory is fear of anarchy; so, for him, the most despotic sovereign is better than anarchy. This justifies his belief that all forms of rebellion are wrong, not just because they usually fail, but because when successful they set a bad example and encourage others to rebel. There is just one exception to the sovereign's claim to total submission on part of his subject: because Hobbes considers the right of self-preservation to be absolute, a man has no duty to a sovereign who has not the power to protect him.

Although many would question, among other things, his contention that human beings are essentially selfish, Hobbes's views continue to exert influence because, generally speaking, people who spend time reflecting on political affairs and the nature of society belong, both intellectually and temperamentally, to one of two main schools: those who hold that law and order are the essential prerequisites for human welfare in society, and those who believe that human liberty has a higher value. The former see an ally in the work of Thomas Hobbes.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury Society exists to promote an understanding of Hobbes' philosophy, the context in which it was formulated and why, three centuries later, his ideas continue to be discussed.

It does so in a variety of ways but principally through two annual events. One is held in Malmesbury at the end of November when the Society celebrates his life at the Thomas Hobbes Supper. The other is day-long series of lectures and discussions .