

LSU HNRS 2030 / Fall 2016
John Protevi

Hobbes, *Leviathan*

This is a masterpiece, both its prose and its concepts. Hobbes was scandalous in his time, and still is to many people. We'll look at

- 1) his materialism;
- 2) his view of human nature;
- 3) the problem of insecurity leading to war in the state of nature;
- 4) the "laws of nature"
- 5) the solution: social contract

MATERIALISM

1. Life. Hobbes is a rigorous materialist: "life is but a motion of Limbs" (Intro).

2. Sense and desire are motions:

That Sense, is Motion in the organs and interiour parts of mans body, caused by the action of things we See, Heare, &c; And that Fancy is but the Reliques of the same Motion, remaining after Sense ... Imagination is the first internall beginning of all Voluntary Motion.... These small beginnings of Motion, within the body of Man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called Endeavor. (Ch 6)

3. Desire or appetite is endeavor (small internal motion) toward something; Aversion is endeavor or small internal motion away from something.

4. Passions of Love and Hate.

a. The passions of love and hate are determined by desire, not rational evaluation. And those desires or appetites and aversions are either innate or acquired. That means they will vary among people according to their inborn character and their individual experience.

b. The objects of love and hate are ever changing, both for individuals and hence even more so between individuals:

And because the constitution of a mans Body, is in continual mutation; it is impossible that all the same things should always cause in him the same Appetites, and Aversions: much lesse can all men consent, in the Desire of almost any one and the same Object. (Ch 6).

5. Judgments as to Good and Evil.

a. Judgments as to good and evil are relative to the political physiology (the innate and acquired characteristics) of bodies.

But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth Good: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, Evill; ...

b. As radically subjective judgments, "good" and "evil" are not properties of objects, and so they are not amenable to reasoning about in the sense of argument between people why they should call X or Y good or evil.

For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them; There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves... (Ch 6)

6. There is no free will! This was one of the most shocking moves by Hobbes.

Hobbes reduces will to appetite: "*Will* therefore is *the last Appetite in Deliberating.*" (Ch 6) In Ch 21 he draws the following conclusions: Liberty is freedom from external impediment to motion, not freedom of the will from causation. Since will is appetite and appetite is motion and all motions are caused, then there is no free will. "Liberty" is applied only to bodies (when they are free from external impediment). Liberty and necessity are consistent; the only free agent when it comes to will is God:

... Because every act of mans will, and every desire, and inclination proceedth from some cause, and that from another cause, in a continuall chaine, (whose first link is in the hand of God the first of all causes,) ... So that to him that could see the connexion of those causes, the necessity of all mens voluntary actions, would appeare manifest.... Men ... can have no passion, or appetite to any thing, of which appetite Gods will is not the cause. (Ch 21)

7. So God is transcendent first cause of the world. "Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World)..." (Intro). God's will determines activity in the world. God is the immortal God which Leviathan, the mortal God, is modeled.

HUMAN NATURE

1. Method of introspection:

that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself ... he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions. I say the similitude of Passions, which are the same in all men, desire, feare, hope, &c; not the similitude of the objects of the Passions ... for these the constitution individual, and particular education do so vary ... (Intro)

2. Power: "the Power of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good." The greatest power is the state, but short of that "to have friends, is Power: for they are strengths united." (So in the state of nature you can have gangs.) (Ch 10)

3. Value: “The Value, or Worth of a man, is of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power; and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependant on the need and judgement of another” (Ch 10). (Among other points McPherson will point to this as indicating Hobbes has imported market society relations into his view of the state of nature.)

4. Temporality of desire, or inability to stay satisfied: the insecurity of the future impinges upon the present and pushes us to find assurance in future access to the things we enjoy:

The Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied... Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later. The cause whereof is, That the object of mans desire, is not to enjoy once onely, and for one instant of time, but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. (Ch 11)

So we come upon one of Hobbes’s most famous lines:

So that in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death. (Ch 11)

This is not because of a search for more intense pleasure but because of insecurity:

But because he cannot assure the power and means to live well which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. (Ch 11)

5. Egoism: In general, in any action there has to be something in it for you (Hobbes is an "egoist"). So acts can gain you friends (which is a power, as they can act with or for you to gain something), or reputation, or they can "deliver his mind from the pain of compassion," or they can give you hope of reward in heaven (the present psychological state of hope of future reward is something you gain). (Ch 14)

INSECURITY AND WAR IN THE STATE OF NATURE (Ch 13)

1. Insecurity in the state of nature; inability to defend property from “invasion.”

Competition of Riches, Honour, Command, or other power enclineth to Contention, Enmity, and War; Because the way of one Competitor, to the attaining of his desire, is to kill, subdue, supplant, or repell the other. (Ch 11)

2. Equality

a. Equality of strength: “the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe” (Ch 13)

- b. Equality of mind: "I find greater equality [here] than that of strength. For Prudence, is but Experience; which equall time, equally bestowes upon all men, in those things they equally apply themselves unto" (Ch 13)
 - c. "Equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends." (Ch 13)
3. Scarcity breeds enmity: "And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies" (Ch 13).
4. Insecurity against "Invaders" of one's property, life, or liberty: "where an Invader hath no more to feare, than an other mans single power; if one plant, sow, build, or possesse a convenient Seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united to dispossesse, and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life, or liberty" (Ch 13)
5. Deduction of state of war from consideration of Passions. We start with three causes of quarrel: Competition, Diffidence, Glory.
- a. War holds outside the state; men "are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man."
 - b. War is not just battle but a stretch of time in which the will to fight is sufficiently known and without assurance of being stopped.
 - c. War is the negation of civilized, propertied, industry: "there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation ... no commodious Building; ... No Letters; no Society ..."
 - d: the worst insecurity: "worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death;"
 - e: the famous line: "And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."
7. Confirmation by experience is possible by introspection of one's habits.
8. Three possible cases of the existence of the state of war:
- a: the "savage people in many places of America"
 - b: degeneration into civil war shows what life w/o the state is like.
 - c: independent states are in a condition of war one with the other.

RIGHT OF NATURE AND LAWS OF NATURE (Ch 14)

1. Right of Nature. Absent agreed upon laws, that is, in the state of nature, you have the right to do what you will and can in the state of nature "for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life." Therefore, you have the right of "doing anything,

which in his own Judgement and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto." You thus have the right to anything, "even to one anothers body."

2. Laws of Nature: reason forbids you to do whatever would destroy your life or your means of protecting your life.

a. The first law. Given the condition of war in the state of nature, the "fundamental" law of nature (the most basic rational thing to do) is to seek peace, but failing to find it, to defend yourself by any means, including war.

b. The second law follows from the search for peace: lay down your right to all things and be content with as much liberty as you would have others have against you.

3. You can either renounce or transfer a right. Mutual transfer is called contract. If there is a time delay in fulfilling the promise, it's a covenant.

4. If you renounce or transfer a right, you have to get something back in return. (Hobbes is an "egoist.")

SOLUTION

1. Hobbes wants to justify the state; he has to show that it is rationally better to live in a state than in the state of nature (such reasoning = finding means to satisfy the motives produced by desires for good living and by the passion of fear).

2. The state is a human creation intended to protect and defend natural man.

For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN, or COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine, CIVITAS), which is but an Artificiall Man: though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the *Soveraignty* is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body. (Intro)

3. Motivation:

a. Desires yield positive motivation (what you hope to gain): "Desire of Ease, and sensuall Delight, disposeth men to obey a common Power. Because by such Desires, a man doth abandon the protection might be hoped for from his own Industry, and labour." (Ch 11)

b. Passions provide negative (what you hope to avoid) and positive motivation: "The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them." (Ch 11)

4. The need for terrorizing power to escape condition of war. (Ch 17)

a. The laws of nature are not enough by themselves w/o "the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed."

- b. "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words"
 - c. Without a common overwhelming power, you fall back on your natural right to do what you will to preserve yourself (that is, anything at all, even to kill and enslave others).
5. The solution: agree to form a terrorizing overwhelming power:
- a. Formation of one will: "conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will." (Ch 17)
 - b. Contingent upon mutual transfer of rights and authorization of action of the sovereign: "I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorize all his Actions in like manner." (Ch 17)
 - c. The agreement is between the subjects, not between the subjects and the sovereign. Sovereignty is generated by the agreement, it doesn't pre-exist it; hence the sovereign, not being yet in existence, can't be party to the agreement, and hence can't forfeit power by supposedly breaking the contract. (Chs 17 and 18)
6. Types of attaining sovereignty.
- a. By Institution (Ch 18 and 19: covenant of subjects among themselves)
 - b. By Acquisition (Ch 20): NB: the rights of the sovereign are the same as in the above cases.
 - i. by Generation (family; we will discuss this later when we read Pateman)
 - ii. by Conquest: what confers sovereignty on the master is the agreement of the vanquished, not the fact that the victor won the battle.
 - aa. A servant is one who agrees to serve the victor and is given bodily liberty and trust not to run away; this person is bound by his agreement.
 - bb. A slave is kept in prison or in bonds and has no obligation to the victor; he may escape, or kill, or enslave the master.
7. Liberties you retain as a subject in a state: you can enact what rights you cannot transfer by covenant. (Ch 21)
- a. You can defend your life, even against the sovereign power.
 - b. You can refuse to hurt yourself upon command of the sovereign power.

- c. You can refuse sovereign orders that are not in line with defense of the commonwealth.

8. Your obligation ceases when the sovereign power fails, for then you are back in the state of nature where you can do what you think best preserves your life and assures future preservation. (Ch 21; see also Ch 17 and Ch 27 [crimes cease when sovereign power fails].)