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Reflection on Thomas Hobbes' Ideas

Introduction

Conflict is an interesting topic to study because it provides us with knowledge on its causes and conflict management. In his book *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes represents insights about confrontations and preservation of peace in society. He states that conflicts are the natural condition of humankind that can either bring misery or happiness. The major causes of conflicts in people that have been identified include distrust, competition, and glory.

Reflection

I found causes of conflicts to be interesting from Thomas Hobbes' reading. Conflict shapes the relations of individuals, leaders, or nations. It can also be a facilitator of misery or disruption of happiness in a person's life. The main aim of Hobbes' writing about the principal causes of discord is to promote peace, which is a crucial aspect that brings people together. According to Hobbes, the need for equality among humans naturally contributes to conflicts among individuals facilitated by three principal reasons including glory, competition, and distrust.

People need glory for the reputation as a defense mechanism. Human selfishness can make them attempt to proclaim themselves over others. Therefore, they may try to identify ways of achieving glory, which may be through the need for reputation. If a person does not want to remain equal with others, they may tend to use all kinds of actions necessary to assert themselves over others. For instance, a differing opinion or a sign of undervalue can result in a quarrel:

“Every man wants his associates to value him as highly as he values himself, and any sign that he is disregarded or undervalued naturally leads to a man to try, as far as he dares, to raise his value in the eyes of others” (Hobbes para 7). Therefore, glory becomes a cause of conflict because naturally, a human is selfish.

Further, Hobbes identifies that competition is a cause of conflict and indicates that nature has made every individual equal in their capacity to exist. However, there is the selfish incline within a human that makes them want to maximize their happiness, which is the level of success one perceives for themselves. Competition causes individuals to invade for the purpose of gain. The factors contributing to competition may include perceived unfairness or blocked goals. Once the person has succeeded, he or she may also become a threat to another person thereby causing enmity. This is supported by Hobbes in the following lines: “So if any two men want a single thing which they can’t both enjoy, they become enemies; and each of them on the way to his goal, which is principally his own survival” (para 5). Notably, competition always leads to distrust. An individual may go to any lengths to achieve equality like another person who they are in competition with. They may even use violence to invade the other person’s success.

Distrust causes differences that affect safety, and the need for safety may prompt an individual to confront others. Anything that provokes a fear or threat in the desire of a person to maximize their happiness can compel them to fight the threat by any means necessary, thus resulting in conflict with the object of their aversion. According to Hobbes, a persistent fear is generated in the state of nature leading to distrust and causing people to use defensive strikes against their enemies: “Because of this distrust among men, the most reasonable way for any man to make himself safe is to strike first, that is, by force or cunning subdue other men” (para 6). The prevalence of distrust in our society is a major factor affecting social ties. Hobbes

believes conflicts and disagreements are tearing relations apart majorly due to differing opinions. It causes tension among people thereby disrupting peace in society.

Conclusion

It is evident that conflict is a major disruptor of peace and happiness. There is a need for a sovereign who would offer the required balance for desires of every person to preserve peace. A lack of such a ruler increases the possibility of every individual to be in conflict with the other person because confrontations are always caused by the desire to seek glory, to evade fear for the need of safety, and self-preservation.

Work Cited:

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Chapter 13. London, 1651.

