# From: T. Hobbes, *Leviathan, 1651*

## Part II. Of Commonwealth. Chapter 17: Of the Causes, Generation and Definition of a Commonwealth.

37. Men naturally love liberty, and dominion over others; so what is the final cause or end or design they have in mind when they introduce the *restraint upon themselves* under which we see them live in commonwealths? It is the prospect of their own preservation and, through that, of a more contented life; i.e. of getting themselves out of the miserable condition of war which (as I have shown) necessarily flows from the natural passions of men when there is no visible power to keep them in awe and tie them by fear of punishment to keep their covenants and to obey the **laws of nature** set down in my chapters 14 and 15.

For the laws of nature—enjoining justice, fairness, modesty, mercy, and (in short) treating others as we want them to treat us—are in themselves contrary to our natural passions, unless some power frightens us into observing them. In the absence of such a power, our natural passions carry us to partiality, pride, revenge, and the like. And covenants without the sword are merely words, with no strength to secure a man at all. Every man has obeyed the laws of nature when he has wanted to, which is when he could do it safely; but if there is no power set up, or none that is strong enough for our security, ·no-one can safely abide by the laws; and in that case· every man will and ***lawfully*** *may* rely on his own strength and skill to protect himself against all other men. In all places where men have lived in small families ·with no larger organized groupings·, the trade of *robber* was so far from being regarded as against the law of nature that ·it was outright honoured, so that the greater spoils someone gained by robbery, the greater was his honour. The only constraints on robbery came from the laws of honour, which enjoined robbers to abstain from cruelty and to let their victims keep their lives and their farm implements. These days cities and kingdoms (which are only greater families) do what small families used to do back then: for their own security they enlarge their dominions, on the basis of claims that they are in danger and in fear of invasion, or that assistance might be given to invaders ·by the country they are attacking·. They try as hard as they can to subdue or weaken their neighbours, by open force and secret manoeuvres; and if they have no other means for their own security, they do this *justly*, and are honoured for it in later years. […]

38. The only way to establish a common power that can defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another, and thereby make them secure enough to be able to nourish themselves and live contentedly through their own labours and the fruits of the earth, is to confer all their power and strength on one man, or one assembly of men, so as to turn all their wills by a majority vote into a **single will**. That is to say:

•to appoint one man or assembly of men to *bear their person*; and everyone

•to *own* and *acknowledge himself to be the author of* every act that he who bears their person performs or causes to be performed in matters concerning the common peace and safety, and all of them

•to submit their wills to his will, and their judgments to his judgment. [Hobbes explains the key concepts of that sentence early in Chapter 16.] This is more than ·mere· agreement or harmony; it is a real *unity* of them all. They are unified in that they constitute *one* single person, created through a covenant of every man with every ·other· man, as though *each* man were to say to *each* of the others:

I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on condition that you surrender to him your right of governing yourself, and authorize all his actions in the same way.

[Rather than ‘you’ and ‘your’, Hobbes here uses ‘thou’ and ‘thy’—the second-person *singular*, rare in *Leviathan*—emphasizing the one-on-one nature of the covenant.]

When this is done, the multitude so united in one person is called a **COMMONWEALTH**, in Latin **CIVITAS**. This is the method of creation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that *mortal god* to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defence. For by this authority that has been given to ‘this man’ by every individual man in the commonwealth, he has conferred on him the use of so much power and strength that people’s fear of it enables him to harmonize and control the wills of them all, to the end of peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad. •He is the essence of the commonwealth, which can be defined thus:

A commonwealth is one person of whose acts a great multitude of people have made themselves the au- thors (*each* of them an author), doing this by mutual covenants with one another, so that the common- wealth may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think appropriate, for their peace and common defence.

He who carries this person is called **SOVEREIGN**, and said to have ‘sovereign power’, and all the others are his **SUBJECTS**.

# Exercises

## Use of English

Practicing your language skills

1. **Fill in the gaps: complete the following text by choosing an appropriate word from the list. The first word is given.**

*Leviathan,* Hobbes's most important \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and one of the most \_\_\_\_\_\_\_philosophical texts produced during the seventeenth century, was written partly as a response to the fear Hobbes experienced during the political \_\_\_\_\_\_\_of the English Civil Wars. In the 1640s, it was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_to Hobbes that Parliament was going to turn against King Charles I, so he \_\_\_\_\_\_\_to France for eleven years, terrified that, as a Royalist, he would be persecuted for his support of the king. Hobbes composed *Leviathan* while in France, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_articulating the philosophy of political and natural science that he had been developing since the 1630s. Hobbes's \_\_\_\_\_\_\_was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ published in 1651, two years after Parliament ordered the beheading of Charles I and took over administration of the English nation in the name of the Commonwealth.

*Leviathan*'s argument for the necessity of absolute \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the politically \_\_\_\_\_\_\_years after the Civil Wars, and its publication coincided with that of many Republican treatises seeking to justify the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (killing of the king) to the rest of Europe (John Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* is a famous example of these regicide tracts).

Masterwork – turmoil – regicide – unstable –work – brilliantly – finally – fled – sovereignty – clear – emerged – influential

## Vocabulary

Using dictionaries

**2. Use a bilingual dictionary and find the correct translation for the following terms.**

1. Laws of nature:…………………………………………….
2. Lawfully: …………………………………………….
3. Laws: …………………………………………….
4. **Use a monolingual dictionary to discover the meaning and the use of the following term:**
5. Implement: …………………………………………….
6. Neighbour: …………………………………………….
7. Safety: …………………………………………….
8. **Use a dictionary or a thesaurus to find a synonym for the following words:**
9. To subdue: …………………………………………….
10. To nourish: …………………………………………….
11. To weaken: …………………………………………….

## Research

Using the net to search for information

1. **What does today “commonwealth” mean?**

<http://thecommonwealth.org>

## Writing

Developing thinking skills

1. **Explain the following concepts, comparing them to More’s utopia: single will, commonwealth (latin civitas), sovereign and subject.**