In the study of the co-ordination of social actions, political philosophy always presupposes, wittingly or unwittingly, a philosophy of action. As a consequence, it is therefore possible, though rarely seen in actual practice, to make a critical evaluation of political and social theories on the basis of their presuppositions and their implications in the field of the philosophical conception of human action. This is what I wish to attempt to do here, approximately and schematically, with reference to a doctrine that can be regarded as one of the first and main modern formulations of the theory of political representation, i.e. Hobbes’s theory of authority and authorization.

The general presuppositions of Hobbesian problematics are well known: it is necessary to construct a theory that justifies how separate and conflictual individuals can reach an agreement and enter into a form of political unity under a common sovereign. The major difficulty of this theoretical operation derives precisely from Hobbes’s concept of natural right. In the state of nature every individual has the right to use his freedom of choice «as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature». Natural right indicates in the field of this freedom of choice the absence of moral constraints that are not taken from his own reason and from his own judgement. “To have a right” means first of all that one is morally legitimated to follow one’s criteria of judgement in the use of one’s freedom of choice and, therefore, that one cannot be obliged by a law. This ethic is thus without duties, but without duties it is impossible to live in society. On this basis, how is it possible hope to construct a political unity, without which there can be neither peace nor prosperity?

1 *Leviathan*, I, XIV.
3 «[…] because there is nothing to which every man hat not Right by Nature». *Leviathan*, I, XIV.
4 *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, I, XIX.
A careful reading of the development of Hobbes's thought shows that at least three different solutions are to be found, each of which is very instructive and related different variants of political liberalism. Here I will limit myself to recalling these and then concentrate on the third. It is however necessary to point out that the knot to be unravelled is that of the transfer of rights. Hobbes's three solutions are three theories on the transfer of absolute rights. How it is possible to transfer a natural right that cannot be further extended without renouncing oneself?

According to Hobbes, natural law consists of two elements, one material and one formal. From the material point of view it is a complex of powers for the obtaining of some future good and, from the formal point of view, it is the freedom to use these powers according to one's judgement.

In *Elements of Law Natural and Politic* Hobbes considers the transfer of powers to be the fundamental way of constituting a sovereign power. If all individual powers are conveyed to a single individual or to an assembly, these acquire a supreme power that is capable of making itself obeyed by its subjects, whose private judgement will not find it worthwhile to disobey. The subjects therefore do not renounce the heart of natural right, i.e. private judgement, but the use of private power (i.e. the right to resist). Just as in the state of nature the power of each person is limited only by that of every other, so it follows that if all persons but one renounce their private powers, that person will have unlimited power and will be the sovereign.

I will not pause to consider here the multiple reasons that make such a theory impracticable and inadequate. In fact it makes it possible to constitute any public power or even the rights of sovereignty. The state of nature is not annulled or overcome. The sovereign remains with the powers that he has in the state of nature. Substantially, there is no real political unity. That is why this solution is the most rigorously "liberal". Hobbes does all within his power to save private judgement in the government of one's actions, even if it is seriously affected by the increase of the sovereign's coercive power.

In *De Cive* Hobbes speaks less and less of "renouncing" one's right and more and more of "subjecting" one's will. The fact that the subject binds himself not only not to resist the sovereign but also « that he refuse him not the use of his wealth, and strength, against any others whatsoever » is in itself a clear indication of the necessity of the political neutralization of private judgement. The ultimate objective is clearly expressed in De Cive: «I conveigh my Right on this party, upon condition, that you passe yours to the same; by which means, that Right which every man had before to use his faculties to his own advantage, is now wholly translated on some certain man, or Councell, for the common

\[\text{De Cive, V, 7.}\]