

**Ethics**  
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**Module No 2**  
**Lecture 09**

Hi, welcome back to this lecture series on ethics. This is lecture number 9 and we are going to concentrate on ethics in modern period and particularly the social contract model of Thoas Hobbs. So to understand the development of ethics, the evolution and development of ethics, we also need to understand the historical context in which certain theories and certain ideas have emerged.

This will be particularly visible when we try to understand the emergence of ethics in modern period because we are now reaching a period after the Greek and then after the medieval Christian era, we are now going to understand another set another perspectives in ethical theory and in ethics in general. So we have seen the Eudaimonistic perspectives of the Greeks, then kind of divine theories, the ethical theories or moral perspectives rooted in the idea of divine, idea of God in the medieval period.

And now, with the modern period, there are certain very important historical developments, particularly the reformation, the scientific revolution and various other things that have happened during this age and naturally these historical and social developments have influenced thinkers, ethicists and the development of moral theory in a certain way in Europe. So we are going to address some of these things and one very important theoretical perspective is social contract theory.

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The slide is titled "Modern Period" in a large, black, serif font. Below the title is a list of six bullet points, each preceded by a small circle. The bullet points are: "The modern era evolved as a result of cultural, social and political changes.", "Philosophical and moral implications of such changes.", "Economic changes due to expansion of trade.", "Invention of printing.", "Copernican revolution and Galileo's inauguration of the new science that employs empirical methods and mathematical tool.", and "Protestant Reformation." In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small circular logo with a red and white design, and the text "Dr. Srookumar Nellickappilly" and "NPTEL" below it.

## Modern Period

- The modern era evolved as a result of cultural, social and political changes.
- Philosophical and moral implications of such changes.
- Economic changes due to expansion of trade.
- Invention of printing.
- Copernican revolution and Galileo's inauguration of the new science that employs empirical methods and mathematical tool.
- Protestant Reformation.

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So here, we will try to see a modern era that has evolved as a result of the cultural, social and political changes which we call as enlightenment a little later than also like to see how certain very important doctrines have evolved during this era. And now, economic changes also have played a very important role because there was expansion of trade and the establishment of new industrial houses, novel technologies were developed for production.


All these things have definitely, have greater influence on the ethical perspectives of people. And invention of printing, of course was very important and Copernican revolution and Galileo's inauguration of a new science that employs empirical methods and mathematical tools. All these things were very important developments that have taken during this era and the Protestant Reformation.

Our discussion of modern ethics will start with some contributions of Thomas Hobbes and here we will, like other modern philosophers, Hobbes is also concerned about human nature and tries to root his entire philosophical thinking in his understanding of human nature. So, Hobbes's conception of human nature is very interesting. He very famously proclaimed that man is fundamentally nasty, brutish and selfish.


To be very interesting to see what kind of morality play develops from this kind of a view, this overview of human nature.

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## Thomas Hobbes



- Man is fundamentally nasty, brutish and selfish.
- Hence morality is not natural to man.
- Human self-interest and the desire for self preservation demand us to avoid this basic natural state.
- To seek a state of peaceful co-existence.
- Morality, politics, society, and commodious living are purely conventional.

  
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Hence morality, naturally if man is fundamentally nasty, brutish and selfish, morality cannot be so natural. So, then what is morality? He says that human self-interest and the desire for self-preservation demand us to avoid the basic natural state. He describes the state of nature or the natural state in terms of fundamental human nature, nasty, brutish and selfish and self-interest dominates.

But what will happen in self-interest? If every one thing is only concerned about his or her self-interest, this can lead to certain consequences. So he says that there is a concern, there is a deeper concerns and and more important concern for self-preservation. This demand us to avoid the basic natural state and to arrive at what he calls the establishment of civil societies to seek a state of peaceful co-existence where other people are also accommodated into our world.


And morality, politics society and commodious living are all purely conventional for Thomas Hobbes. So because of this fundamental human nature which he understands in terms of self-interest and self-preservation. So it is in this context we have to start our understanding of Hobbes conception of morality.

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## Hobbes on Morality

- Nothing is absolutely and objectively good or evil.
- Good or evil are based on our appetite or desire.
- What satisfies our desire is good and what is against it is evil.
- The basis of all human action is to obtain those things that they desire.

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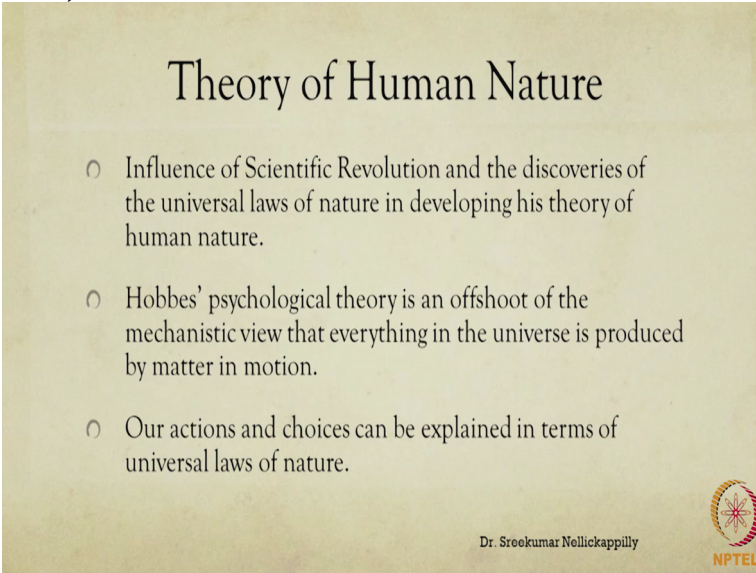
He says that there is nothing absolutely or objectively good or evil as many other philosophers who would have construed, who would have thought that you know there is something fundamentally called good and fundamentally called evil. See, for instance, the divine command theorists would argue that is good is absolutely good. That is good because God has proclaimed it. So there is a reason, there is an extra worldly reason for something to be, for being good and there is a deeper significance for understanding but in Thomas Hobbes's view, there is nothing which is absolutely and objectively good or evil.

Good or evil are based on our appetites and desire. So there is a way in which our subjective, our individual mind, our individual considerations are linked with what is good and evil. So there is a subjectivity involved in it hence as a result. So good or evil are based on our appetites and desire. What satisfies our desire is to be treated as good and what is against our desire is to be understood as evil.

And the basis of all human actions is to obtain those things that they consider as good as anything but what we desire to attain. So our desire to decide what is good for us and we pursue, there is a natural right in us to pursue that, every human being has a natural right to pursue what he thinks, what he desires, what he thinks is right and what he thinks is good for him. But there are certain issues with this. That is why his conception of morality is problematic and also interesting.



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The slide features a title 'Theory of Human Nature' at the top center. Below the title are three bullet points, each starting with a small circle. The first bullet point discusses the influence of the Scientific Revolution and the discovery of universal laws of nature. The second bullet point states that Hobbes' psychological theory is an offshoot of a mechanistic view of the universe. The third bullet point explains that human actions and choices can be understood through universal laws of nature. In the bottom right corner, there is a small circular logo with a star-like pattern and the text 'NPTEL' below it. At the bottom center, the name 'Dr. Srookumar Nellickappilly' is written.

## Theory of Human Nature

- Influence of Scientific Revolution and the discoveries of the universal laws of nature in developing his theory of human nature.
- Hobbes' psychological theory is an offshoot of the mechanistic view that everything in the universe is produced by matter in motion.
- Our actions and choices can be explained in terms of universal laws of nature.

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Now again when we try to understand Hobbes theory of human nature, we could see the influence of the scientific revolution and the discoveries of human laws of nature in developing his theory of human nature. These scientific theories were just emerging during these periods, 17<sup>th</sup>-century and that was the time when Europe was gradually shifting from a feudalistic economy towards a market economy with the development and establishment of new factories and new industrial houses and also the expansion of trade to different parts of the world, colonisation and various other social political developments.


And in that sense, we can say that Hobbes's psychological theory is nothing but it is an offshoot of the gangster worldview which he sort of he was influenced by that everything in this universe is produced by the matter in motion. This was the dominant mechanistic view that was prevalent during those days, those days of modern Europe. Our actions and choices can be explained in terms of universal laws of nature.

So there is nothing more significant than what is there in the physical world and its roots according to Hobbes. So we do not have to search for anything which is more substantially valuable and which makes things ethical, makes things moral, which make things good or evil. What is it then? It is nothing but our desires which can be understood purely in terms of applying the scientific principles, the rules of nature.

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MORAL WORD	INDIVIDUAL TASTE/PREFERENCE
LOVE	Things we are drawn
HATE	Things we are repelled by
GOOD	Describes our appetites
EVIL	Describes our aversions

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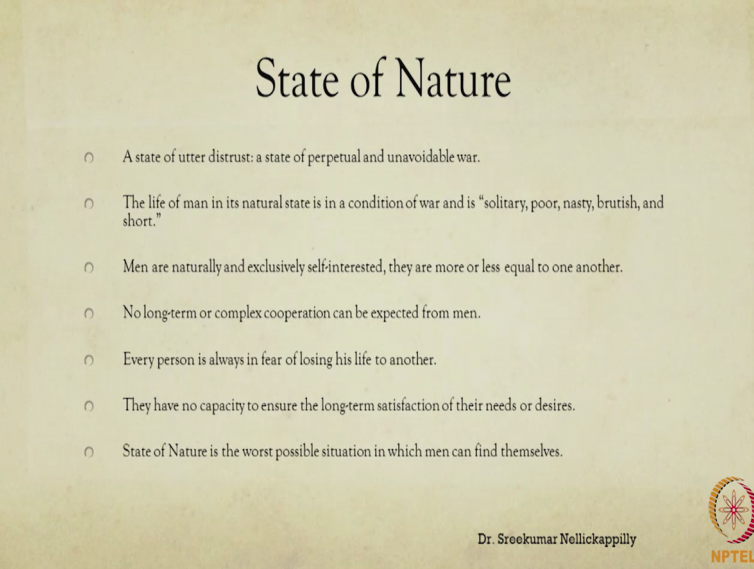
So here we can see how the moral words which conventional moralists, ethicists would be employing are, can be translated into individual taste or preferences. Say for example loving. Love is treated as a greater value within the Christian tradition and many other traditions. Love is treated as a highly regarded, I mean it is regarded as a valuable moral percent by many ethical frameworks but Thomas Hobbes would say that love needs to be understood as things we are drawn towards.

There is love because we are drawn towards that. So it is surely something to do with us, individually and different individuals might be driven towards different things. And again, hatred. There is nothing which is in an object which makes it intrinsically you call objectionable so that we should hate it. But it is nothing but we are repelled by.

And good is nothing but it is described in terms of our appetites and evil can be described in terms of aversions towards something. So there is nothing objectively and absolutely true about these words, I mean certain state of affairs in this world, in this universe that would make them good or evil in the absolute sense of the term but only for attitude towards them, our approaches towards them.

And here, one very important concept which Hobbes's framework, to understand Hobbes's ethical framework, we need to understand his concept of state of nature which is a very important notion in his framework.


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**State of Nature**

- A state of utter distrust: a state of perpetual and unavoidable war.
- The life of man in its natural state is in a condition of war and is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."
- Men are naturally and exclusively self-interested, they are more or less equal to one another.
- No long-term or complex cooperation can be expected from men.
- Every person is always in fear of losing his life to another.
- They have no capacity to ensure the long-term satisfaction of their needs or desires.
- State of Nature is the worst possible situation in which men can find themselves.

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It is termed as state of utter distress. The state of nature is understood as a state of utter distress, a state of perpetual and unavoidable war because as I mentioned earlier, he treats man as nasty and brutish and selfish. Every man would be pursuing his or her self-interest. So naturally, such a state would definitely will be a state of perpetual and unavoidable war because every man might be pursuing his or her self-interest which might contradict with each others and naturally this might result in a kind of conflict and war and chaos.

So the life of a man in its natural state is in a condition of war and is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. So this is a very unfortunate situation and this is a very, a state of utter distress. We all have to put up with this but we cannot. We cannot put up with such a situation. We need to overcome it. There is reason why we need to overcome this.

Because we are reasonable as well. We are not animals. Human beings are not animals. Since we are reasonable, we can overcome this virtual state of uncertainty and unavoidable war and utter distress and probably arrive at a better situation where we can live a better life, a more peaceful

and happier life. So how can we do that? That is the perceive, that is where morality comes into picture.

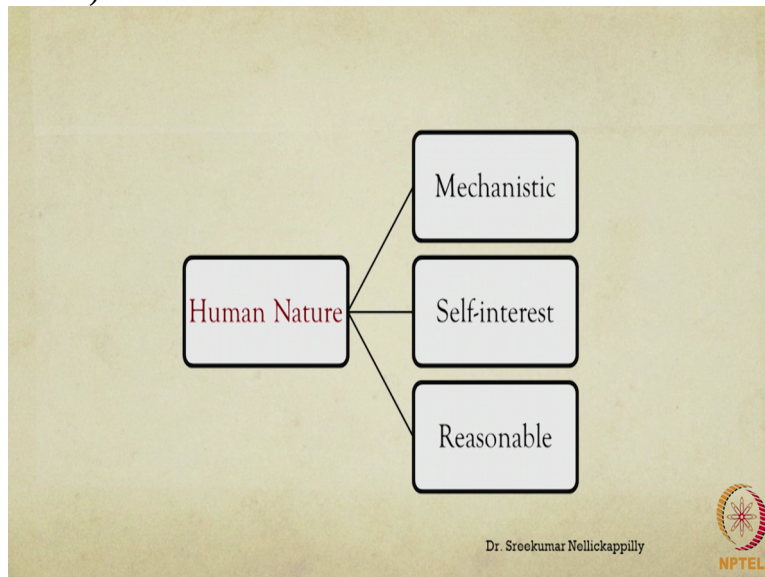
Men are naturally and exclusively self-interested, they are more or less equal to one another, all these aspects, all these factors would make the situation worse. No long-term or complex cooperation can be expected from men if this state of nature is what is the fact. If that alone is the fact, if that alone is reality, then we cannot expect any cooperation, we cannot expect any peaceful coexistence.

Every person is always in fear of losing his life to another and they have no capacity to ensure the long-term satisfaction of their needs and desires because I can definitely, I have the right to do that, my state of nature, assures that or ensures that I have the right to pursue my self-interest, my desire but I cannot do that unfortunately. I need the help of other people, the cooperation of the people satisfy my desires and needs.

What should I do for that? I cannot expect that you know, the people would listen to me and they would cooperate with me and help me for attaining my goals, my desires unless I too do that same for them, I too have to help them and co-operate with them so that they can also attain their goals and satisfy their desires. So we need to arrive at a win-win situation where both of us, me and other people with whom I have to interact with, I am forced to interact with, will have to arrive at a kind of cooperative situation, a kind of a contract.

And it is from this necessity, the idea of social contract has evolved. State of nature is the worst possible situation in which men can find themselves. So this is a worst situation, very unfortunate situation which can lead to total destruction of human kind. But there is something which gives us hope. As far as human nature is concerned, Hobbes says that there are at least 3 factors which we need to understand which constitute human nature.

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The 1<sup>st</sup> one is, its mechanistic nature or its mechanistic aspect. The 2<sup>nd</sup> one is its self-interestedness. Every human being is self-interested. So these 2 aspects we have already explained. But there is something else, something more than that, something more than that that is the reasonable. Human beings are reasonable creatures. And this rationality in us enable us to pursue a long-lasting peace and sustainability in our peaceful state of affairs.

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## Humans are Self-interested

- All men pursue only what their own individually best interests.
- Men are mechanistically drawn to that which they desire and repelled by that to which they are averse.
- Everything we do is motivated solely by the desire to better our own situations and satisfy our desires.

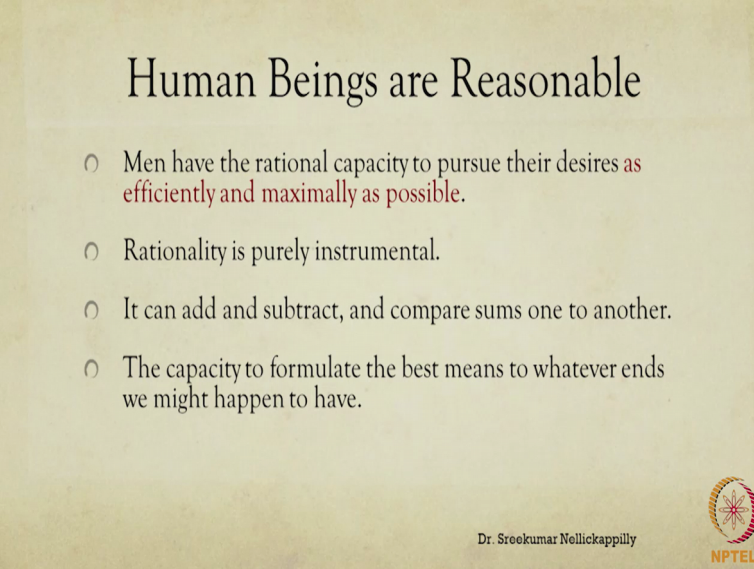
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So all men pursue only what their own individual interests interests. Men are mechanistically drawn to that which they desire and repelled by that to which they averse. Everything we do is

motivated solely by the desire to better our own situations and satisfy our desires. These are all aspects which naturally emanate from our fundamental nature which is rooted in self-interest. That is true. But at the same time, they are also reasonable.

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The slide features a title 'Human Beings are Reasonable' at the top. Below it is a bulleted list of four points. The first point is highlighted in red. At the bottom right, there is a logo for NPTEL and the name 'Dr. Sroekumar Nollickappilly'.

## Human Beings are Reasonable

- Men have the rational capacity to pursue their desires **as efficiently and maximally as possible.**
- Rationality is purely instrumental.
- It can add and subtract, and compare sums one to another.
- The capacity to formulate the best means to whatever ends we might happen to have.

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Men have the rational capacity to post their desires as efficiently and maximally as possible. Every creature has the ability to pursue their desires but men can do that efficiently and maximally as possible. So this is where the rational aspect plays a very key role. Rationality is purely instrumental. It enables us to understand situations by evaluating, by taking into account the complexities of the situation in which it is involved.

We can add, subtract and compare and see what is the best outcome. So this is where rationality plays. The capacity to formulate the best means to whatever ends we might happen to have. Something which we can attain. What is that? The happiest, I mean the satisfaction, the reasonable satisfaction of our desires can be attained by entering into a contract. Reason salvages us from the perpetual state of distress. How do we do that?




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## Escape from Natural State

- Reason enables us to see the laws of nature that help us to escape the State of Nature and create a civil society.
- Each man be willing to pursue peace when others are willing to do the same.
- Also retains the right to continue to pursue war when others do not pursue peace.
- Construct a Social Contract that will save them from the uncertainties of the State of Nature.

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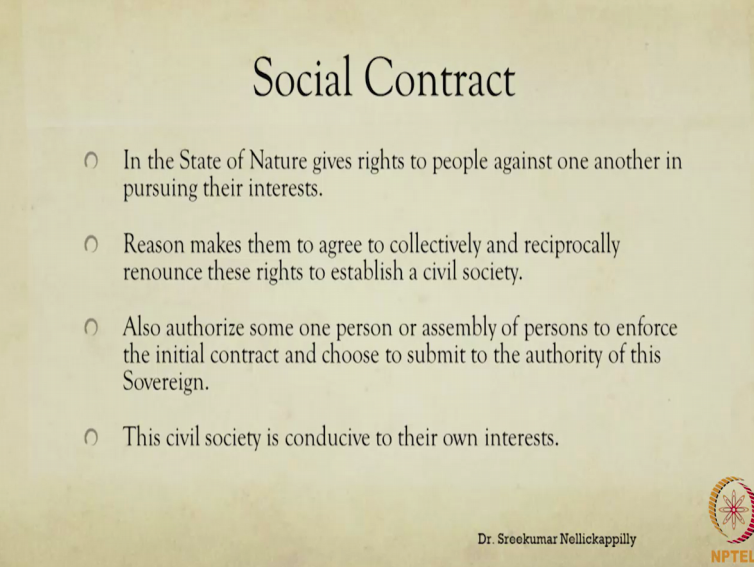
Reason enables us to see the laws of nature that help us to escape the state of nature and create a civil society. So this is very essential. So it is in this sense you know you can see how from human nature, he starts with his ideas of human nature and from there he takes us to a situation or he rather tells us how he followed the state of nature, how many can end up total chaos or total disorder and total distress where nothing is achievable, no civilisation is achievable, no higher goals will be achievable.

Everybody will be a loser. But from this stage we can go to the next stage where we can attain reasonably attain our goals, achieve our desires, satisfy our desires by developing, by creating a civil society with other people. So the construction of a civil society, the establishment of civil society would help us to escape from the state of nature. Each man be willing to pursue peace when others are willing to do the same because these are all universal facts that every man seeks peace, every man wants peace, every man wants the satisfaction of his or her desires.

And this is passed only by satisfying one's desires, one can be peaceful. And since every human being desires to have peace which is possible only by establishing a civil society between cooperation and help and assistance of other people. Then you know where each man will be willing to pursue peace with others. Also, retains the right. At the same time, you know since it is rational, we also retain the right to continue to pursue war when others do not pursue peace.

So there is a possibility that this peace might down at any moment and the moment it breaks down, contract also will break down. So contract is a purely conventional thing. It is nothing absolute in it. Construct a social contract that will save man from the uncertainties of the state of nature. So social contract becomes the central principle, notion of Hobbesian political theories. So we have arrived at from his conception of human nature, we have arrived at an understanding of his ethics and from there he, now we are gradually moving to towards an understanding of Hobbes political theory which is rooted in the concept of a social contract.

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The slide is titled "Social Contract" in a large, black, serif font. Below the title, there are four bullet points, each starting with a small circle. The text of the bullet points is as follows:

- In the State of Nature gives rights to people against one another in pursuing their interests.
- Reason makes them to agree to collectively and reciprocally renounce these rights to establish a civil society.
- Also authorize some one person or assembly of persons to enforce the initial contract and choose to submit to the authority of this Sovereign.
- This civil society is conducive to their own interests.

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In the state of nature gives right to people against one another in pursuing their interest. The then makes them to agree to collectively and reciprocally pronounced these rights to establish a society. So every human being will have to renounce some of their rights in order to construct, establish a civil society. And also authorise, that is a very important point. This one is a very important point.

The 1<sup>st</sup> one is you know, the natural state, the 2<sup>nd</sup> one is how reason enables or reason tells us that it is very important to renounce our rights and the 3<sup>rd</sup> one is, what do you do after that and how do you do this. Authorise a person, some person or an assembly of persons to enforce the initial contract. So the contract has already been set but now you need a principle of sovereign, a sovereign authority to oversee this.

To enforce the initial contract and choose to submit to the authority of this sovereign. So reason also demands us all human beings to renounce a greater part of our rights and submit ourselves to a very great extent unconditionally to the sovereign, to the authority of sovereign. The civil society is conducive to their own interests.

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## Historical Backdrop

- England in the 1620s: emerging as a market economy that demanded the displacement of feudalism and aristocracy and recognizing the rights of citizen.
- English Civil War (1642-1648): King and the Monarchists Vs. Parliamentarians over the demand for more power for Parliament.
- Hobbes represents a compromise between these two factions.
- Hobbes rejected the theory of the Divine Right of Kings.
- Also rejected the idea of sharing power between Parliament and the King.
- Supported the idea of power of the sovereign.

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And now, let us see some the historical backdrop. You know as I mentioned in the beginning of this lecture, there is no ethical theory, no political theory, no social theory is free from the historical and political changes that take place. Similarly, Hobbes, the social contract theory is also developed in a very unique social, political and economic context. For that we have to understand the England, in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England.

In 1620s, it was emerging as a market economy that demanded displacement of feudalism and aristocracy and recognising the rights of citizens because in a certain way, the very concept, the very idea of market economy functions more efficiently and effectively with the recognition of individual rights. So that becomes very important. And English Civil War, it was in this context, the Civil War broke out between the king and his supporters want the monarchists and the parliamentarians.

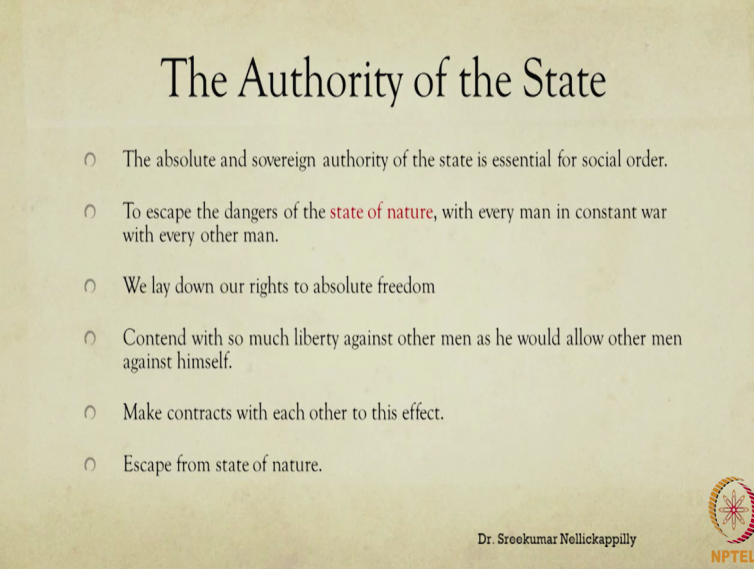
The Civil War which lasted several years from 1642 to 1648 and Hobbes was not actually taking any side. Hobbes was not saying that the king, the monarchists are right or the other people are right. Rather, he was trying to propose a middle path, something which he agrees with one of them to some extent, at the same time very carefully and very importantly distances himself from the perspectives of both these opposing parties.

What he says is that he rejects the theory of the Divine rights of Kings. This is what the monarchists were highlighting, the Divine rights of thing. The King is the representative of God

in this earth and the authority of the king owes to what God has it was bestowed upon the king by God. This is what the theory of Divine rights of Kings would advocate. But Hobbes is not ready to accept this view.

He rejects it. At the same time, he also had very serious reservations in accepting the idea of sharing power which the parliamentarians were proposing. They wanted the king to come down and share power with the Parliament. This was also Hobbes found that this proposition also was equally problematic because in his idea, the sovereign should be an unconditional authority. It cannot be sharing authority. It needs to be unconditional authority. Supported the idea of the sovereign.


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The Authority of the State

- The absolute and sovereign authority of the state is essential for social order.
- To escape the dangers of the **state of nature**, with every man in constant war with every other man.
- We lay down our rights to absolute freedom
- Contend with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself.
- Make contracts with each other to this effect.
- Escape from state of nature.

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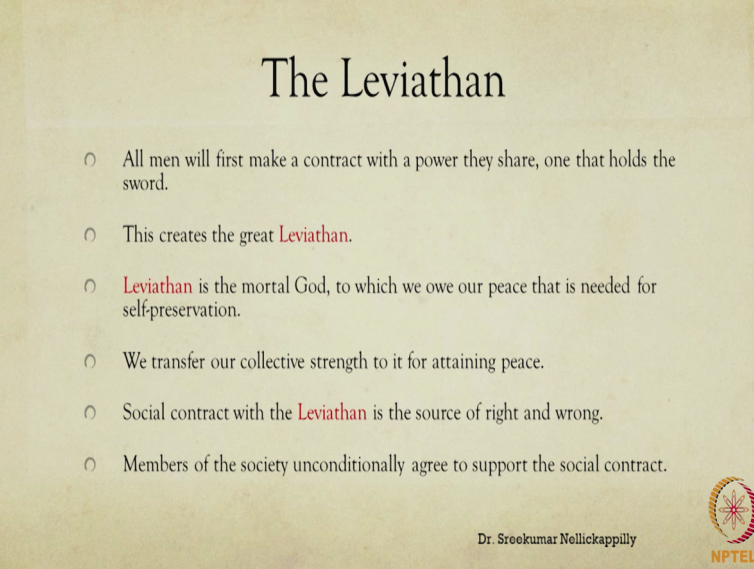
And the authority of the state according to him is absolute. The state had absolute and sovereign authority and this is essential for all social order. In the absence of such a sovereign power, the state will collapse, the society cannot exist and human beings cannot reasonably attain their satisfaction. To escape the dangers of the state of nature. Again with every man in constant war with every other man, we need a very powerful state at the Centre who would negotiate every relationship.

Then we lay down our rights to absolute freedom. For the sake of this, we do that. We content with so much liberty against other men as he allow other men against himself. So, a kind of equal



(( ))(24:49) equals kind of a principle is evolving. Make contracts with each other to this effect and such contracts are negotiated in the context of the authority, the unconditional authority of the sovereign. Escape from the state of nature. So this is what Hobbes was proposing to attain.


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The Leviathan

- All men will first make a contract with a power they share, one that holds the sword.
- This creates the great Leviathan.
- Leviathan is the mortal God, to which we owe our peace that is needed for self-preservation.
- We transfer our collective strength to it for attaining peace.
- Social contract with the Leviathan is the source of right and wrong.
- Members of the society unconditionally agree to support the social contract.

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And it is in this context the idea of the Leviathan is introduced. All men will 1<sup>st</sup> make a contract with a unconditional power they share, one that holds the sword. This creates the greater Leviathan. This you know, laying down the power which each individual has in their natural state and creating a Leviathan, making it more and more powerful and attributing it to all the authority, ascribing to that Leviathan, all authority and all power.

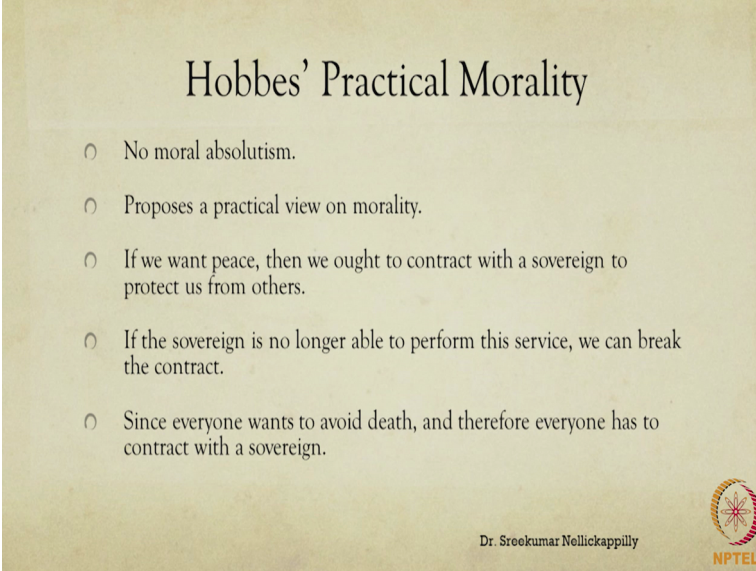
Leviathan is the mortal God. It is a God on earth to which we owe our peace that is needed for self-preservation because each one of us value our self-preservation. For us, that is very important and that is our prime concern and that concern can be addressed, that can be ensured only if a Leviathan created, only if a higher authority to which all of us you know, all human beings, all members of the society would agree to create such a Leviathan who would negotiate our relationships is created.

We transfer our collective strength to it for attaining peace and social contract with the Leviathan in the source of right and wrong. So there is nothing called absolutely right and wrong. This is what we have started (( ))(26:43). The social contract with the Leviathan is a source of right and



wrong, good and evil. Everything is decided on the basis of that. Members of the society unconditionally agree to support the social contract.

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The slide is titled "Hobbes' Practical Morality" and contains five bullet points. At the bottom right, there is a logo for NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) and the name "Dr. Srookumar Nellickappilly".

- No moral absolutism.
- Proposes a practical view on morality.
- If we want peace, then we ought to contract with a sovereign to protect us from others.
- If the sovereign is no longer able to perform this service, we can break the contract.
- Since everyone wants to avoid death, and therefore everyone has to contract with a sovereign.

And it is in this context you know, we would now try to summarise our understanding of Hobbes's moral theory. He proposes a practical morality unlike the Greeks, unlike the Greek masters who would argue for a doing monastic ethics or the Indians who would argue for an ethics based on moksha which is the higher levels of human reality, human experience. Hobbes is proposing a practical morality which is very interesting because even after Hobbes, much after him, we would find another very important philosopher, Emmanuel Kant who is the chief proponent of the deontological school.

He is coming up with a very different kind of idea. He links his idea of good with duty. I mean, we will discuss that later but here Hobbes' perspective is very interesting because he proposes a practical morality that has no moral absolutism, proposes a practical view on morality. If we want peace, it simply says this, if you want peace then you ought to contract with a sovereign to protect you from other people.

There is a possibility that other people might be a serious threat to your self-preservation. That possibility cannot be ruled out because in the original state of nature, every man is fundamentally nasty and brutish and selfish. So in that state, we cannot avoid the possibility of that, we cannot

avoid the possibility of getting endangered. I mean we cannot avoid the possibility of getting killed by other human beings. So this can be prevented only by jointly, collectively I mean submitting ourselves unconditionally to an external authority.

If the sovereign is no longer able to perform the service, we can break the contract. Since everyone wants to avoid death, and therefore everyone has to contract with a sovereign. So the moral philosophy ends in a political philosophy and takes a new turn from there. Thomas Hobbes in that way is an interesting philosopher, is a very important moral perspective which is rooted in the very idea of social contract which later on was developed by many other philosophers.

Now social contract theory precisely tells you that the relationship between human beings are based on certain implicit, unwritten contracts. We all have a fairly good understanding. As members of society, through our process of socialising, we all have a fairly good understanding about this contract, what is expected from us, what others expect from us and what do we expect from others. It is based on the expectations and such promises and such you know deliveries, we lead a life.

And Hobbes theory is peculiar because he says that to negotiate this relationship, to oversee such relationship, there should be an authority, an over action authority, all powerful authority and that is the Leviathan. So we will wind up our discussion on Hobbes philosophy and moral theory here and next picture also we will try to address some of the very interesting aspects of social contractarianism and then move onto the next theoretical perspective. For the time being, we will wind up, thank you.