

Phil 114, January 23, 2012
Hobbes: *Leviathan*
Introduction, Ch. 6, 8, 10–11

The paradox of Hobbes:

- His *premises* seem thoroughly *democratic*. All men, in his view, are naturally free and equal, and no state is legitimate without their consent.
- But his *conclusions* seem entirely *undemocratic*. Men ought to consent to a state in which a single body wields all political power, in whatever way it likes.

Why? The democratic premises create an intolerable problem, and the undemocratic conclusion offers the only stable solution to it. Today, we look at the premises.

Hobbes's rejection of Aristotelian metaphysics: man as mechanism

Hobbes rejects Aristotle's theory of natures for a "mechanistic" or "corpuscular" alternative.

- There are only *bits of matter*,
- distinguished only by *quantifiable* properties, such as shape and size.
- Everything that happens is explained by the *spatial motions* of these bits of matter,
- where these motions are governed by *universal laws*, which govern everything, everywhere.

Since there are no natures, Hobbes believes, there are no natural purposes. Bits of matter move in certain ways, and certain things result. That's it.

Hobbes's rejection of Aristotelian politics: state as artifact

For Hobbes, the state is not natural, as Aristotle claimed. It is instead an *artifact*. The state is a tool that we have *deliberately designed* for our own self-preservation.

Hobbes's rejection of Aristotelian ethics: desire, not goodness

For Aristotle, we answer ethical questions by finding out man's purpose, which determines his good. For Hobbes, man does not have a natural purpose. Instead, Hobbes starts simply by describing what happens. People are made up of matter. This matter behaves in certain ways: there are certain "motions of the body." These motions of the body cause people as a whole to be disposed to do certain things.

- *Desire*=a motion towards what causes it.
- What a man calls "*good*"=what he desires=what he tends to move towards.

There is no fact of the matter whether something really is *good*, whether we *ought* to desire it. There are only facts about what we *do*, in fact, desire. No *justification*, only *description*. Is this coherent? Ultimately, Hobbes means to be advising us to accept a certain kind of state. But if Hobbes is *advising* us, isn't he saying that we *ought* to follow his advice, that it would be *good* to?

Hobbes's rejection of Aristotelian ethics: happiness not the end

So what are the effects that we want?

- Certainly, *our own survival: self-preservation*.
- *Not* Aristotle's *eudaimonia*. Hobbes does describe something called "felicity," but:
 - Felicity is simply success in satisfying *whatever desires we have*.
 - Felicity, unlike *eudaimonia*, is not an objective matter.

- Felicity, unlike *eudaimonia*, is *not* desired for its own sake (but instead for the sake of those other desires).
- Felicity, unlike *eudaimonia*, is impossible to achieve (no matter how fortunate we are). As soon as we satisfy one desire, new, unsatisfied desires appear. “A perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.”

Why do we desire power (=the means to satisfy our desires) after power? Does the problem lie inside of us—in our psychology—or outside of us—in our circumstances?

- If our desires *for ends* were insatiable, then the problem would lie within us.
- But perhaps the problem is that, although our desires for ends are satiable, we find ourselves in circumstances in which we need *ever greater means* to sate them.
- Which circumstances lead to this result? Not our natural circumstances, it seems.
- Instead, our social circumstances. But why? It has something to do with...

Hobbes: Glory

- (1) thinking that one has power and
- (2) liking that thought.

Kinds of glory:

- (a) confidence: based on a *justified* belief in one’s power.
- (b) vainglory: based on a *unjustified* belief in one’s power.
 - (i) merely *entertains the thought* that one has power, as in a daydream.
 - (ii) actually *believes*, but *unjustifiably*, that one has power.

The kind of glory that most interests Hobbes is:

- (1) actually *believing* that one has *greater power than others* and
- (2) liking that belief.

This is a kind of vainglory of type (b)(ii).

This kind of glory has three very nasty effects:

- (A) because one actually *believes* that one has greater power than others, one is inclined to “rash engaging”: i.e., picking fights that one may well lose
- (B) because one *likes* the belief that one has greater power than others, one is inclined to pick fights for the chance to experience, if one wins, one’s greater power in action.
- (C) because one actually *believes* that one has greater power than others, one is particularly vulnerable to being *dishonored* by others. To dishonor someone, as Hobbes uses the term, is to value him less highly than he values himself. (And there are lots of ways to do this! See Ch. 10). When one is dishonored, one is inclined to lash out.

These effects are especially nasty, because in the state of nature all men have equal powers. So:

- one will pick fights with people who won’t back down, leading to bloodshed on both sides, and
- one will be dishonored, since others won’t value one’s powers as highly as one does.

Review Questions:

1. How would Hobbes describe the state of mind of the guy in the headband, with the incongruously Austrian accent, filmed here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PQ6335puOc>

2. Why, according to Hobbes, do we seek power after power?

- What answer is suggested by: “because life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense,” and “Nor can a man any more live, whose desires are at an end, than he whose senses and imaginations are at a stand”?
- What answer is suggested by: “And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more.”

3. This is NOT an accurate quote from Hobbes: “For every man looketh that his companion should value him as highly as possible, and upon all signs of contempt, or not valuing as highly as possible, naturally endeavors, as far as he dares.... to extort a greater value from his contemners, by damage, and from others, by the example.” How does it differ from the original? Why does the difference matter?