

*From absolutism to fascism: Hobbes’  
philosophy through the prism of  
Horkheimer, Adorno and Neumann*

*Del Absolutismo al Fascismo: La Filosofía de Hobbes  
a través del prisma de Horkheimer, Adorno y Neumann*

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## Abstract

Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Neumann in *Behemoth*, have tried to understand the genealogy, the structures and the practices of fascism in particular through Hobbes' philosophy. However, despite their common membership in the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, they disagreed on the continuity between Hobbes' absolutism and European fascism. Horkheimer and Adorno were convinced that Hobbes' absolutism and fascism have shared the same anthropological origins, the principle of "Self-preservation" being at the root of absolutism as well as fascism. In both cases, the power is benefiting the dominant class, and creates an expanse where individuals destroy themselves. However, according to Neumann, absolutism and fascism are opposed, because Hobbes' "Leviathan" is a real state and differs from nazi « Behemoth », which is a non-state. The human reason that grounds the civil state is not just "instrumental", but also emancipatory.

*Keywords:* Horkheimer, Adorno, Neumann, Hobbes, Fascism, Totalitarianism, Absolutism, Self-preservation, Aufklärung, Reason..

## Resumen

Horkheimer y Adorno en *Dialéctica de la ilustración*, y Neumann en *Behemoth*, han tratado de comprender la genealogía, las estructuras y las prácticas del fascismo en particular a través de la filosofía de Hobbes. Sin embargo, a pesar de su membresía común en el *Institut für Sozialforschung*, no estaban de acuerdo sobre la continuidad entre el absolutismo de Hobbes y el fascismo europeo. Horkheimer y Adorno estaban convencidos de que el absolutismo y el fascismo de Hobbes compartían los mismos orígenes antropológicos, y que el principio de «autoconservación» estaba en la raíz del absolutismo y del fascismo. En ambos casos, el poder beneficia a la clase dominante y crea una expansión donde los individuos se destruyen a sí mismos. Sin embargo, según Neumann, el absolutismo y el fascismo se oponen, porque el «Leviatán» de Hobbes es un estado real y difiere de la nazi «Behemoth», que no es un estado. La razón humana que fundamenta el estado civil no es solo «instrumental», sino también emancipadora..

*Palabras Clave:* Horkheimer, Adorno, Neumann, Hobbes, Fascismo, Totalitarismo, Absolutismo, Auto-conservación, Aufklärung, Racionalidad..

In the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt gives a special status to Hobbes in the history of political philosophy. According to her, we can find in Hobbesian thought some prefiguration of totalitarianism. In her analysis of “imperialism”, she writes that it is not a coincidence that Hobbesian absolutism and totalitarianism are identified<sup>1</sup>. For Arendt, Hobbes is at first a bourgeois philosopher, because he advocates the extension and the expansion of power on the citizens and outside the state in order to support the “accumulation of capital”. The process of the accumulation of power is “never-ending” and goes beyond the borders as well as the financial capital; which is why he “foreshadowed the rise of imperialism”<sup>2</sup>. However, he would have also prefigured totalitarianism. Arendt asserts indeed “Hobbes provided political thought with the prerequisite for all race doctrines, that is, the exclusion in principle of the idea of humanity which constitutes the sole regulating idea of international law”<sup>3</sup>. According to Arendt, Hobbes would have justified the idea of “race” and of wars, which can be found in totalitarian doctrines<sup>4</sup>.

After WWII, Hannah Arendt continues the work of Horkheimer and Adorno’s approach by searching for the meaning of the barbarism perpetuated by totalitarian movements throughout the history of philosophy<sup>5</sup>. All of them are convinced that there is a continuity between Hobbes and totalitarianism or fascism<sup>6</sup>. Both terms are synonyms in that they designate states where people

<sup>1</sup> Arendt Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part Two “Imperialism”, Chapter 5 “The political emancipation of bourgeoisie”, Orlando, Harvest book - Harcourt Brace and co, 1979, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> Arendt pointed out that the Hobbesian idea of “the state of nature” between the states themselves is “the best possible theoretical foundation for those naturalistic ideologies which hold nations to be tribes, separated from each other by nature, [...], unconscious of the solidarity of mankind and having in common only the instinct of self-preservation which man shares with the animal world.” Cf. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Horkheimer Max, “Idee, Aktivität und Programm des Instituts für Sozialforschung [1938]”, in M. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* XII, Frankfurt a. M. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987, p. 149: „Der autoritäre Staat ist auch in der bürgerlichen Epoche nichts Neues, sondern die durch den Liberalismus vermittelte Rückkehr zu autoritären Formen, die im Absolutismus ihre Vorgeschichte haben.“

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt uses more the term of “Totalitarianism” than “Fascism” because; totalitarianism refers only to National Socialism and Stalinism. By contrast, Mussolini’s fascist regime is a tyranny or a dictatorship. His authority relies on a party, and not on a movement. Besides, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Totalitarianism is more

are dominated by terror and ideology. They refer mostly to National Socialism, Italian Fascism and Stalinism. According to Arendt, totalitarian regimes aim to abolish spontaneity in human beings, which is the most basic expression of liberty<sup>7</sup>. This differs from authoritarian regime or tyranny, because it is not a restriction of human liberty, but its elimination. In Horkheimer and Adorno's common thought, fascism is also the framework of the "decline of the individual"<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, it contains Horkheimer's notion of an "Authoritarian State", which takes up the notion of "State Capitalism" theorized by Friedrich Pollock, an economist and the associate director in the Institute for Social Research. "Authoritarian State" is defined like the result of the centralisation of economic and political power in the hands of a powerful minority; it appears after the monopolistic phase of capitalism<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, I am going to use the word "fascism" in the large sense of the term, that is, in the sense that has been developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Fascism is not only Mussolini's doctrine, it also takes the form of National-Socialism. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, fascism has at least two characteristics, both a political and anthropological dimension: first, it is the political domination of the most powerful over the mob. Secondly, it is the revenge of the impulses against the civilizing reason.

It is true that Hobbes' state is also based on coercive power and ideology<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, the political aims of Hobbesian absolutism and fascism are completely different. For Hobbes, the purpose of state is to ensure the "safety of the people". According to him, "safety" is not "a bare preservation, but also all other contentments of life which every man [...] shall acquire to himself"<sup>11</sup>. On the contrary, according to the German philosophers, humans lose their subjectivity

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an adjective than a substantive. To go into this question in depth, cf. Katia Genel, «*La dialectique de la raison, contribution à une théorie du totalitarisme ? – Etat autoritaire, Etat totalitaire et non-Etat*», in *La dialectique de la raison – Sous bénéfice d'inventaire* supervised by Katia Genel, Paris, Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2017, pp. 117-135.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Arendt H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 438: "The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behaviour, and of transforming the human personality into mere thing, into something that even animals are not [...]."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Horkheimer Max, *Eclipse of reason*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, the title of the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter: "Rise and Decline of the Individual".

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Horkheimer M., "Autoritär Staat", *Gesammelte Schriften* V, Frankfurt a. M., Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987, pp. 293-319. Pollock Friedrich, "State Capitalism: its Possibilities and Limits" and "Is National Socialism a New Order?", *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Jahrgang 9, 1941, München, Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, respectively pp. 200-225 and pp. 440-445.

<sup>10</sup> The term "ideology" in Hobbes' philosophy refers to the "public instruction" about laws and citizens' duties.

<sup>11</sup> Hobbes Thomas, *Leviathan*, Chapter XXX, Oxford, edited by Gaskin in Oxford University press, 2008, p. 222.

and their individuality under fascist domination. Franz L. Neumann, another member of the *IfS*, argues that absolutism and fascism have not the same political structures and practices. For him, Hobbes' *Leviathan* is a real state, because it preserves the rule of the law and the citizens' rights. By contrast, Neumann's *Behemoth*, who has taken Hobbes' title from *Behemoth and the Long Parliament*, is a non-state, the anarchy that has destroyed human rights and dignity.

Thus, if there is indeed a crucial difference between Hobbes' state and fascist movement; is it relevant to establish a continuity between Hobbesian theory and fascism? Since it is difficult to identify absolutism with fascism when we consider legal and political structures, how can Horkheimer and Adorno assert as such?

My hypothesis is that the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* draw a correlation between Hobbes and fascism from an anthropological perspective. Hobbes is described as a "somber writer of the early bourgeois period", who "recognized society as the destructive principle"<sup>12</sup>. By "speaking up the egoism of the self"<sup>13</sup> through the principle of "self-preservation", he perceived that one of the consequences of economic liberalism can be self-destruction. This perspective is anthropological because it assesses how the will of self-preservation finally leads a fascist minority to use absolutist techniques of power against the masses. In addition, self-preservation is also "a destructive natural force"<sup>14</sup> insofar as human beings must adapt themselves to the reality and lose their individuality in the fascist era. Thus, Horkheimer and Adorno establish the link between Hobbes and fascism by analysing the transformation of human beings.

The question is, how relevant is the link between Hobbes and fascism, correlation that is anthropological here?

First, I will study the use of Hobbes in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and analyse the notions of "self-preservation" and "reason". If the Hobbesian concept of "reason" involves only "instrumental reason", it is relevant to return to Hobbes in the history of the "bourgeois rationality" in order to understand the roots of fascism.

Secondly, I will study another conception of the Hobbesian anthropology in Neumann's *Behemoth*, where the concept of "reason" is universal and objective, and consequently differs from "instrumental reason". Contrary to Horkheimer and Adorno, he connects the anthropological issues with political theory.

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<sup>12</sup> Horkheimer Max and Adorno Theodor, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, E. Jephcott trans., Stanford University press, 2002, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> Idem.

<sup>14</sup> Idem.

## 1. Self-preservation and domination: Hobbes as agent of the “conspiracy of rulers against peoples”<sup>15</sup>.

IN THE *DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT*, Horkheimer and Adorno conceive that the *Aufklärung* as “thought in progress”, can, in some historical circumstances, lead to fascism, after the liberal phase. The fact that the instrumental reason finds the better means for any ends produces a world where the values of humanity are liquidated, and where nature and men can finally be dominated. The sole principle of the instrumental reason is the self-preservation.

Precisely, the authors perceive a link between Hobbes and fascism through the anthropological concept of “self-preservation”. On the one hand, they explain how Hobbes’ political theory serves the interests and the self-preservation of the powerful minority in the fascist regime. On the other hand, they see in the Hobbesian transition from the “natural condition” to the civil condition how individuals finally destruct themselves by desiring to preserve themselves.

It is remarkable that the notion of “self-preservation” is fundamental in *Leviathan* as much as in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For Hobbes, it represents the fundamental right of nature, that is, “the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself for the preservation of his own nature”<sup>16</sup>. The right of nature contains all men’s action, which are necessary for their own preservation. In a civil state, this law of nature limits men. Law of nature is a precept “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”<sup>17</sup>. The laws of nature are just precepts of reason; they become laws only due to the sovereign’s coercive power. They contain the rules by which men can live in peace, because peace is the sole state where they can preserve their life and felicity. Therefore, self-preservation is the principle of some men’s action, and the purpose of laws of nature that forbid self-destruction.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, self-preservation do not have the exact same meaning: it is concomitant with the formation of the *Ego* and individuality. Indeed, the notion of *Ego* is not only biological, but also historical. It is the result of the separation between the self and nature. The subject can preserve the self and be separated from nature only by its domination. Consequently, self-preservation is the principle of the domination of nature, and thus it becomes the principle of science and exploitation of nature. The main instrument to dominate nature

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<sup>15</sup> Horkheimer M. and Adorno T., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Idem.

is Reason, in its instrumental potentiality. With reason, men can find the means for any ends. In short, self-preservation is not only preservation of his own life as Hobbes underlined it, but also a way of preserving the ego as principle of individuality.

So how are the principle of self-preservation and the instrumental reason articulated with fascism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*? The authors highlight two viewpoints: the viewpoint of those dominated and the dominant's viewpoint. First, in a fascist state, dominated people have to be adapted to new sets of rules: "[...] the people were prepared to adapt themselves passively to new power relations, to allow themselves only the kind of reaction that enabled them to fit into the economic, social and political setup."<sup>18</sup> Self-preservation demands that subjects adapt themselves to any kind of political setup.

Secondly, self-preservation underlies the conduct of the dominants. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the ego can "expand" or "contract with the individual's prospects of economic autonomy and productive ownership"<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, if we follow the principle of self-preservation, dominants want to maintain and increase their domination over the masses. The domination of nature requires domination of other men because a minority of men wants to keep the power. Therefore, the principle of self-preservation is not limited at liberalism; it is also specific to fascism. It triggers the search for ways to dominate people.

Besides, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, Hobbes already dealt with the techniques of people's domination.

"Finally it passes from the expropriated citizens to the totalitarian trust-masters, whose science has become the quintessence of the methods by which the subjugated mass society reproduces itself. [...] The conspiracy of rulers against peoples, implemented by relentless organization, finds the Enlightenment spirit since Machiavelli and Hobbes no less compliant than the bourgeois republic."<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the techniques to dominate other men are a thematic of political philosophy during the early bourgeois period, that is, for Machiavelli and Hobbes. Therefore, the authors establish a first link between Hobbes and fascism because Hobbes sets the means to dominate the masses. In "Die Juden und Europa" and in his preface of the ninth issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Horkheimer brings the common techniques of power shared by absolutist and fascist rulers to

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<sup>18</sup> Horkheimer M., *Eclipse of Reason*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Horkheimer M. and Adorno T., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Idem.

light. These are “ideology” and “terror”<sup>21</sup>. In “Die Juden und Europa”, terror has been always advised for the dominant class since Machiavelli<sup>22</sup>. In Horkheimer’s preface, the fascist clique “shuffles [ideologies] about freely and cynically according to the changing situation, thus finally translating into open action what modern political theory from Machiavelli and Hobbes to Pareto has professed.”<sup>23</sup>

Hobbes is a representative of the will to dominate nature and men in the history of Enlightenment, and is connected with fascism because he belongs to Enlightenment as “*fortschreitenden Denken*” which finally leads to fascism as a way of asserting a very strong power over the masses.

Yet, I state that Hobbes’ *Leviathan* is not at all a foreshadowing of totalitarian states. In the *Leviathan*, the sovereign has an absolute power and is not subjected to the law because laws are the expression of his will. However, the purpose of the generation and the existence of the state is not limited to the domination for the domination, or the happiness just for the most powerful men only, but involves the “*salus populi*,” in other words, the “safety” of people. Furthermore, the creation of the Commonwealth by the social pact is not based on the future sovereign’s will to dominate and preserve himself, because its purpose is the self-preservation of each man in the multitude. My hypothesis is that Horkheimer and Adorno did not intend to say that the structures of totalitarian state are already in the *Leviathan*. Instead that they perceived in Hobbes’ work a manifestation of the will of domination specific to the Enlightenment spirit and later peculiar to fascism.

## 2. From Self-Preservation to Self-Destruction: What is “Coming Out” of the Hobbesian Natural Condition in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*?

IN *DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT*, the connection between Hobbes and fascism is not to be found directly in his political theory, but in his anthropology, through the transition from the “natural condition” to the civil condition. In Hobbes’ anthropology and political theory, the civil condition is the result of the institution of the Commonwealth. There is no differences between living in the civil

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<sup>21</sup> In the 1950s, Hannah Arendt also refers to ideology and terror as the specific instruments of domination in totalitarian states. Cf. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., Part Three “Totalitarianism”, chapter 13 “Ideology and Terror: a Novel Form of Government”, pp. 460-479.

<sup>22</sup> Horkheimer M., „Die Juden und Europa“, *Gesammelte Schriften* IV, Frankfurt a. M., Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 1988, p. 316-317.

<sup>23</sup> Horkheimer M. “Preface” in *ZfS*, Jahrgang 9, 1941, op. cit., p. 196.

condition and being ruled by the sovereign. The Hobbesian themes of the “natural condition” and “Commonwealth” implicitly appears in this quote from the second digression:

“If all affects are of equal value, then self-preservation, which dominates the form of the system in any case, seems to offer the most plausible maxim for action. It was to be given free rein in the free economy. The somber writers of the early bourgeois period, such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Mandeville, who spoke up for the egoism of the self, thereby recognized society as the destructive principle and denounced harmony before it was elevated to the official doctrine by the bearers of light, the classicists. The former writers exposed the totality of the bourgeois order as the horrifying entity, which finally engulfed both, the general and the particular, society and the self. With the development of the economic system in which the control of the economic apparatus by private groups creates a division between human beings, self-preservation, although treated by reason as identical, had become the reified drive of each individual citizen and proved to be a destructive natural force no longer distinguishable from self-destruction.”<sup>24</sup>

The authors established an opposition between the “somber writers” of the bourgeoisie and the “classicists” such as Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say and David Ricardo<sup>25</sup>. Contrary to the classicist economists, the former writers Hobbes, Machiavelli and Mandeville have understood that in a society where free economy or liberalism rules, there is no harmony between the individuals and the society. For example, Adam Smith’s principle of the “invisible hand” demonstrates that when merchants and manufacturers pursue their own interests, they contribute of the enrichment of the society<sup>26</sup>. Thus, the conflict of interests is solved in the social totality according the “bearers of light”. However, for Horkheimer and Adorno, such a harmony is an illusion.

On the other hand, they praise Hobbes, Machiavelli and Mandeville for being more clear-sighted than the classicists are. From early on they have seen that the principle of self-preservation “proved to be a destructive natural force no longer distinguishable from self-destruction”<sup>27</sup>. Then, they have understood that the pursuit

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<sup>24</sup> Horkheimer M. and Adorno T., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Horkheimer M., “Die gegenwärtige Lage der Sozialphilosophie und die Aufgaben eines Instituts für Sozialforschung [1931]“, *Gesammelte Schriften* III, Frankfurt a. M., Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988. In this speech, Horkheimer refers to Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say and David Ricardo as the names of the liberal economists. He quotes them through their use in Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 189.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Smith Adam, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book IV, Chapter II, Amsterdam, Lausanne, Melbourne, Milan, New York, Sao Paulo, Μέτα Libri Digital Edition, 2007, p. 349-350: “By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.”

<sup>27</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p. 71.

of an individual's own interest in order to preserve himself leads to self-destruction. Yet it is strange that Hobbes is, on the one hand, a spokesman of the "egoism of the self" specific to the liberal era, and on the other hand, an apologist for the "horri-fying entity which finally engulfed both, the general and the particular, society and the self"<sup>28</sup>, that is, a representation of the fascist era. Moreover, it is puzzling that the German philosophers perceived in Hobbesian philosophy the "murky fusion"<sup>29</sup> between self-preservation and self-destruction.

Indeed, I claim that the term "society" from the quote above corresponds to a mix of "natural condition" and "civil state". It refers to the competition between the bourgeois owners; so, it is the version of the war of every man against every man in the economic society. I also suppose that "the totality of the bourgeois order" is the state, while the "Leviathan" is the Commonwealth in Hobbes' theory. So, if society is recognized by Hobbes as "the destructive principle" and if the "totality [...] engulfed both [...] society and the self" according to Horkheimer and Adorno, Hobbes would recognize the civil condition and the state as the framework where individuals are destructed. This assertion is like a distortion of his philosophy. For Hobbes, to come out of the natural condition by instituting the Commonwealth is the only way to preserve life and to be happy. The natural condition is indeed a condition where "the life of man" is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, how to explain that Hobbes recognizes "society" or "civil state" as the "destructive principle", and "totality" or "Leviathan" as the scene of self-destruction?

Horkheimer and Adorno read Hobbes through Freud's essays about the notion of Culture, *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and its Discontents*. In both works, Freud takes Hobbes' theme of "natural condition" and transforms it. To "lay down" almost all the "natural right"<sup>31</sup> in order to come out of the natural condition in Hobbes's political theory, corresponds to "a renunciation of instincts" in the *Future of an Illusion*:

"It seems rather that every civilization must be built up in coercion and renunciation of instincts [...]."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Idem. NB: in this English translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the dimension of the "apology" or "praise" is forgotten. Cf. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in Horkheimer M., *Gesammelte Schriften* V, Frankfurt a. M., Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 1987, p. 113: „Jene [Machiavelli, Hobbes, Mandeville] priesen die Totalität der bürgerlichen Ordnung [...].“

<sup>29</sup> Idem: "The two principles combined in a murky fusion".

<sup>30</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter XIII, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter XIV, op. cit., p. 87-88.

<sup>32</sup> Freud Sigmund, *The Future of an Illusion*, James Strachey trans., New York, W. W. Norton and Company. INC., 1961, p. 7.

According to Freud, human beings renounce and sacrifice their impulses, in order to live in society peacefully and defend themselves against the external nature. Now, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the renouncement of the impulses is a sacrifice of an internal nature and the Self<sup>33</sup>. In his essay “The End of Reason” and its German translation “Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung”, Horkheimer shows that life in community requires two kinds of renouncement, that is, the renouncement of the use of reason and the renouncement of instincts.

“The enthusiasm of the counter-revolution and of the popular leaders not only joined in a common faith in the executioner but also in the conviction that reason may at any time justify renouncing thought, particularly of the poor. De Maistre, a belated absolutist, preaches forswearing reason for reason’s sake. [...]. / The individual has to do violence to himself and learn that the life of the whole is the necessary precondition of his own. Reason has to master rebellious feelings and instincts, the inhibition of which is supposed to make human cooperation possible.”<sup>34</sup>

In the German translation “Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung”, Horkheimer adds the name of Hobbes next to the French counter-revolutionary De Maistre:

“De Maistre, ein verspäteter Absolutist, predigt mit Hobbes die Abschwörung des eigenen Urteils für alle Zeit, aus Vernunft. [...]”<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, if “the life of the whole is the necessary precondition” of their own life, human beings must forswear their own judgement and sacrifice their instincts, because those can be antagonistic towards the whole. Such a renunciation is the ground for the Self-destruction and individual’s decline, specific to fascism. In the fascist era, the whole, as the state, would engulf individuals. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, Hobbes’ Leviathan is a preview of this pathological relation between the whole and individuals.

The Freudian mediation in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is thus necessary to understand why -for Horkheimer and Adorno- Hobbes praised “the totality of the bourgeois order as the horrifying entity which finally engulfed both, the general and the particular, society and the self”<sup>36</sup>. In other words, they can establish a link between Hobbes and fascism because they understand the transition from the nat-

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, “Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment”, op. cit., pp. 67-103.

<sup>34</sup> Horkheimer M., “The End of Reason”, *ZfS*, Jahrgang 9, 1941, op. cit., p. 369.

<sup>35</sup> Horkheimer M., “Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung”, *Gesammelte Schriften* V, op. cit. p. 325.

<sup>36</sup> Horkheimer M. and Adorno T., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p. 71.

ural condition to the civil state as the renunciation to the instincts in order to live in society. Now, this renunciation prepares the Self-destruction peculiar to fascist phase: by aiming for the Self-preservation, individuals will renounce their own nature. Therefore, they will adapt not merely to the political reality of fascism, but they will take revenge against civilisation through barbarism and the persecution of minorities such as the Jewish people, for example<sup>37</sup>.

To sum up, we have to understand that, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Hobbes, as somber writers of the Enlightenment, is not only a pre-fascist writer. He brought to light the dark side of the *Aufklärung*, with the rawness and the lucidity of his thought. However, Horkheimer and Adorno missed the purpose of the *Leviathan* as the construction of a state where men can live in peace, despite and with human passions. With their interpretation of the Hobbesian transition from natural condition to civil society, they cannot conceive a state which can realize the *salus populi*, or which can deal with the human passions. Indeed, their own anthropological conception is disconnected with a real political thought. We know that it is absurd to conceive the political system without an anthropology, but can we have a conception of the human nature by disregarding the political practices?

Now we have to confront their use of the Hobbesian anthropology with Franz Neumann's reception of Hobbes in order to have another conception of the anthropology connected with the political theory.

### 3. The prism of Neumann: *Behemoth versus Leviathan*.

NEUMANN HAS PUBLISHED his *Behemoth* in 1942. Contrary to Horkheimer and Adorno, he distinguished clearly the Hobbesian absolutism and the National Socialism, which we can understand as a type of fascism.

“National Socialism is anti-democratic, anti-liberal, and profoundly anti-rational. That is why it cannot utilize any preceding political thought. Not even Hobbes's political theory applies to it. The national socialist state is no Leviathan. But Hobbes aside from his *Leviathan* also wrote *Behemoth or the Long Parliament* [...]. *Behemoth*, which depicted England during the Long Parliament, was intended as the representation of a non-state, a situation characterized by complete lawlessness.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Horkheimer M., *Eclipse of reason*, the third chapter “The Revolt of Nature”, op. cit., pp. 65-89.

<sup>38</sup> Neumann Franz, *Behemoth – The Structure and Practice of National Socialism 1933-1944*, Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 2009, p. 459.

According to Neumann, National Socialism differs from absolutism, because the Nazi state is a non-state, has no legal structure and is irrational. In that way, he is in opposition to Carl Schmitt, and his conception of Hobbes<sup>39</sup>. National Socialism is irrational because of its lack of political theory, where the structures of the state, the laws and their rationality can be outlined. Neumann has understood that Hobbes is not a fascist writer ahead of his time, since he asserts that Hobbes' philosophy is rational. Indeed, he underlines the fact that *Leviathan* is based on laws and the rationality of the citizens:

“The Leviathan, although it swallows society, does not swallow all of it. Its sovereign power is founded upon the consent of man. Its justification is still rational and, in consequence, incompatible with a political system that completely sacrifices the individual.”<sup>40</sup>

In other words, Hobbesian state is rational because the sovereign power can be justified and accepted by the citizens, not only because of the coercive power, but also by his rationality expressed by the laws of nature. Furthermore, to live in the Commonwealth does not require a sacrifice of individuals because Hobbes postulates the right of resistance<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, the social pact cannot be valid if individuals commit to allowing killing, even by the sovereign's forces.

The question is: what is the meaning of “rationality” according to Neumann? Indeed, if the rationality is only “instrumental”, it is overcome by the principle of self-preservation analysed by Horkheimer and Adorno. It is true that the Leviathan as state is a means for the purpose of self-preservation. However, in this case, the purpose is not self-preservation of the dominants, but those of all citizens; in addition, self-preservation does not lead to self-destruction like the version of the Hobbesian civil society in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The reason is not just subjective, it is also objective, as Horkheimer has underlined in *Eclipse of Reason*<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, in Neumann's thought, rationality is the main characteristic of Natural Law and underlies rational political systems:

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<sup>39</sup> According to Carl Schmitt, Hobbes is a philosopher of the dictatorship and is the theoretician of Decisionism. In that way, we can link National Socialism and Hobbes together because, in Schmitt's juristic theory, the Führer have the power to decide who the enemy is in order to protect the total state. Cf. *Die Diktatur* (1921), *On the Concept of the Political* (1932), and *On the Three Types of Juristic Thought* (1934). Yet in *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (1938), he finds in Hobbes's political theory seeds of liberalism.

<sup>40</sup> Neumann F., *Behemoth – The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*, op. cit., p. 459.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter XXI, op. cit..

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Horkheimer M. *Eclipse of Reason*, chapter 1 “Means and Ends”, op. cit., pp. 1-39.

“If every doctrine of Natural Law is based upon men as an individual, either autonomous or subject to the lawfulness of external nature, then man must be considered as a rational individual. That in turn implies the recognition of the essential equality of human beings. And this again lead to the universality of the Natural Law doctrine which is the central view common to all doctrines.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, Natural Law is universal and implies the recognition of equality because of the inborn rationality of human beings. Natural Law cannot be compatible with irrational doctrines or practises. The rationality of Natural Law derives from the rationality of human beings and produces a rational political system where human rights are applied. According to Neumann, even Hobbes’ absolutist doctrine of Natural Law is rational because it “base[s] the authority upon the consent of man”<sup>44</sup>. In addition, in the essay “Der Funktionswandel des Rechtsgesetzes”, published in the “*Zeitschrift*“ in 1937, Neumann shows that, in Hobbes political theory, the state and its laws are based upon Natural Law:

“Obwohl nach Hobbes Gesetz reine *voluntas* ist, obwohl Recht und Massnahmen des Souveräns jeder Art identisch sind, obwohl ein Recht ausserhalb des Staates nicht bestehen soll, nimmt er doch starke Einschränkungen an seiner monistischen Theorie dadurch vor, dass der Staat (und damit das Recht) selbst auf ein Naturgesetz basiert wird, dieses aber nicht nur *voluntas*, sondern auch *ratio* ist, da es die Erhaltung und Verteidigung des menschlichen Lebens zum Inhalt hat.”<sup>45</sup>

Consequently, Hobbes’s juridical doctrine is not a pure decisionism: the sovereign makes law, but he must himself base this on the Natural Law when he makes it. Neumann contradicts thus Carl Schmitt’s vision of Hobbes. According to Carl Schmitt, Hobbes is indeed the first thinker of Decisionism<sup>46</sup>. However, by his opposition to the Nazi jurist, Neumann assert the rationality inherent in Hobbesian Commonwealth.

The other issue is that the rationality of the laws of nature would be only ideological, a means to enslave the people and justify all the actions of the sovereign. Neumann himself recognizes this ideological dimension of every doctrines of

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<sup>43</sup> Neumann F., “Types of Natural Law” in *ZfS*, Jahrgang 8, 1939-49, München, Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, p. 349.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 357.

<sup>45</sup> Neumann F., “Die Funktionswandel des Rechtsgesetzes”, in *ZfS*, Jahrgang 6, 1937, München, Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, p. 544.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Schmitt C., *Die Diktatur – Von der Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf*, Berlin, Duncker und Humblot, 2015, the first chapter „Die kommissarische Diktatur und die rechtstaatliche Theorie“, p. 1-25. / Schmitt C., *On the Three Types of Juristic Thought*, Joseph W. Bendersky trans., Praeger Publishers, 2004.

Natural Law. For example, thomistic Natural Law is “a kind of codification of the feudal order, a completely authoritarian order”<sup>47</sup>. However, it is just “one aspect of the system”<sup>48</sup>: thomistic doctrine is progressive insofar as it is in opposition with the Augustinism and the royal domination by “charisma”. Furthermore, Hobbes’ doctrine of Natural Law is not ideological for him. It seems that he is more revolutionary than previously considered:

“The democratic kernel and the inherent revolutionary dynamics were clearly perceived by the Court and rejected by the ruling classes, who were afraid and ashamed of that outspoken philosopher whose materialism allowed no veiling ideology.”<sup>49</sup>

According to Hobbes, the laws of nature are rational, not only because they are rules of prudence in order to reach the peace, but also because they imply obedience with consciousness. They are certainly an expression of the ideological power of the sovereign, but it is not clear whether the concept of “ideology” is, only a doctrine serves and hides the interests of the dominants here. They are ideological because they represent an education of the citizens, which require their rationality as consciousness and understanding<sup>50</sup>.

It seems that Neumann understands the concept of “rationality” as universal and not as instrumental. The result of this understanding is that the citizen’s obedience is not only influenced by terror, but also by their “consent”. However, it does not mean that the sovereign will lose his rights to rule people if he does not “fulfil his side of the bargain”, as Neumann claims it in his *Behemoth*:

“The whole power of the sovereign is, for Hobbes, merely a part of a bargain in which the sovereign has to fulfil his obligations, that is, preserve order and security so that there may be realized ‘the liberty to buy and sell and otherwise contract with one another; to choose their own adobe, their own diet, their own trade of life, and institute their children as they themselves think fit’. If the sovereign cannot fulfil his side of the bargain, he forfeits his sovereignty. Such a theory has little common with National Socialism, absolutistic as it may be.”<sup>51</sup>

First, Hobbes asserts that there is not a covenant between citizens and the sovereign. The covenant is made only between citizens: they commit, one to each other,

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<sup>47</sup> Neumann F., “Types of Natural Law” in *ZfS*, Jahrgang 8, 1939–40, p. 351.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 352.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 356.

<sup>50</sup> On the ideological function of the sovereign in Hobbes’ philosophy, cf. *Leviathan*, op. cit., chapter XXX.

<sup>51</sup> Neumann F., *Behemoth – The structure and Practice of National Socialism*, op. cit. p. 459.

to lay down the unlimited right of nature and to obey the beneficiary of the transfer, that is, the future sovereign. The sovereign is not obliged towards his subjects by a “bargain”. Moreover, he cannot “forfeit his sovereignty”, because the rights of the sovereign are inalienable<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, it is true that he has not betray them, because he is the beneficiary of a “gift”. Thus, he has to respect the fourth law of nature about the “grace” or the “free gift”: “*that a man which received benefit from another of mere grace endeavour that he which giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will*”<sup>53</sup>. So, Hobbes’s theory “has little in common with National Socialism”<sup>54</sup>, not because Hobbesian sovereign has to “fulfil his side of bargain”, but because of the trust of the people in him and his obligation to fulfil the “safety of the people”, that is, the respect of Natural Law.

To conclude, I would like to add that the way to conceive human nature determines how one defines the state. On the one hand, if human reason is just instrumental, the state is only an ensemble of techniques to dominate people for the benefit of the dominant minority. In this case, the state cannot be democratic and is always potentially fascist. On the other hand, if human beings are capable of rationality in an objective and universal meaning, it is possible to conceive a “real state”, which can serve the people if it is well structured. In my opinion, Neumann is right when he underlines the importance of political theory for the viability of a political structure. Indeed, National Socialism is a non-state because it has no political theory. So, when we follow the way of Horkheimer and Adorno without completing their fruitful thought with a political theory, the risk is to miss the possibilities of emancipation that we can find in the political sphere and through the structures of the state.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter XVIII, § 4, whose title is “Sovereign power cannot be forfeited”, op. cit..

<sup>53</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>54</sup> Neumann F., *Behemoth – The structure and Practice of National Socialism*, op. cit. p. 459.

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Bajo Palabra. II Época. Nº21. Pgs: 341-358