

## Thomas Hobbes's View

*"In the state of nature, life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."*

The case of **Éloïse Mercier** has stirred up debate in the streets and salons of Paris. People speak of rights, reason, and justice. But I ask a different question: **what will keep society from falling apart?**

People, by nature, seek their own gain and act out of fear. Without a strong authority to keep them in check, they fight, steal, and destroy. That is why we have governments—to **keep peace**, to make people obey laws, and to stop society from turning into chaos.

Now, Éloïse may or may not be guilty of poisoning the noblewoman. The facts are unclear. But what is clear is this: when people start doubting the courts, the nobles, and the law itself, **trouble follows**. A nation cannot run on personal opinion—it must run on **fear of punishment**, or else people will stop following the rules altogether.

Some say her trial was unfair. She had no lawyer. She was tortured. But we must ask: **what is more dangerous—one possibly unfair trial, or a collapse of public order?** If courts seem weak, if they start letting people go because of protests or pamphlets, then the government may lose control. And once that happens, life becomes dangerous for everyone.

Still, I understand that a ruler or court that is too cruel also creates fear—not of the law, but of injustice. This is where the challenge lies. A ruler must be strong, but not reckless. Laws must be firm, but not wild.

The court's decision—to sentence Éloïse to life in prison rather than death—might be a wise compromise. It reminds the people that justice is still firm, but not without thought. That kind of choice keeps the peace.

So while others argue about truth or fairness, I ask: **What will keep people safe? What will prevent war, rebellion, and fear?** That is the real goal of law. Not perfection—but survival.

- **State of nature:** A time or condition without government or law.
- **Authority:** The power to make people follow rules or laws.
- **Chaos:** Complete disorder and confusion.
- **Public order:** When people follow laws and live peacefully in society.
- **Fear of punishment:** The idea that people follow rules because they're afraid of what happens if they don't.
- **Collapse:** When something (like society or government) falls apart or fails.
- **Compromise:** A decision that is not perfect but balances different needs.

## Hobbes - Primary Source Quotes

**Source:** Project Gutenberg: Leviathan

1. **Quote (Part I, Chapter 13):**

"And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of Reason, That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of War."

- **Relevance:** Hobbes emphasizes the need for peace and order, achieved through a strong sovereign. In Éloïse's case, he might argue that the state's authority to prosecute her, even with circumstantial evidence like the jar, is necessary to prevent societal chaos. A just treatment, for Hobbes, prioritizes the state's stability over individual claims of innocence.

2. **Quote (Part II, Chapter 17):**

"The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of Foreigners, and the injuries of one another... is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men."

- **Relevance:** This underscores Hobbes' belief in a centralized authority to resolve disputes. He would likely support a swift trial for Éloïse to reinforce the sovereign's power, viewing her radical associations as a potential threat to order, regardless of the prosecution's motives.

3. **Quote (Part II, Chapter 21):**

"And therefore if a man, by the terror of present death, is compelled to do an act against the Law, he is totally Excused; because no Law can oblige a man to abandon his own preservation."

- **Relevance:** While Hobbes prioritizes state authority, this quote suggests a limited right to self-preservation. Students could explore whether Éloïse's actions (if guilty) were driven by survival after her prior unjust imprisonment, though Hobbes would still likely prioritize the state's judgment.

**Connection to Éloïse's Case:** Hobbes would likely advocate for a state-led trial to maintain order, accepting the prosecution's case if it deters rebellion, even if the evidence is weak. You can use these quotes to argue that Hobbes values societal stability over individual fairness.