Phil 2, September 27, 2006

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*.

Is this coherent? Hobbes describes certain "laws of nature": a list of basic moral rules, such as "Keep your promises." Hobbes seems to be *advising* us to follow these laws of nature, these basic moral rules. But if Hobbes is *advising* us to follow these laws, isn't he saying that we *ought* to follow them, that it would be *good* to follow them?

Hobbes's laws of nature tell us only that certain actions have certain effects. For example, if we keep our promises, then we will stay alive. How then can these descriptive, cause-and-effect claims function as advice? Because, Hobbes thinks, we desire the effects. For example, we desire to stay alive. So when Hobbes convinces us that, "If you keep our promises, then you will stay alive," this information will influence our actions, much like advice does.

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

(i) descriptive claims that certain actions have a certain effect,

which are

(ii) addressed to an audience that wants the effect.

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 a *justified* belief in one's power.
    (i) merely *entertains the thought* that one has power, as in a daydream.
    (ii) actually *believes*, but *un*justifiably, 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), since in the state of nature, the belief that one has greater power than others is not justified.

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.