

THOMAS HOBBS (1588-1679)

Life

Thomas Hobbes was on close terms with many of the best scientists and mathematicians of the day, including Galileo

their discoveries seemed to imply that all things are made of material particles and all change is reduced to motion of particles

basic premise of his metaphysics: *all that exists is bodies in motion*

two main types of bodies: physical and political

two divisions of philosophy: natural and civil

sometimes called the father of modern analytic philosophy

in political philosophy he was the first to develop the idea of government by social contract

attended Oxford 1603-1608

1610 first visit to the Continent

discovered disrepute of Aristotelian philosophy

after returning to England, met Bacon

thought little of Bacon's inductive method but agreed with Bacon in his criticism of Aristotelianism

agreed with Bacon about knowledge as power to be used for improvement of human society

translated Thucydides into English

warned of the dangers of democracy... civil war

1629 second trip to the Continent began his career as philosopher

developed passionate interest in geometry

gave him a method of analysis and a conception of scientific method

third trip to Continent in 1634 brought him in circle of Mersenne,

who also patronized Descartes and Gassendi

1636 made journey to Italy to visit Galileo

Galileo's notion that motion is the natural state of bodies

fled England in 1640 as a result of the reaction to his first philosophical treatise

The Elements of Laws, Natural and Politic

in which he had argued for the creation of an absolute sovereign

this, at a time when revolutionary developments were beginning to develop

which eventually led to civil war and the beheading of King Charles I

during the civil war he remained in France

in Paris composed some 16 objections to Descartes *Meditations*

led to acrimonious exchange with Descartes

1651 published *Leviathan*, his philosophical masterpiece

he was allowed to return to London that same year

Oliver Cromwell was in power and though he had overthrown the king

he supposedly welcomed the arguments in the *Leviathan* justifying an absolute sovereign

even if the sovereign had achieved power by revolution

though Hobbes argued that no subject had the right to overthrow a sovereign

the sovereign ruled only so long as he had the power to enforce peace and security

after the restoration of Charles II Hobbes was able to maintain the favor of the king

he lived the rest of his long life in England and remained a controversial figure because of his political absolutism and his materialist metaphysics in 1666 when the Plague and the Fire of London brought catastrophe to the land many thought God was punishing an irreligious age and Hobbes was a target of much criticism for his reputed atheism in his eighties he wrote two autobiographies and verse translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* he died in 1679 at the age of 91

natural philosophy

main outlines of his philosophy
method of geometry and concepts of new science of motion applied to man in society
focused on the problem of sensation
what was the nature and cause of sense
concluded the cause of everything, including that of sensation itself,
was in variations of motion
this went against main thread of Aristotelian thought in which rest was the natural state
developed a mechanistic psychology

Hobbes' strategy was to show that there is a basic mental activity, *perception* or "sense" as he called it
from which all other mental phenomena are derived
perception itself is reduced to matter in motion:
motion in the external world produces motion within us
this motion within is experienced as an external object having certain properties
these properties do not really exist in the objects
they are just the way they *seem* to us
so motion outside us causes motion inside, which is perception
if the internal motion remains for awhile after the external object is no longer present
then it is *imagination* or *memory*
Thinking is merely a sequence of these perceptions

humans, unlike animals, are able to form signs or names (words) to designate perceptions
this ability enables humans to reason
reasoning for Hobbes is nothing other than "adding and subtracting of the consequences of general names"
as for *decisions* or other voluntary actions such as walking or speaking
these are all movements of the body that begin internally as *endeavors*,
which are caused by perceptions
when the *endeavor* is toward something that causes it, it is *desire*
when away from it, *aversion*
deliberation is simply the alteration of desires and aversions
will is nothing but the last desire or aversion remaining in a deliberation

thus Hobbes tried to establish that every aspect of human psychology is a derivative of perception
and that perception reduces to matter in motion

Logic and Methodology

theme of the importance of method

Bacon's *Novum Organum*

Descartes' *Discourse on Method*

Spinoza's *Ethics*

all take up the theme of the importance of a proper method

Doctrine of Names

distrustful of the inductive method and its reliance on observations of nature

prudence not to be mistaken for wisdom

wisdom is the product of reason, which gives knowledge of "general, eternal, and immutable truths"

definitions of paramount importance in geometry

"The only way to know is by definition"

"Names are signs not of things, but of our cogitations"

animals cannot reason for reasoning presupposes words with meanings fixed by decision

Universals

two classes of concrete names: proper names and universals

Hobbes' doctrine of universal names crucial to his attack on the scholastic belief in essences

"Universals" is the name of a class of names, not some entity designated by a name

error of those who believe in essences results from confusion of universal name with proper name

misuse of words

Hobbes often considered a precursor to modern analytical philosophy because he was particularly concerned with the way in which ridiculous doctrines can arise from confusions about how words have meaning

Scientific truth

his theory of scientific truth not always consistent

stated with the insight that "true" and "false" are attributes of speech not things

thought that all the propositions of natural science are deductions from basic theory of motion

Philosophy of Nature

his natural philosophy seems to have been stimulated by the problem of the nature and cause of sensation

his theory was that the cause of everything lies in varieties of motion

seems to have been little troubled by the problems of epistemology

he assumed things exist independently of our perceptions

Motion and qualities

like Galileo and Kepler held that secondary qualities, smells, colors, and sounds

all are only appearances of bodies in motion

such secondary qualities are but phantasms in the head

caused by the interaction of the primary qualities of things with the sense organs

this notion of bodies in motion that exist independently of our perceptions of them disclosed by mathematics

deeply embedded in the new natural philosophies of the day

distinction of Hobbes' mechanical theory: extended Galileo's system in two directions
into geometry and one end and psychology and politics at the other
geometry becomes the science of simple motions
paves the way for mechanics

Causation

all causation consists in motion
extended this conception of causation to human actions
to bring about transition from mechanics to physiology and psychology
introduced concept of "endeavors"
notion of infinitely small motions
thus attempted to bridge gap between mechanics and psychology

Hobbes is often called a materialist
but better perhaps to refer to him as the great metaphysician of motion
social life is even understood in terms of bodies in motion, moving toward and away from other bodies

Substance and accident

held there is nothing in the world but bodies
by "accident" Hobbes understood a property or characteristic that is not part of a thing
but rather "the manner by which any body is conceived"

Psychology

Hobbes' psychology was not behavioristic as often is thought
Hobbes stressed the indispensability of introspection in the analysis and explanation of human behavior
Hobbes' view certainly mechanistic
general neglect of epistemological criteria undermines his psychology
fundamental difference between imagination and perception is not one of vividness but is an
epistemological difference

dreams

was fascinated by dreams
tried to determine what distinguishes them from waking thoughts
tried to develop mechanistic explanation of dreams

Hobbes' psychology was remarkable in its attempt to establish psychology as an objective study
untrammelled by theological assumptions
suggestion that man is a machine marked the beginning of scientific account of psychology

Difficulties with Hobbes' account of perception

most serious difficulty is that all psychological states are derivatives of perception
thus if there is anything wrong with his account of perception, there is something wrong with his
entire account of mental states
perception is merely the movement of particles within
caused by the movement of external particles
but *what is it that experiences* the internal movement?

Hobbes' materialism expressed in rudimentary form a view that is attractive to many contemporary
philosophers and brain scientists

namely that every mental activity is a brain process of some sort or another
the difficulties with Hobbes' account is still a problem for even the most up-to-date versions of materialism

Ethics

was scornful of the notion that "good" and "evil" named any metaphysical essence
these words name objects of our desires and aversions
distinguished between short-term and long-term goods
peace was a long-term good and thus
all necessary means to produce peace are good
men cannot have the peace they desire until they accept the sword of the sovereign that will make death
the necessary consequence of breaking the rules that are the necessary condition of peace

Determinism and free will

Hobbes denied that there is any power in men to which the term "will" refers
what is called will is only the last desire in deliberating
only a man is properly called "free"
not his desires, will, or inclinations
Liberty is only the absence of impediments to action
thus there is no contradiction in saying that a man acts freely even though his actions are completely determined
Locke and Hume followed Hobbes on this notion of liberty

Hobbes thought of man as a natural machine
all causes as mechanical pushes
his doctrine carried the suggestion that the behavior of men is not only explicable but also somehow unavoidable
for choices and decisions are simply the manifestations of internal pushes

Political Philosophy

tried to conceptualize the relationship between the new nation-state, which had been emerging under the Tudors, and the individual citizen
the rise of individualism
social mobility that accompanied rise of commerce and capitalism
old medieval conceptions of man in society no longer applied
Hobbes' picture of life a gruesome caricature of an age of individualism, restless competition, and social mobility
with the loss of traditional authority what other form of social control could arise?
The answer to be found in growth of statute law
together with development of individual conscience
civil society could be reconstructed as a simple mechanistic system

in the *Leviathan* Hobbes puts forth a Galilean analysis of the rationale of civil society
thus gives the first articulation of a social contract theory of government
it was an attempt to rationalize political obligation
Hobbes employed the social contract model to demonstrate that absolutism is the only logical outcome
Hobbes prided himself on grounding the authority of the sovereign and the liberty and duty of subjects on axioms of human nature rather than on tradition and divine right

the *Leviathan* is divided into two parts
 the first part contains Hobbes' psychology, which is based on his materialistic metaphysics
 or the metaphysics of motion
 Hobbes' position is "psychological egoism"
 people are "hard-wired" we might say to seek only their own self-interest
 this egoism implies that conflict or war is inevitable
 unless there is an absolute power to secure the peace

Chapter 13 of Part I is particularly important for his conceptualization of a "state of nature"
 or what society would be without government
 because of his overriding concern with security and his depressing estimation of human nature
 given the scarcity of goods and the relative equality, or diffidence, of all men
 no one is able to dominate others and thus the "state of nature" is a state of war
 without civil society the life of man would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"
 in this "state of nature" there is no justice or injustice:

To this war of every man against every man, this is also consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law: where there is no law, no injustice.

Chapter 14 of Part I is very important for his conceptions of natural law, natural rights, and liberty
 Hobbes imagined the individual in a state of nature as having an unlimited right to "protect his life and members" and "to use all the means, and do all the actions, without which he cannot preserve himself"
 also had a right to all things:
 "to do what he would, and against whom he thought fit, and to possess, use and enjoy all that he would, or could get"
 thus, in the state of nature:

. . . it followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a right to every thing: even to one another's body.

employing here a strange concept of right
 Hobbes uses the term to refer to both what a person is entitled to
 and what a person cannot be obliged to renounce
 by the "right of self-preservation" he meant not that an individual is entitled by some rule to life
 but that he cannot be obliged to renounce it because it is psychologically impossible to do so
 "natural rights" thus mean something different from what Locke later articulated

his concept of natural law is simply a general rule found out by reason
 by which a person is forbidden by nature (here his mechanistic psychological theory comes into play)
 to do something that would be destructive to his own life

the war of all against all in the state of nature thus leads to the first natural law:
that every man, ought to endeavor peace, as far 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.

the first law of nature leads to a second natural law:
that a man be willing, when others are so too, as farforth, as for peace, and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.

This *natural law* leads then to a laying down of one's *natural right*
a divestment of one's *liberty*

one lays one's right aside either by simply renouncing it, or by transferring it to another
when one lays down one's right, one is then *obliged* or *bound* not to hinder those to whom one has
transferred the right

Hobbes goes on to point out, since the transfer of rights is done voluntarily (to escape the state of nature),
and the object of such transference is thus some *good to himself*
that there are some rights which cannot be transferred or be taken away:

And therefore there be some rights, which no man can be understood by any words, or other signs,
to have abandoned, or transferred. As first a man cannot lay down the right of resisting them, that
assault him by force, to take away his life; because he cannot be understood to aim thereby, at any
good to himself.

he seems to be saying here that one's right to life cannot be taken away
this is the concept of an "inalienable" or "indefeasible" right
Hobbes goes on to talk about the Social Contract
it remains to be seen if there really are any inalienable rights in his social contract

by contract, Hobbes means simply a "mutual transferring of right"
any covenant, or contract, made in the state of nature simply upon mutual trust are, for Hobbes, void
the implication is that there is no power to enforce the contract if it is simply based on trust

thus, only "if there be a common power set over them both, with right and force sufficient to compel
performance" will the contract have any force

another passage suggests the notion of an inalienable right:

A covenant not to defend myself from force, by force, is always void. For (as I have shown
before) no man can transfer, or lay down his right to save himself from death, wounds, and
imprisonment. . . .

he goes on to argue that the only force that can maintain covenants
is certainly not the force of words but either one of two aspects of human nature:
the fear of the repercussions from breaking the covenant
or the glory, or pride, in appearing not to need to break it
and since the latter is too rarely found the only force to count on is that of fear

In Chapter 15 of Part I Hobbes comes to his conclusion that the only solution
to the problem of securing peace
is a social contract in which individuals lay down their natural rights
and give absolute power to a sovereign

he begins with a third law of nature which follows from the second:

that men perform their covenants made: without which, covenants are in vain, and but empty
words; and the right of all men to all things remaining, we are still in the condition of war.

this leads again to Hobbes' conception of *justice*
in the state of nature, where there is no covenant, no action can be unjust
justice is simply a matter of accepting the terms of covenants made

the definition of injustice is simply the breaking of covenants

And in this law of nature, consisteth the fountain and original of JUSTICE. For where no covenant hath proceeded, there hath no right been transferred, and every man has right to every thing; and consequently, no action can be unjust. But when a covenant is made, then to break it is *unjust*; and the definition of INJUSTICE, is no other than *the not performance of covenant*. And whatsoever is not unjust, is *just*.

thus justice depends totally upon some power to force men to uphold covenants made:

Therefore before the name of just, and unjust can have place, there must be some coercive power, to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants, by the terror of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their covenant. . . .

Hobbes goes on at length in the rest of the chapter on the foolishness of breaking covenants anyone who thinks he can break covenants cannot be a member of any society the only way of gaining security is to not break the covenant

Justice therefore, that is to say, keeping of covenant, is a rule of reason, by which we are forbidden to do any thing destructive to our life; and consequently a law of nature.

he argues against the right to rebellion

those that think natural law derives not from the preservation of man's life on earth but rather the attaining of eternal reward after death

and thus think they can break any covenant, and rebel against a sovereign power believing thus that there is a natural law above that of earthly covenants

Hobbes simply dismisses as being deluded by superstition of the supernatural

in Part II of the *Leviathan* Hobbes articulates his notion of the social contract and justifies absolutism as the only rationally defensible form of government

basically Hobbes argues that only absolute power is powerful enough to secure peace for "covenants, without the sword, are but words"

the only human beings can escape this state of war is to erect a common power over all and the only way to do this is to confer all power upon one man or upon one assembly of men (he does not require an absolute monarchy) what is needed is some absolute power, whether of the one, the few, or the many, in which all individual wills are united into one will

This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every many with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, *I authorise and give up my right of governing myself, 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*. This done, the multitude so united in one person, is called a COMMONWEALTH, in Latin CIVITAS. That is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that *mortal god*, to which we owe under the *immortal God*, our peace and defence.

In Chapter 18 Hobbes lays out the rights of the sovereign

it is clear that in Hobbes' version of the contract the sovereign

has absolute power—no one has the right to remove him

is above the contract (above the law)

has the right to determine who gets to speak to the public (control of media)

and what books can be published (what doctrines are acceptable)

the right to determine moral and civil law (there is no possibility of conflict between moral and civil law)

the right of judicature (there is no independent judiciary)

the right to go to war whenever he determines it necessary (the sovereign is always commander-in-chief of the military)

the right to choose all counselors, magistrates, ministers (noting like congressional approval)

the right to dole out rewards and punishment as he sees fit

the right to determine all honours (what titles are to be given to whom)

Chapter 21 is important for Hobbes determination of the rights and liberties of the subject

“what are the things, which though commanded by the sovereign, he may nevertheless, without injustice, refuse to do”

he seems to argue that the right to life, or the “right to self-preservation” cannot be transferred and is thus inalienable

“that every subject has liberty in all those things, the right whereof cannot by covenant be transferred” thus

1) the subject has the liberty to disobey any sovereign command to kill, wound or maim himself, or not resist those who assault him, or to abstain from any necessity without which he cannot live

2) a subject has liberty to remain silent and not accuse himself (even of a crime he committed) because no man can be obliged by covenant to accuse himself

3) a difficult passage here on whether a subject ever has the right to refuse the order to go to war

he seems to say that one might refuse without injustice an order to go to war

even though the sovereign has the right to punish the refusal with death

to avoid battle is not injustice, but cowardice

unless the defence of the commonwealth itself is at stake

in that case everyone is obliged

but it is not clear, if the sovereign is above the law, and cannot, by his definition of justice, be accused of injustice how the individual retains any rights at all

no man has liberty to resist the sword of the commonwealth in defence of another man whether innocent or guilty because such liberty undermines the authority of the sovereign

in Chapter 29 Hobbes lists the things that weaken a sovereign and thus lead to the dissolution of the commonwealth

here it is made clear that the sovereign’s power must be absolute must be above civil law

individuals have no right to make themselves judges of good and evil

again, no conflict between moral and civil law is possible

thus we should have no conscience in Hobbes’ commonwealth

and for Hobbes there should be no separation of powers

separation of power leads to danger of civil war and dissolution of the commonwealth