

## *How to prevent repression: Equality and Natural Right in Hobbes, Spinoza, and some critics*

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*The natural equality of men is a primary and incontrovertible fact with which modern political theory has to deal. The awareness of the “original” power of individuals thus pushes Hobbes to outline a theory of the limits of power (and of the “duties of the sovereign”), which Spinoza translates into a republican and democratic political proposal. The themes of libertas philosophandi, repression and cultural control (which we study through some disputationes academicae written against Spinoza in the 18th century) can be read as a metaphor for the changes that new social and political subjectivities impose on modernity.*

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### 1. *Equality and limits of power: Hobbes and Spinoza*

In *De cive*, Hobbes provides what can be considered the clearest summary of the 17<sup>th</sup> century theoretical framework of natural law. In the state of nature, all individuals have an unlimited right to everything (*ius in omnia*). However, this generates a condition of conflict so severe that it forces the individuals themselves to negotiate a rational way out, one that safeguards the original right of men but also gives sovereignty to a State able to ensure peace.

This model is based on an assumption of the original equality of men: in the state of nature, everyone is an equal possessor of fundamental and inalienable rights, but, moved by self-interest and desire for glory, each individual constitutes a potential threat to the life and security of others. Indeed, it is precisely the instinctive awareness of this equality that moves men to leave the state of nature, transferring their natural rights to an absolute sovereign and, as is well known, *ipso facto* renouncing any right of resistance.

From what has been said it is perfectly clear that in every complete commonwealth (i.e. a commonwealth in which no citizen has the Right to use his strength at his own discretion to protect himself, or in which the *right of the private sword* is excluded), there is somewhere a *sovereign power*, the greatest power that men can confer, greater than any power that an indi-