

## Phil 2, February 24 and March 1, 2011

### Hobbes's rejection of Aristotelian natural purposes

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.

Aristotle answers the question, "Why should we be moral?" by appealing to our natural purpose. But if Hobbes denies that we have a natural purpose, then how can he answer the question?

### Hobbes's descriptive approach to the question, "Why should we be moral?"

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*.

### Hobbes's "Felicity"

So what is the effect that we want? *Not* happiness. The closest thing in Hobbes to Aristotle's eudaimonia, or Bentham's pleasure is "felicity." Felicity is simply success in satisfying whatever desires we have.

- Felicity isn't something, like eudaimonia or pleasure, that we desire for its own sake.
- And we can never achieve felicity, because as soon as we satisfy one desire, new 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 within us—in our psychology—or without 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? We will see next time. It has something to do with...

### Hobbes's "Glory"

- (1) having the thought that we have power and
- (2) liking that thought.

Kinds of glory:

- (a) confidence: based on a *justified* belief in one's power.
- (b) vainglory: based on an *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:

- (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 one 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. When one is dishonored, one is inclined to extort honor by force.

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.

**Hobbes's aim in Ch. 13:** to show that the state of *nature*—the state in which a certain *artifact*, namely a *sovereign*, is missing—is a state of war.

### Natural equality

- Of course, there are physical and intellectual differences.
- But all men are equal in the sense that that none of us is *so vastly* superior to the rest of us in his physical or intellectual abilities that he can be reasonably assured that he will *not be killed* by the rest of us. Even if I cannot win a fair fight with you, I can win through deception or number: “secret machination” or “confederacy with others.”
- By “men” here, Hobbes does *not* mean, as many of his contemporaries would have meant, “male human beings.” Hobbes rejects the Aristotelian view that men are naturally superior to women and hence have legitimate authority over them. Why? Because no man can be reasonably assured that women won't kill him!

### Competition

- People often desire the same things.
- If there were obvious, significant differences in natural ability, then the weak would surrender to the strong without a fight.
- But there are no such differences. Everyone has reason to think that he might win.

- So people “attempteth,” and attempteth to repel attempts.

### Diffidence

- Even if I haven’t yet faced competition, I recognize that I might in the future.
- Should I wait for an attack, or should I make a preemptive strike = “anticipation”?
- If I sit back, then my adversaries can only grow stronger, by subduing others.
- But if I go on the attack, then my initial adversaries will be relatively weak,
- and by subduing them and exploiting their resources, I will be at an advantage with respect to my subsequent adversaries.
- My adversaries will think the same way.
- So, I can expect them to go on the attack = mutual distrust, or “diffidence.”
- So, the best I can do is to beat them to it.

### Glory

- Those given to (vain)glory will attack because they overestimate their abilities,
- and because they enjoy the experience of subduing others,
- and because they are easily dishonored.
- The presence of such people in our midst only reinforces our decision to anticipate.

These three causes—competition, diffidence, and glory—make the state of nature a state of war, with the famous consequence that human life within it is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

To leave this state of war, we need to leave the state of nature. If no *natural* man has is so vastly superior to the rest to effectively deter them from going on the attack, we need to devise an *artificial* man who has this power: the *sovereign*.

### Interpretation 1: Knowledge and desire for survival suffice for war

Why does it raise each person’s chances of survival to go on the attack? After all, if *no one* goes on the attack, then *everyone’s* chances of survival will be better than if *everyone* goes on the attack. So how can it *improve* each person’s chances of survival to contribute to a situation in which his own chances of survival are *definitely worse*?

*State of Nature Game: Interpretation 1*

	<i>If the other guy sat still</i>	<i>If the other guy went on the attack</i>
<i>If you sit still</i>	+\$50, +\$50	-\$20, +\$100
<i>If you attack</i>	+\$100, -\$20	+\$1, +\$1

You should go on the attack *no matter what* the other guy does.

How does the sovereign remedy this situation? By changing each person’s situation so that it no longer promotes his self-preservation to go on the attack. In particular, by credibly threatening to punish anyone who gets out of line.

*The Commonwealth Game*

	<i>If the other guy obeys</i>	<i>If the other guy rebels</i>

<i>If you obey</i>	+\$20, +\$20	+\$10, -\$100
<i>If you rebel</i>	-\$100, +\$10	+\$1, +\$1

### Interpretation 2: Glory is necessary for war

Why should the state of nature game have the payoffs described? After all, if you *know* that the other guy is your natural equal, then you know that you risk your self-preservation in attacking.

#### *State of Nature Game: Reinterpretation of 1*

	<i>If the other sat still</i>	<i>If the other went on the attack</i>
<i>If you sit still</i>	+\$20, +\$20	-\$40, +\$10
<i>If you attack</i>	+\$10, -\$40	+\$1, +\$1

- You should go on the attack *only if* the other guy went on the attack.
- Why should *this* state of nature be a state of war?
- Why expect that the other guy *will* go on the attack?
- Because of competition? But why is there competition?
- Because of the insatiable “desire of power after power”? But why is there this desire?
- Because of competition? But why is there competition? Because there is the insatiable desire for power after power.
- How does the vicious cycle get started?

Because some people are afflicted with glory. They (i) desire something other than self-preservation, such as the thrill of victory or not being dishonored, and (ii) believe that they are more powerful than you. To them, the payoffs look different:

#### *State of Nature Game: Interpretation 2*

	<i>If the other guy sits still</i>	<i>If the other guy goes on the attack</i>
<i>If you sit still</i>	+\$20, +\$20	-\$40, <b>+\$50</b>
<i>If you attack</i>	+\$10, -\$40	+\$1, +\$1

Now other guy is inclined to go on the attack, *no matter what you do*.

Although the other guy attacks because he desires something other than survival and does not know that you are just as powerful, you may go on the attack even though—indeed, because—you desire your survival and you know that you are just as powerful.

The root of the problem is glory. How do we get rid of it? The sovereign: our artificial Leviathan. It...

1. ... makes potential gloryseekers feel small by comparison, so they don't get it into their heads that they are more powerful than other individuals.
2. ... makes it so certain that, if they disobey, they will die, that it becomes a bad bargain to risk death for a chance of enjoying the pleasures of conquest.

### Right and Laws of Nature:

A *law of nature* “requires” us to do what we believe we need to do in order to survive...  
...but this just means that we *will* do what we believe we need to do in order to survive.

The *right of nature* “allows” us to do what we believe we need to in order to survive...

...but this just means that there is no law forbidding us from doing what we believe we need to do in order to survive...

...but this just means that it is *not* the case that we will *not* do what we believe we need to in order to survive.

*First Problem:* How is Hobbes *advising* us by telling us about the right and laws of nature, if these are simply claims about how we *in fact* behave? Shouldn't advice say that we *ought* to follow these laws?

The specific laws of nature are essentially causal claims of the form: this kind of action, e.g., keeping your promises, makes you more likely to survive. How then can such claims as advice? Because, as the general formulation of a law of nature says, you will do whatever you believe you need to do in order to survive. When Hobbes gets you to believe that, if you keep your promises, you will stay alive, this will lead you to keep your promises.

In sum, then, Hobbes's laws of nature are simply

- (i) descriptive claims that certain actions have a certain effect (=survival),
- that are
- (ii) addressed to an audience that wants the effect.

*Second Problem:* The right of nature and the laws of nature are exceptionless. So Hobbes appears to be assuming that we will never do what we believe undermines our survival. Is this plausible? Consider:

- (i) desires for the survival of one's loved ones,
- (ii) desires for the comforts of life,
- (iii) desires for the fulfillment of one's religious duties, and
- (iv) desires associated with glory: to exercise power over others and not to be dishonored.

How does Hobbes respond?

### **The right of nature**

The right of nature is a right everyone has to do whatever he thinks will help him survive. Since in the state of war, one might think that anything could help one to survive, in the state of war *everyone* has a right to *everything*.

This may seem incoherent. Distinguish two meanings of: "S has a right to X"

- a. S has a *claim* to X  
= *Others* have a duty not to interfere with S's use of X.
- b. S has a *liberty* to X  
= S does *not* have a duty not to interfere with *others'* use of X.

The right of nature

= the fact that no one has a duty to let anyone else use anything

= the fact that no one *will* let anyone else use anything.

### **The first and second laws of nature**

The *first law of nature* is: “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.”

From which follows the *second law of nature*: “that a man be willing, when others are so too, as often as provision has been made for the peace and his own defence, to lay down his right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.”

In short, we should accept constraints on our conduct when others are willing to accept similar constraints. If others are not willing to constrain their conduct, then—the first law tells us—one should not constrain one’s own.

### **The third law of nature**

Hobbes claims that people can, by certain voluntary acts, leave the situation in which everyone has a right to everything.

- A mutual transfer of rights between two parties is a *contract*.
- And a contract in which one or both parties agree to perform at some later time is a *covenant*.

If one’s right is simply an *absence* of a duty to let others use things, then giving up one’s right is *imposing* a duty on oneself to let others use things.

The *third law of nature*: “that men perform covenants made” (XV, 1).

Why is the third law of nature true? How can one, by performing a voluntary act, change one’s situation from one in which it serves one’s self-preservation to interfere with others’ use of things, into one in which it serves one’s self-preservation *not* to interfere with at least certain others’ use of at least certain things?

*First case*: a covenant in which neither party has performed, in the state of war. Covenants become invalid “upon any reasonable suspicion” (XIV, 18). Why? If we do our part, then we leave ourselves vulnerable to exploitation. Grounds for suspicion are easy to come by in the state of war, in which there is no coercive power to compel people to carry out their covenants. This is why we cannot exit the state of war with a simple covenant to keep the peace.

*Second case*: a covenant in civil society. Here we don’t have grounds for suspicion, because there is a coercive power to compel people to carry out their covenants. So covenants remain valid. It does not threaten our self-preservation to keep them, even when we have to go first. Moreover, we will be punished for not doing our part. So it does threaten our self-preservation *not* to keep them.

*Third case*: a covenant, in which the other side has performed, in the state of war. Hobbes thinks that it *does* serve one’s self-preservation to do one’s part. His argument is his reply to the “fool.”

In order to survive in the state of nature, one needs to enter into confederations with others, by making covenants. But if one make it clear that one is willing to break covenants whenever it suits one's purposes, then either (a) one will not be admitted into any confederations, in which case one's chances of survival are slim, or (b) one will be admitted into confederations only by mistake, which is not something one can reasonably count on at the time of breaking the covenant.

### 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* is the kind of glory that most interests Hobbes:
  - (1) actually *believing* that one has *greater power than others* and
  - (2) liking that belief.a kind of vainglory of type (b)(ii)?
3. What does Hobbes mean by: "From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends"? Why does he think that this "equality of hope" is a bad thing?
4. "Hitherto I have set forth the nature of man, whose pride and other passions have compelled him to submit himself to government, together with the great power of his governor, whom I compared to *Leviathan*, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of *Job*, where God, having set forth the great power of *Leviathan*, calleth him King of the Proud" (XXVIII, 27). Why does Hobbes liken government to a monster sent by God to tame the *pride* of men?
5. Why is the second law of nature conditional? That is, why does Hobbes add the qualification: "when others are so too, as often as provision has been made for the peace and his own defence"?
6. Consider Hobbes's fourth law of nature. (In the reading, not discussed in lecture.) What aim does gratitude help us to achieve? How does gratitude help us to achieve it?