Phil 104, Wednesday, September 15, 2010
Aristotle, *Politics*, I: 1–6
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 6, 8, 10–11

Aristotle: The relation of man and state

First, the city "is natural" (1252b30) and "exists by nature" (1253a1). Political institutions are good to the extent that they fulfill the city's nature and purpose.

Second, "a human being is *by nature a political animal*" (1253a3). Not simply gregarious (fond of spending time with others of his kind), as, say, bees are.

Third, Aristotle says that the city is *naturally prior* to individual human beings. "Further, the city is naturally prior to the household and to the individual, since the whole is necessarily prior to the part. For if the whole animal is dead, neither foot nor hand will survive, except homonymously [that is, something will survive that we can *call* a "foot" or a "hand"], as if we were speaking of a stone hand."

What does Aristotle mean by "naturally prior"?

- Totalitarianism? The interests of the state must come first?
- A human being without a city cannot physically survive, just like a fish out of water?
  Pro: Elsewhere, Aristotle says that x is prior in nature to y if and only if x can exist without y, but y cannot exist without x.
  Con: Someone might be without a city by "fortune," if not by "nature." (1253a4).
- A human being cannot realize his *nature* or function or purpose outside of the city.
  "Now everything is defined by its function and potentiality; and so anything that has lost them should not be called the same thing, but a homonymous thing" (1253a23–25). Just as a hand can fulfill its *function* only as part of the organism, so an individual man can fulfill his *function* only as part of the city.

  This complements Aristotle's claim that a human being is by nature a political animal.

  A weaker interpretation: life in the city *merely a causal means* to fulfilling his function. It gives him the leisure time he needs for contemplation, the exercise of the virtue of philosophical wisdom.

  A stronger interpretation: life in the city *partly constitutive* of fulfilling his function. It gives him the only possible arena for exercising justice: "the rule of justice is an order in the political community" (1253a40).

Aristotle: natural slavery

Aristotle claims that it is legitimate for some human beings to be enslaved to others. Why? Because some human beings are by their nature slaves, and others by their nature masters. If we consider the way that certain people are, we will see that their function or purpose is to be slaves.

> "For someone is a natural slave if he is capable of belonging to another (that is why he belongs to another)—if, that is to say, he shares in reason enough to perceive it <in another> without having it himself" (1254b21–23).

Slaves are those who have the capacity to receive orders, but not the capacity to issue them. The slave and master appear here to be analogous to the part of the soul that obeys rationality and the part that has rationality and thinks, respectively. Just as, within the soul, the latter has natural authority over the former, so too the master has natural authority over the slave.

Aristotle doesn't think that *every* slave *ought* to be a slave. Some are slaves only by "convention and force." But he did think that *some* slaves ought to be slaves: were slaves by nature. "[I]n some cases the natural slave and the free person are distinguished; in these cases it is expedient for the natural slave to be enslaved and for the naturally free person to be master" (1255b6–7).

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? 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 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* desired for its own sake (but instead for the sake of those other desires).
  - Felicity is impossible to achieve. 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 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 *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).

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 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.

Review Questions:

1. The Preamble to the Constitution says: "We the *people* of the United States, *in order to* form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, *do ordain and establish* this Constitution for the United States of America." Is this view closer to Aristotle's view or Hobbes's view about the naturalness or artificiality of the state?

2. 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

3. *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)?