

# Human Nature and Human Knowledge:

## Part I of *Leviathan*

In Thomas Hobbes' Introduction to *Leviathan*, mechanistic materialism<sup>1</sup> is a central feature of the development of his moral, social, political, and theological views. Hobbes likens the functioning of a political state to that of a human (or other) being. In this view Hobbes was influenced by William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood and the burgeoning knowledge of the time in human anatomy and other physical sciences. Hobbes describes the political "body" and its parts in physicalistic terms and indicates that his work on government will proceed on the basis of cause-and-effect and the model of science applied to physical bodies. Similarly, for his moral and political doctrines, Hobbes' arguments proceed on the basis of a "scientific" analysis of human beings.

It is also important that Hobbes insists that if we will understand what he has written in *Leviathan*, we should read ourselves (that is, understand oneself) in order to know what other human beings desire and why they do what they do. This instruction is an early and clear indication of the individualistic thinking that manifests itself in a number of ways throughout Hobbes' *Leviathan*. With respect to individualism, Hobbes' claim that one ought to "Read thyself" to know the nature of man is of special note. Hobbes' philosophical project depends on the observational truth that most people behave in predictable and similar ways, and if we are to know the nature of human behavior, expectations, desires, goals, and actions, all performed by people to reach goals, we need only to look inside ourselves. Hobbes even says that it is not that difficult a task to do so. But one thing to keep in mind—and something Hobbes himself carefully kept in mind—is that not all human beings have the *same* goals; it is simply the case

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<sup>1</sup> Mechanistic materialism is the position that the only real, existent thing in the universe is matter and that its existence is governed by physical laws of nature.

that all human beings *have goals*. The recognition of individual human goals, not a goal set for all time for everyone (as was common in medieval thought), is a central feature of Hobbesian individualism.<sup>2</sup>

Individualistic thinking characterizes much of early modern philosophy and it continues to be a major influence in our time in multiple areas of human experience ranging from religious beliefs to economics, from human rights to privacy, and beyond. It is found widely in philosophical thinking in, for example, positions as diverse as Descartes's insistence that it is the individual human being who is the guarantor of knowledge to Thomas Paine's celebration of the rights of individual human beings in *The Rights of Man*. Individualistic thinking continues to this day in arguments regarding morals and politics in works such as John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, and in arguments against and critical evaluations of radical individualism in many works such as in the contemporary feminist theory of Virginia Held, in the works of Michael Oakeshott and Alasdair MacIntyre, and in Michael Sandel's very popular works on justice and community.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The liberty to which Hobbes refers with respect to the subjects' ability (liberty, freedom) to do with their lives as they wish is important in understanding the difference between a modern contractarian political theory like that of Hobbes and the views of the ancients (including Aristotle) and some of our contemporaries as well, who believe that there ought to be some common good toward which all people and citizens strive. This is clearly not the case for Hobbes since he denied that there is an ultimate good. But more, Hobbes' statement here is part of a tradition of thought in modern political theories insisting that every person has a right to determine her or his own plan of life, to seek out one's own good. The position that every person has the inherent right to this sort of freedom is a classic statement of political liberalism in denying that there is some pre-established path on which all human beings must stay to reach the good. The good, instead, is to be determined and is determinable by each of us.

<sup>3</sup> For some classic statements on individualism in thought, religion, and moral and political life, see, among many others: René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*; Thomas Paine, *The Age of*

Chapters I through III of *Leviathan* center on sensation, imagination, and the consequences of trains of thought in imagination. In a work recognized in the history of philosophy as political theory with heavy emphasis on a theory of morals, it might seem odd that Hobbes begins the work's main chapters with topics about the origin of ideas and the way the human imagination works. On first glance, these issues fit better in epistemology and philosophy of mind than in a work of political thought. To think this way, however, would be to miss the significance of Hobbes' inclusion of these chapters. Their contents lead to and are important in understanding the arguments he puts forth later in the work on issues as diverse as the question of who should provide counsel to the political sovereign, the impossibility of conceiving of (having an idea of) God, and the nature of science.

Hobbes' position on the origin of ideas is very similar that of the other classic British empiricists whose works in epistemology and metaphysics are usually—and with good reason—more popularly recognized in those areas. While Hobbes did in fact write on epistemology and metaphysics in various works, such as in a set of objections to Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* in 1641, in *The Elements of Philosophy* (1656), and in *Human Nature* (1650), it is his ethical and political thought that receive the most attention. With that said, to omit information about Hobbes' conception of the origin and nature of knowledge and its distinction from mere

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*Reason* and *The Rights of Man*; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," "The Divinity School Address," and "The American Scholar"; John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*; and Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. For some powerful critiques of individualism, see, for example, contemporary feminist ethics, especially the ethics of care in Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* and Maria Lugones, "Community"; Michael Oakeshott's "Rationalism in Politics"; Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*; and Michael Sandel's "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self" and *Democracy's Discontent*. Reference information for these works appears in the References section at the end of the print and online editions of *The Essential Leviathan*.

belief would be a mistake. Bernard Gert, for example, claims that Hobbes wrote on metaphysics and epistemology to dismiss the supposed plausibility of religious views other than his own.<sup>4</sup> While that is most likely not the only reason that Hobbes concerned himself with issues usually recognized as outside the scope of ethics and social and political theory, Gert's view is certainly, as you will see, more than plausible.

Beginning with Chapter I of *Leviathan*, Hobbes expresses the “empiricist thesis” that all ideas arise from—and only from—experience. He therefore agrees with John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume (or better, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume agree with Hobbes since they follow him chronologically) that ideas are caused by real things outside ourselves and that the qualities of real things (which for Hobbes are completely and only material things) cause ideas in us by the operation of their qualities on our senses.<sup>5</sup> Hobbes has at least hinted here at the notion that it is important to recognize the distinction between what we perceive through the senses and the thing itself. In essence, he is making a distinction between appearance and reality, a distinction on which much has been written in the history of philosophy. While it is beyond the scope of this edition of *Leviathan* to delve deeply into this distinction, it should be

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Gert, *Thomas Hobbes: Prince of Peace* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> While the claim that objects have an effect on our senses seems simple and straightforward, it really is not. For an interesting discussion that goes beyond Hobbes' presentation of this process in *Leviathan*, see John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book II, Ch viii. Section 13 (Kenneth P. Winkler, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996) in which he notes that matter is mindless, senseless, and inert and yet he claims that ideas are caused by material objects through the action of “insensible particles” on the senses. If things are as Locke described them, one may wonder how matter could “act” on anything if it is inert, and if it *can* act, how it could be noticed by a perceiver if the material particles are “insensible.” For an interesting and important criticism of the notion that matter “acts,” see George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, “Second Dialogue” ed. Robert Merrihew Adams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979).

sufficient to note here that the distinction makes a great difference in Hobbes' political doctrine and becomes prominent beginning in Chapter V (on reason and science) and in the distinction Hobbes employs throughout the work between “science” and observation.<sup>6</sup>

Empiricism is a “common sense” view often utilizing a “representative” theory of perception in which the ideas we have (the objects of the mind) are more or less copies—however inexact they may be—of things outside ourselves or of some “reality” independent of the perceiver. While other empiricists spilled considerable ink on making distinctions (or denying

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<sup>6</sup> Hobbes shares with other British Empiricists (John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume) a version of the empiricist thesis and it is set against the Continental Rationalists (René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, and G.W.F. Leibniz) who argued also for the notion that there are some ideas in the mind that are “innate,” or implanted in some way in the mind. There are important historical distinctions between British Empiricism and Continental Rationalism, though the lines between them can become blurred. For an accessible introduction to some of the salient features of the positions of the Rationalists and Empiricists, see Peter Markie, “Rationalism vs. Empiricism” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rationalism-empiricism/>). Further, the distinction does not end with the early modern rationalists and empiricists, especially considering the work of Immanuel Kant in *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (tr. and ed., James W. Ellington, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001) and the work of the American Pragmatists, especially William James, in his “What Pragmatism Means” (in *Essays in Pragmatism*, New York: Hafner, 1948). Immanuel Kant argued that the positions of traditional rationalists and empiricists were insufficient in understanding many of the concepts that remained unexplained or were explained in an unsatisfactory manner (such as causation, freedom, and infinity) and offered a revolutionary new approach to epistemology. James, a pragmatist, dismissed much of previous philosophizing on such matters and asserted that the pragmatic attitude was “*the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, ‘categories,’ supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts*” (146, italics in original). For an introductory overview of the metaphysical and epistemological problem of appearance and reality, see Nigel Warburton, *Philosophy: The Basics*, Chapter 5 (London: Routledge, 2013).

them) between primary (real) and secondary (apparent) qualities of objects, the scope of interest in *Leviathan* is not a complete statement of Hobbesian philosophical theses on the nature of perception and the actual characterization of material objects that cause our ideas. Instead, for Hobbes in *Leviathan*, what is important with respect to perception, ideas, and knowledge concerns how they impinge on social and political ideas. In Chapter I, Hobbes makes it clear that it is important for us not to be misled into believing the doctrines of the “Schools” (that is, the Scholastic philosophers who were influenced by the works of Aristotle) that state that things like a “visible being seen” is the cause of the ideas received through visual sensation. For Hobbes, the simple fact is that what we perceive (the “fancy” or idea in the mind) is one thing, and the thing itself, which is the cause of sensation, is another.<sup>7</sup> More straightforwardly put, Hobbes has argued himself into a position in which, as scholar Douglas Jesseph notes, “Hobbes confines our knowledge of nature to ‘phantasms’ or ‘fancies’ in the mind, which he takes as mental representations of an external world.”<sup>8</sup> As the reader will see in the first few chapters of *Leviathan*, Hobbes has taken a position regarding our ability to “know” the external, material world that is as severe as that of John Locke’s position in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In that work, Locke admits that it really is not possible to know the nature of the external world at all (since we are in perception limited to our own ideas as objects of knowledge), but that we can be confident that matter exists (even though we have,

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<sup>7</sup> In the history of philosophy, the notion that there is a distinction between perception and the thing perceived has been problematic, and throughout the early Modern period of Western philosophy, it is much discussed. See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), esp. Sections 2, 4, and 5. and particularly the groundbreaking work of Immanuel Kant on the distinction between phenomena and noumena in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, tr. and ed., James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Jesseph, “Hobbes and the method of natural science” in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 89.

really, no idea of it at all). So we are for both Hobbes and Locke in a sense “stuck” in a world of our own perceptions and all the things we say and think we know about matter are at best not much more than guesses. This is clearly, then, a problematic element of Locke’s theory of knowledge. But it was not problematic for Hobbes.

For Hobbes as a mechanistic materialist, everything in the world is nothing more and nothing less than matter. There are no free-floating minds or souls or even immaterial souls in bodies. There are, instead, material things with material properties that cause ideas in us (other material things with material properties) by the motions of those external objects (material things) that affect our senses. Again remembering that Hobbes’ position is that the objects of our thoughts are phantasms or “fancies,” as he regularly calls them, “Hobbes differs from standard empiricism in that he appreciates that language is included in that which was at first begotten upon the organs of sense, and he explicitly says of understanding that it is ‘nothing else but conception caused by speech.’”<sup>9</sup>

Why Hobbes’ position on the nature of our perception and knowledge is important will become more clear as he builds upon this foundation to explain, for example, why all religious claims are nothing but matters of faith that cannot be demonstrated and that many of the fears we experience are based on extrapolations from our perceptions that are in no way warranted by sensory evidence. Hobbes’ views on perception and knowledge play into his insistence, both in Chapter I and in Part IV of *Leviathan*, that his work ought to be taught in the universities in place of the work of the “Schoolmen.” Hobbes’ straightforward and practical ways of thinking will help to remove us from the prison of our baseless fears and therefore will be conducive to more peaceful and productive lives than we could lead in retaining our fears.

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Gert, “Hobbes’s psychology” in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 158.

Since the empiricist contends that all of our ideas arise through experience, it is also the case that all of the things we imagine (the things of which we have “fancies”) and all of our memories are the product of sense experience. What may begin to confuse us, however, is the simple fact that some believe that there is a measure of difficulty in distinguishing dreams from waking moments, and also that there are people who make use of fear and superstition to disguise themselves and their ideas, leading people to believe claims that do not derive from ideas based in experience. For example, even though it is possible for us to combine ideas of “horse” and “wings” into the idea of “Pegasus,” there is no such externally existing creature corresponding to those ideas so far as we know. The lack of an existing specimen of “Pegasus” does not make the idea of Pegasus any less real, but the fact that an idea is “real” does not in itself provide justification to believe that what we imagine actually exists outside our own ideas. Because there are people who have an interest in convincing us of the reality of things that do not actually correspond to existent things outside ourselves, Hobbes wants people to know the limits of justifiable claims regarding the reality of external things and to be cautious about claiming that the objects of memory (nothing but “decaying sense”) and objects of the imagination have real existence outside our own thoughts.

While Hobbes' words in the first two chapters of *Leviathan* are at least in part designed to provide a warning to readers to be careful in drawing conclusions from their experiences, this does not mean that experience itself is of no value. Far from it. While the train of our imagination is not always predictable itself, there are causal connections between the ideas we connect in our thoughts. In fact, we seek to know (as Aristotle noted so clearly in the first line of his *Metaphysics* that “All men by nature desire to know”<sup>10</sup>), and to know is to know causes. The notion that knowledge is knowledge of causes is a major factor in epistemology (the theory of

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. W.D. Ross, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 1947), 243.



knowledge concerning the origin, nature, and extent of what we claim to know) from the ancient Greeks to the Early Modern period (17th and 18th centuries). However, Hobbes stops short of following Aristotle's doctrine of the causes to the conception of "final" causes that give us, from an Aristotelian perspective, ultimate knowledge of the "why" of things.<sup>11</sup> The reason Hobbes doesn't follow Aristotle's doctrine to this "final" cause is intimately related to Hobbes' conception of the nature of our ideas. We not only cannot know the nature of matter due to the condition of our senses in providing to us only ideas ("fancies"), there is nothing in our ideas leading us reliably to any conclusion about ultimate causes, "essences," or reasons for things in nature (or beyond).

While truly knowing something is to know its causes, Hobbes insists that from experience we have information available to us that produces prudential knowledge. That is, a person who is more prudent is one who has, generally speaking, more experience—and in particular that person has more experience in perception and recollection of those events or occurrences that we ordinarily think of as being causal connections.<sup>12</sup> So, for example, a person

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, tr. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 1947), 122-125. Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes includes the material, efficient, formal, and final causes of all things, and from Aristotle's point of view, the knowing the final cause (the "essence") of a thing is the most complete knowledge possible.

<sup>12</sup> While it is important to Hobbes to make cause-effect relationships a central part of his philosophy, he noticed long before David Hume in *The Treatise of Human Nature* (ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Niddich. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978)) and the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (ed. by Eric Steinberg, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993)) that cause-effect relationships conceived by us through experience are not strict knowledge. By "strict knowledge" is understood information that is beyond all doubt, resulting in absolute certainty. Hobbes makes it clear that experiential claims are certain only from the past and in the present, but we have no ability to "know" that like effects will follow from like supposed causes in the future. David Hume clarified the problem with cause-effect relationships and our knowledge

who has experienced many instances of the appearance of two events, X and Y, occurring one after the other in quick or regular succession is the person who is most likely to be able to express the conviction from past experience that when X appears, Y will follow it. Being aware of an apparently simple fact like this is of the utmost importance in simply getting by in the world. It is through this type of experience that we know, for example, that completely immersing a human being in water for more than a few minutes results in death, that certain kinds of snakes and their bites are poisonous, and that some person or other normally behaves in predictably uniform ways.

From the fact that prudential knowledge is useful, however, it does not follow—even for a person of great experience—that prudential knowledge may be possessed by anyone of some types of things at all. For example, we may believe that we have the capacity to imagine things like the character or nature of God, but for Hobbes, we have no conception of such a being since what we can imagine is only that which is finite. If God is defined as an infinite being, it is impossible for us to have any conception of God.

It is important for Hobbes' social and political philosophy to make it clear that there is no positive idea of God. That is, according to Hobbes (as you will see in later chapters), our references in speech or thought to “God” are nothing more than statements of reverence and not statements related to any idea in our minds. Hobbes notes in Chapter III and later in the work, especially in Part III, that those who claim to have an idea of the infinite or of God are engaging in absurd speech that is probably the result of “deceived and deceiving Schoolmen”

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of them in his definitions of “cause,” which amount simply either to the “constant conjunction” of events in our experience and the psychological expectation on our part that some event that has been in the past attended with another will continue now and into the future to be attended with the same “effect.” But the fact of constant conjunction of events over time or our expectation that one event will be attended by the occurrence of the other is not knowledge, but is instead belief.

leading people to believe such absurdities as that we have an idea of God or that we may conceive of the infinite or even of an immaterial soul.

That Thomas Hobbes was a mechanistic materialist means that he held the position that there is nothing but matter in the universe, that there is no such thing as an immaterial soul, and that, apparently, even God is a material thing. All of these claims, and more, are obviously problematic in a number of ways, not least of which is their conflict with the popularly held belief in dualism that the universe is composed of both bodies and immaterial minds, souls, or spirits. Hobbes turns to these issues at various points in *Leviathan*, and their importance in establishing the political commonwealth and social peace becomes clear as Hobbes proceeds in building his argument for absolute government and for the identification of the political sovereign with the ultimate authority in all matters of doctrine—including religion.

In Chapters IV and V of *Leviathan*, the subjects of speech and reason take center stage and retain that position in one form or another throughout the work. It is speech that Hobbes identifies as the “most profitable invention” for humanity. We use it to remember, to name things, and to speak to each other. Without speech, in fact, there could never be peace or political organization. Speech makes memory possible, and in doing so, it saves labor. For example, the use of speech allows us to be able to communicate useful information to each other that otherwise each person would have to learn on her or his own. Without speech (and writing), it would not be possible—or at least it would be highly unlikely—for us to communicate useful and essential information to each other that makes survival itself possible. Consider discoveries or creations such as matches for making fire. Without language of some kind, even if it were very rudimentary, every generation would have to discover for itself how to make and use an implement as simple as a sulphur match. Language—that is, speech—is therefore not only absolutely necessary to human survival and progress; it is also what ultimately makes our arts and sciences possible.

Hobbes explains that there are four uses and four corresponding abuses of speech. By means of speech we come to be able to inquire into and to know causes; but also by speech it is possible for people to “play with words” and deceive themselves into thinking that what is said and meant means something other than what was originally intended or justified. By speech we can pass on knowledge to other people; but also by speech, especially when used by those who are clever enough to use it in metaphorical ways, we can deceive others. Speech allows human beings to let it be known to others what they wish or will to occur; but also by speech it is possible for those who are devious to lie and claim that to be their will which is actually not so, and thereby to twist language from a helpful invention into one that is not. Finally, speech makes possible amusement (take, for example, telling jokes for innocent amusement and fun); but speech also makes it possible for us, as Hobbes puts it, to “grieve each other.”

It may seem odd that immediately after explaining the uses and abuses of speech, Hobbes takes great pains to assert that there are no “universals.” The problem of universals is, from a Hobbesian point of view, the result of the ways of thinking (and grieving with words) of the Greek and Roman philosophers who were influenced by the works of Aristotle and whose thought continues into the Churchmen (for example, St. Thomas Aquinas and others who are often the object of Hobbes' criticism) in the “Schools.” “Universals” are the supposed “essences” of things, a way of conceiving of the nature of things that is a remnant of ancient and medieval philosophy. Believing that there is something called “justice” (in and of itself) that is above and beyond particular just actions or institutions is to believe in abstractions; to believe that there is something that is “humanity” above and beyond particular human beings is to be an “essentialist” who holds with the supposed real existence of “universals.” Hobbes, on the other hand, claims that “universals” are simply the products of words, that a “universal” is simply some common attribute applying to many individual things.

Hobbes was, in short, a nominalist. This means that everything in the universe is an individual thing. There are no abstract essences, such as “man,” that in themselves exist above

and beyond what is common to all individual human beings. There are, in other words, no such things as “mankind,” “beauty,” “justice,” or “truth” in and of themselves that exist in a realm beyond experience or even “in” individual things. Such terms are something like extrapolations of the characteristics common to all beings that are human, all things that are beautiful, all acts that are just, and all statements that are true. Unlike Aristotle who claimed that there are indwelling forms of material things that make them what they are, Hobbes was—as you will see in his discussion of the concept of human nature—firmly entrenched in the notion that there are characteristics common to things subsumable under a specific sort of abstract heading, but that every single thing in the universe is just that—a single thing, an individual.

Even more with respect to Hobbes' nominalism, where it is common to hear people talk of “things” being true or false, Hobbes' view is that the issue of “truth” and “falsehood” is a matter of misusing words. For Hobbes, truth and falsehood are properties of speech, and not of things. For example, it makes no sense to attribute either truth or falsehood to a tree, but it makes perfectly good sense (that is, it is logical and not contradictory in any way) for us to say something like “A tree is a living thing.” The statement is either true or false, but “tree” and “living thing” are themselves, as trees or living things, not subject to any such characterization. It is when people are not careful in speech, and when they do not understand clearly, that falsehoods may masquerade as truth and truth as falsehood.

Here it is important to distinguish between error and falsehood. Falsehood is a matter of mis-identifying things with the use of language and asserting that a quality is possessed by a subject that the subject does not, in fact, possess. Error, however, is the result of lack of method or poor quality of method used in reasoning. It is here that Hobbes begins to build on another theme characterizing *Leviathan*: the importance of geometrical reasoning in the search for knowledge. For Hobbes, in all our inquiries, we should use the insights of geometry in requiring definitions that are clear, complete, and accurate as the starting point of all of our reasoning just as a careful geometer, given correct definitions and axioms, is able to arrive at and demonstrate

conclusions through proofs.<sup>13</sup> Errors in reasoning occur, again, through lack of method or insufficient method. To combat errors at their source, Hobbes is convinced that careful use of language in the form of definitions is the beginning of reliable inquiry leading to knowledge.

Before moving to the concept of “science” in Chapter V, Hobbes makes a point to warn his readers that it is necessary not to trust “books.” The fact that something is written in a book—and this seems obvious, but it is too often overlooked—does not make what is written true. In any of our investigations, all of which use speech (language), whatever books we use must be read carefully and cautiously to check for the accuracy of terms used in them. If they are incorrectly used, we should correct them or start over. In other words, Hobbes is arguing that we have no compelling reason to follow the words of authorities simply because they are authorities and have had their words recorded in books. It is, instead, up to each of us as individuals to recognize ourselves as the ultimate arbiters of meaning and the sole determinants of truth. While this may seem problematic in that it leads to relativism in knowledge (and it does do so), Hobbes is able to transform the problem into its own solution with the creation of a political sovereign.

To claim that the individual human being determines meaning and judges truth may sound odd to those who know at the outset that Hobbes argued for absolute sovereign power in

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<sup>13</sup> Hobbes wrote a great deal on geometry, including a treatise on the topic, *On the Principles and Reasoning of the Geometers* (trans. and ed. by Douglas Jesseph, *Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford UP, forthcoming)). This was the source of much controversy for Hobbes' critics. If his philosophy followed the geometric method (“*more geometrico*”) and his geometry is flawed, it calls into question his method and subsequently his entire philosophy. See Douglas Jesseph's *Squaring the Circle: The War Between Hobbes and Wallis* (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 2000). Also see Descartes' *Discourse on Method* available in *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, trans. and ed. by Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 49.

government with absolute authority to determine what will be published in books, taught to children, and accepted as public doctrine. But this is part of the beauty and the cleverness of Hobbes' works. As we investigate the nature of Hobbesian “science” in the next chapter and beyond, the importance of Hobbes' claims regarding our mistrust of “books” should become clear. In the meantime, however, it may be instructive to see a parallel between Hobbes' distrust of books with that of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In “The American Scholar,” Emerson lamented the sorry state of American society and in particular the unacceptable nature of “education” in his time—a period in which the scholar, instead of being “man thinking,” had become (in a manner of speaking) a book. Emerson encouraged his readers and those who attended his lectures to think for themselves, to regard books, as he put it, the way we should our friends: to keep them close by, but seldom use them. Emerson argued for “Self-Reliant” individualism in all of his major works (including what is arguably his most famous work, “Self-Reliance”), pointing out, for example, that people lose their ability to think new thoughts in new ways when they allow themselves to be imprisoned by the ideas of others and take those ideas as the truth simply because “everyone” believes them or because they are traditionally accepted. Hobbes, on the other hand, was concerned both with original thinking as well as with careful thought. And what Hobbes found in the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and what he subsequently found in the Medieval Schoolmen, was error and falsehood. To combat it, Hobbes argued for the careful use of words and application of reliable method. Doing this is to take a critical and analytical look at the words and writings of others and to “trust thyself” in a way similar to that which Emerson would put forth two centuries later. Emerson and Hobbes did not have the exact same ideas about books, the words and ideas of others, and the amount of trust we can put in representations of the “truth,” but their ideas come from the same general source in the attitude of modern philosophers toward tradition and authority. Even though Hobbes published *Leviathan* in 1651 and Emerson published “The American Scholar” in the middle of the 19th century, representing a nearly 200

year gap between their works, both were working in the spirit of modern Western thought characterized by individualistic thinking, trusting one's own reason, and paving one's own roads to make one's way in the world.

Notice, for example that Descartes, the so-called "father of modern philosophy" argues in *The Discourse on the Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy* that it is no longer sufficient (nor was it ever sufficient) simply to trust to the science and philosophy of the ancient and medieval worlds. Experimentation, the science of optics making telescoping possible, and exploration of the world beyond Europe had shown clearly that the ideas and positions taken by the ancients and medievals were to be supplanted by something new and more reliable. Descartes, engaging in a method of doubt, went so far as to doubt everything he previously thought he knew and made the individual thinker the center of the world of knowledge. It is no different for Hobbes in the realm of politics. Just as Descartes broke down the edifice of knowledge to build anew, so Hobbes broke down the edifice of social organization and government in a grand thought experiment to show that a science of politics would provide a firm foundation for social and governmental organization just as Descartes had tried to do for metaphysics and epistemology.

Even though Hobbes' interest in *Leviathan* is certainly not centered on metaphysics or epistemology for their own sakes, they are important—essential, in fact—to understanding his conception of science. He contends immediately that science begins with proper definitions. Remember that Hobbes was working on the model of geometrical reasoning, which begins with definitions from which all reasoning is to proceed and all conclusions derive. Hobbes did not mean by strict "science" what we mean in the 21st century as an experimental process of understanding the properties of natural things. Instead, strict science that yields certainty, for Hobbes, is on the model of mathematical or geometrical reasoning from which absolutely certain conclusions will be derived. What we call natural science, on the other hand, is for Hobbes an enterprise in human inquiry ending in probability. It is important to note this



difference for Hobbes' project since, as the reader will see in Hobbes' introduction to *Leviathan*, Hobbes conceives the nature of the political state on the model of the creation of nature with this very important difference. We create the political state ourselves, in which case we create the causes and can thereby control the effects. With natural things, on the other hand, we possess knowledge about consequences or effects and we reason "backward," so to speak, to what *may* be the causes that led to these natural occurrences. There is room for error in the natural sciences; but for Hobbes there is no room for error when reason is applied properly to the definitions and demonstrations we create. A.E. Taylor notes that, for Hobbes, "scientific method ... has two branches, reasoning from general principles (definitions and axioms) to their consequences or, as Hobbes phrases it, from causes to their effects, and this is *synthesis*; reasoning from the facts to the principles involved, from effects to causes, and this is *analysis*."<sup>14</sup> If Taylor's assessment of the issue is correct, Hobbesian science is the application of the resolute-compositive method (which involves both synthesis and analysis) in the proper way. So, when Hobbes asserts that "Words are wise men's counters" but "they are the money of fools," he is insisting that we proceed at our own peril in valuing words simply because of who said them or when they were said instead of utilizing our own rational capacity to verify the truth and accuracy of what they represent. Ultimately, demonstrable knowledge is of the utmost importance in Hobbes' philosophy because "the commonwealth is created by man, its causes are fully knowable by men, and there is room for a genuinely demonstrative science of the commonwealth."<sup>15</sup>

It is when we are not careful in defining terms and when we proceed to reason clumsily and carelessly, we may inadvertently make insignificant and meaningless claims. Careless

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<sup>14</sup> A.E. Taylor, *Thomas Hobbes* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., Ltd, 1908), 34.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Jesseph, "Hobbes and the method of natural science," in Tom Sorell, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 88.

reasoning and definition lead to a lack of understanding. Hobbes is careful to point out that one of the areas of inquiry in which it is impossible for us to have regular or constant signification or meaning of terms (and so ratiocination is impossible) is with respect to the virtues. We have, he notes, different names for the virtues as they are conceived. Later, in Chapter XIII of *Leviathan*, Hobbes will clarify this notion by noting that different people at different times and places, and even the same person from time to time, will vary in what actions or cases the term “virtuous” applies. In Chapter VI Hobbes clarifies, with respect to human passions, that it is not always the case that the same person will call the same thing good (or bad), but instead that the evaluation of a thing or occurrence—as good or bad, for example—depends on the preferences of the person to whom consideration of things applies. This is why, ultimately, Thomas Hobbes does not include ethics, a theory of morals or virtues, among the exact sciences. Regarding ethics, Hobbes is—even for all the critical claims he makes about Aristotle—in agreement with the ancient philosopher that ethics is not an exact science. Hobbes claims that ethics is instead part of an inquiry into “manners,” which are the subject of Chapter XII of *Leviathan*. Scholar and professor Richard Tuck has commented that there is, then, a “sharp distinction between ethics and politics, expressed in these terms, [which] illustrates the heterodoxy of Hobbes' view of ethics. The connection of moral philosophy according to both the old tradition and our own view of the matter are, after all, precisely such things as ‘justice and all the other virtues,’ which Hobbes assigned to the domain of *civil* philosophy, whereas ethics, for him, was conversant instead with the passions and manners of men.”<sup>16</sup>

The question of just what appropriate subjects of reason and science are is clarified in Chapter V. Here, Hobbes quite literally insists that reason is nothing more than adding and subtracting the consequences of names. Names are those words on which human beings agree

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Tuck, “Hobbes's moral philosophy” in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 179-180.

to mark and signify their thoughts. Thoughts are marked for memory by the individual; words signify socially to provide information and meaning to others. That the subject matter of science is found in words does not mean, however, that those things about which we may be said to have scientific knowledge are simply objects of an overactive imagination or wishful thinking. This is far from the case.

Hobbes is careful to note that we reach absurd conclusions by having insufficient method of reasoning or no method at all. Indications of the lack of method, where method is the hallmark of science, are in examples such as statements in which we give the names of material bodies to their qualities or which use metaphors. These and many other instances of lack of method are cases in which names signify nothing. So it is certainly not the case that Hobbes is arguing that the subject-matter of science is some kind of human invention in some completely arbitrary combination of terms conjured up with any meanings of any kind. Instead, for example, Hobbes notes that since there is nothing in the world but material things, some of the claims we make, even when we have defined the terms used, amount to nonsense and are therefore not the subject of science and reasoning. So a statement such as “The soul is immaterial” is for Hobbes completely meaningless, attributing to the soul a quality that is itself not a quality at all. If there is something we mean by “immaterial” substance—and it surely is the case that we can define it as we wish—the term does not necessarily correspond to anything real. In fact, for Hobbes, what is called “immaterial” is the negation of what is “material,” and since he holds that the only things that exist are material things (which includes the soul or spirit), to claim that the soul or spirit (which is material) is immaterial is to engage in a contradiction. Contradictory claims cannot both be true (and they cannot both be false) at the same time. So the term “immaterial soul” is without meaning and to persist in using it will result in nothing but absurdity and meaninglessness. Therefore, that we do not engage ourselves in contradictory claims is itself an indication that the things about which we speak are potential candidates for inclusion in what is real in the world.

We therefore must exercise great caution in reasoning, especially since we are neither born with it nor do we acquire it simply by experience. Reason comes about in us through hard work in thinking and developing our intellectual capacities so that we might apply the sciences (in Hobbes' way of defining and understanding this term) and use the proper names or terms when we apply careful method (the resolute-compositive method) to create consequences. This, for Hobbes, is science. Those who are capable of and exercise proper method are wise since they are in possession of science.

The next two chapters, VI and VII, deal with passions and the ends of discourse. The passions concern our estimation or opinion of the desirability or undesirability of objects relative to the observer. The simple fact is that human beings are bodies in motion. Some of our motions are "vital" and require no imagination or activity on our part. These, except insofar as they are necessary to maintaining life, are not of interest to Hobbes. Such vital motions include heartbeat, the circulation of blood, and other motions of the internal organs of a human body that we now contend are controlled by the central nervous system. They are the motions that keep a human being alive. But those vital motions on their own are not enough to keep a body alive; it takes additional resources (food, water, clothing, shelter, weapons, implements, etc.) for us to supply the body with what it needs to continue on. The "animal motions," according to Hobbes, are voluntary and all voluntary motion begins in the imagination. Remember that the objects of imagination are those things that are now being observed or have been observed in the past. When we imagine or perceive something, and when it is something we desire, we (expressed in typically Hobbesian mechanist fashion) move toward it. When it is something to which we are averse, we move away from it. Chapter VI of *Leviathan*, in short, is about our desires and aversions.

Our desires and aversions are motions, then, regarding or having as their object those things we either wish to possess or avoid. We move toward those things we desire in order to possess or use them, and this is endeavor toward that which we love. Aversion is the opposite,

and is endeavor away from something, and it indicates that which we hate. Hate and love, however, are not static characterizations of those things we desire or to which we are averse. Because human beings are material things, and our bodies are in constant motion, not all things always cause the same appetites and aversions. All we can say is that at some particular time we call “good” that which is the object of our desire; we call “evil” that which is the object of hate and aversion; and we call a thing “contemptible” when our attitude toward it is that it is either vile or not worth our consideration. Since our judgment that an object is desirable or an object of aversion may change from time to time, there is nothing simply and absolutely good and nothing simply and absolutely bad or evil. For Hobbes—and this is a very important point—the words “good” and “evil” are used with respect to the person (whether a natural human being or sovereign of a commonwealth) or are determined by a judge or arbiter of disputes.

It is at this point in Chapter VI that Hobbes once again seems to have changed subjects all of a sudden as he begins to discuss the terms “religion” and “superstition,” which seem at first glance not to have anything to do with our desires and aversions. But they do. The things we call “bad”/“evil” or “good” are the powers or qualities of a thing corresponding to our aversion or desire. Sometimes, we fear things that are not part of our perception in experience. In these cases, the things feared are “invisible” powers that are either the products of individual imagination or the results of stories publicly known and approved. Hobbes refers to this “fear of invisible power” as “religion.” It is important to recognize that Hobbes refers to fear of invisible power that is not publicly allowed as a “superstition” and certainly not as “religion.”

With respect to our thoughts, deliberation occurs regarding those things we find desirable or those we find offensive, and in either case it concerns our hopes and fears. Deliberation stops at the point at which an action is performed or it is deemed impossible to be done. This means that deliberating about the past is impossible, as is deliberating about any things that are impossible (*i.e.*, logically absurd). Finally, “will” is the last appetite or aversion

related to the action performed or not performed.<sup>17</sup> In other words, “will” is the action resulting from deliberation about those things to which we are averse or those we find desirable.

Regularly obtaining the things we desire is felicity, or happiness.

We engage in discourse, the operations of the mind in thinking, in order to reach our ends or goals. One of our goals is to find truth. Just as the last action resulting from deliberation is will, so the last opinion in our search for truth is judgment. In the process of thinking about our goals and how to reach them, we often find ourselves in doubt. Doubt, for Hobbes, is nothing more than our recognition of a chain of different opinions.<sup>18</sup> When it comes to facts—that is, to occurrences in the world of material things—there is no absolute knowledge. That is, there is no absolute knowledge of facts. This does not mean that because there is no absolute knowledge of facts that there is no knowledge at all. It is simply that knowledge is not characterized by certainty. Recall that if we seek certainty, we utilize science as Hobbes has conceptualized it. The catch, however, is that knowledge of consequences from science (again in Hobbes’ meaning of the term) is conditional and about names, not about “things” or natural objects. Any other information we possess (if it is neither knowledge of fact nor knowledge from science) is nothing more than opinion.

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<sup>17</sup> As Hobbes proceeds through *Leviathan*, the notion that the will is the last appetite or aversion becomes very important both politically as well as metaphysically with respect to the concept of “free will.”

<sup>18</sup> In the notion that doubt is alternation of opinions about a question of what is true or false, Hobbes prefigures the work of the American Pragmatist, Charles Sanders Peirce, who, in his “The Fixation of Belief” (1877) (<http://www.peirce.org/writings/p107.html>), argued that the entire point and purpose of human inquiry is to relieve ourselves of the agitation of doubt. Peirce, however, argues that the best for which we can hope is to reach “belief,” and he defines that as simply what is “unassailable” to doubt. In other words, we reach a state of belief, according to Peirce, when we have reached the endpoint in our deliberation at which we are secure in feeling that the conclusion is not subject to doubt.

Hobbes' position on the distinction between types of knowledge (of fact and of names) and about opinion is important in many respects, not least of which is found in chapters of *Leviathan* on counselors to the sovereign, on the nature of faith and religion, and on individuals' private judgments. Note, for example, that at the end of Chapter VII Hobbes speaks of faith, properly understood, as being in the one who speaks and is different from belief. Belief can be in both the person who speaks and in the truth of the statements made. So when, for example, we believe only on the authority of authors and on what they write, we exhibit faith in a human being, not faith in the thing about which the human being speaks.

Chapter VIII, on intellectual virtues and defects, follows naturally from the previous chapters. If it is true, as Hobbes indicates, that objects of love are associated with movements toward the things we find desirable, and objects of hate are those from which we move away because we consider them to be objects of aversion, it must also be the case that those things we desire, which we call good, are subjects of our own individual judgment. Here, in Chapter VIII, Hobbes contends that desire for power causes difference of wit; and later, in Chapter XI, Hobbes contends that it is a given that human beings constantly seek power and are never satisfied with any power they have at any given moment. Hobbes will later assert that “reputation of power is power” and among the sources of one’s reputation (which is a social phenomenon) are a person’s intelligence, wit, prudence, and wisdom. Hobbes will also argue later in Part I that a person’s pride subjects her or him to anger. Anger can and often does become rage when one person subjects another to revenge, jealousy, or envy—and even when one person contradicts what another holds to be true. Think, for example, of the way in which many people behave when others challenge their beliefs, as often happens in disagreements about religion, politics, and objects of desire. Here, Hobbes is giving us a preview of his arguments about the causes of quarrels between individuals that lead, ultimately, to the need for the establishment of an absolute sovereign power to manage or overrule disagreements. Hobbes is careful to add that a form of “madness” is also characteristic of people who hold

beliefs in religious concepts such as transubstantiation and who, we might reasonably assume, become just as enraged as any other individual when their vehemently held beliefs are challenged.

Hobbes takes a brief hiatus from arguments about passions in Chapter IX. It is at this point where it is possible from previous discussions of science, method, and the nature of causation to clarify the division of the sciences in table form. See Chapter IX of the main text of *Leviathan* for the table. As Hobbes indicates, there are two types of knowledge. One is of “fact” and the other is conditional. Hobbes has already explained at several points that knowledge of fact is at best only probable when reasoning into the future (and only “absolute” when knowledge is a matter of memory of that which in fact has occurred) while knowledge of conditionals yields certainty. In short, subject-matter that is of our own creation—what we create through definitions and the proper application of sound method—yields certainty. Chapter IX is intended to clarify the division of the sciences and ultimately to make it obvious why the science of politics, the crowning achievement of *Leviathan*, is among the most pure and reliable of all.

Chapter X, concerning power, worth, dignity, honor, and worthiness, is very important as an introduction to Hobbes' conception of human behavior. All of Part I is “Of Man,” as Hobbes has titled it, but beginning with Chapter X and continuing through Chapter XIII, Hobbes presents his position on human personality and on some elements of clashes that occur between human beings when their preferences, their honor, and their very survival are threatened. It is in Chapter X that Hobbes' position is alive with implications regarding human dignity and value, both of which are intimately connected to survival or, more specifically for Hobbes, they are intimately connected to avoiding the *summum malum*,<sup>19</sup> death.

Power is, simply put, the means a person has to obtain something in the future that the person considers to be good. Powers are either natural or instrumental. A natural power is a

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<sup>19</sup> *Summum malum* is an ultimately bad occurrence, thing, or state of affairs; the ultimate evil.



faculty of the body (e.g., strength and speed) or of the mind (e.g., intelligence). An instrumental power is, as its name implies, a means to acquire more power. Some instrumental powers, therefore, are natural (since, for example, strength is a means to move or carry things) or acquired by luck. No matter what kinds of power a person possesses, however, there is no greater power, on Hobbes' view, than the power of people united in a commonwealth.

It is important to understand why Hobbes makes the claim that the greatest power is that of people united in a commonwealth. If people seek after things they consider to be good for their continued survival and happiness, the ability successfully to obtain those things and to continue to do so is, as Hobbes notes earlier in Part I, felicity. So if an individual human being is less successful in obtaining ends for himself, and if working in concert with others will prove more fruitful, it follows that commonwealth (which Hobbes carefully defines in Chapter XVII) is a manifestation of more strength and power than any individual or small group of individuals can muster for themselves.

When Hobbes defines the value or worth of a man as his price, which is the amount that another is willing to give for the use of that man's power, the amount given as well as the worth estimated are both relative to the person "buying." Hobbes explicitly states that the buyer determines the price and that the true value of a man is no more than it is considered to be by others. Here, the interests and goals or ends of others who wish to make use of another person's power for whatever purposes they have in mind, determine the value of that other person. Later in *Leviathan*, when Hobbes contends that it is a law of nature—a law of reason and of God—that every person consider every other person his equal by nature, we shall see how the determination of a person's value by another person is a cause of significant strife and disagreement between people. Value manifests itself in honor and dishonor while the person who is valued by others thinks he is valued highly or lowly depending on the "rate" he sets on

himself.<sup>20</sup> Further, Hobbes makes a distinction between being worthy of an honor and deserving of an honor. A person may be worthy of honor due to some power or ability (e.g., a person may be worthy of honor for the ability she has to design a building or other structure), but may not “merit” (i.e., deserve) honor when there is no need or demand for the service. So for Hobbes, being worthy of honor is different from deserving honor.

We are honor-seekers because honor indicates power. Because each human being desires things different from others, there is no common or accepted conception of anything called “The Good.” There is, in fact for Hobbes, no greatest good at all because desires constantly continue and change in a living thing. But, Hobbes notes, human beings experience a “perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceases only in death.” It is not enough simply to acquire what one needs to survive and be satisfied with that. For example, hunger is never completely satisfied except at a particular, given time, and eventually hunger returns. So a person realizes from his own experience that he will be hungry again. Not only that, he realizes also that he will be in need of other things not only to live, but to live well. Hobbesian people are not satisfied with just good enough—they want to be assured of continual

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<sup>20</sup> Hobbes' claim regarding the value of a person is problematic in the state of nature. If Hobbes claims that every person determines his own value for himself, then there is no limit to the value anyone sets on himself either valuing oneself at a high rate or at a low rate (which Hobbes contends is determined also by the individual). If everyone is potentially invaluable or immeasurably, then no one is valuable at all. Hobbesian persons, as you will see in Chapter XIII, certainly do not and would not consider themselves of no value. The problematic issue of the value of a person or a thing arises again with respect to rights in Chapter XIII. Martin Harvey makes the point nicely when he says that “if Hobbesian natural rights are unlimited then it is not so much the case that each is of equal worth. Rather, each is equally worth/less. Put another way: Each in the state of nature has equal *negative* moral standing with every other, that is, *no one* has *any* objective moral standing at all” (“Teasing a Limited Deontological Theory of Morals out of Hobbes,” *The Philosophical Forum* XXXV (1), Spr 2004, 35-50), 46-47.

success in obtaining what they need to live and to live well, where “need” is individually defined by each person. One way to obtain that which has been determined as a need is to get it from other people. And here, tension between people is bound to occur. It is not that people desire to be in conflict with others over what they need or desire. It is instead that we come into conflict with each other “not as the result of our wish to engage in aggression, but as the result of our wish to lead a quiet life.”<sup>21</sup> It is one of the ironies of Hobbes' position—and one he intends to create and cultivate—that the desire to live well, to satisfy our desires, leads us ever more surely toward what we all take as the *summum malum*, death.

Hobbes notes that when we receive benefits of some kind from another person, there are “power plays” occurring such that if, for example, I receive a benefit from a person I consider to be inferior to me in some way or ways, it is acceptable to receive that benefit just so long as it is possible for me to return the benefit. When I receive a benefit (which is a power) from another person I consider superior to me in some way, the story is a bit different since Hobbes contends that gaining benefits from someone superior to me disposes me to love that person.<sup>22</sup>

There are times, though, when what we have received from another person is not considered beneficial but is instead hurtful in some way. It is then that the question of revenge and forgiveness becomes important: If we should return benefit for benefit, should we also return hurt for hurt or, instead, take the high road and forgive the doer of harm. Interestingly—

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<sup>21</sup> Alan Ryan, “Hobbes's political philosophy” in Tom Sorell, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 168.

<sup>22</sup> This is an interesting and important claim with respect to Hobbes' later arguments regarding sovereign power. Simply put, receiving benefit from the political sovereign, who is put in a superior position relative to subjects, disposes them to “love” the sovereign, and thereby engage in the protection of the political state. Hobbes makes similar claims with respect to commanders in armed forces who need to cultivate both fear and respect, and even love, from soldiers, which makes them more willing to follow commands.

and equally important—Hobbes states that revenge and forgiveness are both “hateful” in that the doer of harm hates the sufferer of harm. Hobbes does not explain clearly who is the object of hurt or harm in such cases, and perhaps he did this intentionally. Think of a case, for example, in which I maliciously damage a piece of your property because I am angry with you for some reason. You now may seek revenge against me or you may forgive me for the transgression against you and your property. If you seek revenge, you in turn hurt me in some way. If you hurt me in return for the damage I did to your property, I can either seek revenge against you or I can forgive you. If I seek revenge against you because of some hurt or harm I believe you have done to me, even if I think it is reasonable for you to have done it, then it is the case that you and I are in a condition in which I am now worse off than I was prior to the harm you inflicted. Seeking revenge, in short, in some sense lowers my position in relation to you and, since Hobbesian persons are nothing if not prideful, seeking revenge is just as bad as the original harm I did to you.

Interestingly enough, forgiveness causes a similar problem. If I damage something of yours, and you forgive me, I have put you in a position (and you have kept yourself in it) in which I have taken (in a manner of speaking) the upper hand over you. That is, in damaging you or something of yours, I have decreased your power. When you forgive me and do not react against me to harm me in return, you are in a sense harming me nonetheless since you have now taken an attitude of forgiveness that indicates you have more power than I possess or that, perhaps, you will take action against me later. That is, you do not need to seek revenge to lower my value because, in your act of forgiveness, you are indicating that the harm or damage I did to you is inconsiderable and did not lower your own power or value at all.<sup>23</sup> Even in a case in which you claim to forgive me, I am not sure whether I should believe you.

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<sup>23</sup> An interesting conception of the use of retaliation or revenge is found in Jean Hampton's view of punishment designed to vindicate a victim's value. Hampton explains that there is a sense in which

Power is associated with fear. Every person is on a constant search for power, and Hobbes notes that some of the ways people try to gain power for themselves (and over others) are with lies, ignorance, and deceit. Immediately after pointing this out, Hobbes notes that we have no idea of God (his reasoning for this claim has already been discussed with respect to the origin of ideas) and that people have a natural fear of “invisible things.” It becomes clear in Parts III and IV of *Leviathan* how the fear of invisible things (in addition to the uses of absurd and contradictory language regarding them) allows some people to gain power over others and to cause them to behave in ways that are contrary to their own interests. For now, however, Hobbes notes that the natural fear of invisible things is the “seed of religion” and the difference between religion and superstition is essentially that people worship or fear such invisible things and powers differently. When I worship or fear that power, I call it religion. When you worship or fear an invisible power and it is different from the way in which I do it, I call it superstition. Again, Hobbes is setting the stage for the development of his political conclusions, and they are closely related to the ways in which human beings deal with fear, desire, and power, as well as with the differences in conceptions of those things feared or desired.

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punishment of a wrongdoer restores equality. She writes: “Suppose we gave a victim [of wrong-doing] a ticker-tape parade after [a] crime to express our commitment to [her or his] value. Still the fact that [the person] had been mastered by the wrongdoer would stand. [The victim] would have lost to [the wrongdoer], and no matter how much the community might contend that [the victim] was not [the wrongdoer’s] inferior, the loss counts as evidence [that the victim *is* inferior]. Hence the victim wants the evidence nullified. And punishment is the best way to do that.” Hampton’s point is that one who vindicates himself by doing to the wrongdoer what he did to the victim shows that the victim has negated the claim to superiority that the wrongdoer has asserted. So “punishment is ... a second act of mastery that negates the evidence of superiority implicit in the wrongdoer’s original act.” See Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1988), 105.

In Chapter XII, "Of Religion," Hobbes combines the importance of knowledge (which is power) with religion. Again, Hobbes is paving the way for Part II of *Leviathan*, "Of Commonwealth," and its relationship to Part III, "Of a Christian Commonwealth" with respect to the most powerful creation of human beings: the political state. Hobbes begins Chapter XII by reminding us that we all seek causes because we wish to be able to control the sequence of causes and effects. We naturally reason that whatever has a beginning must have a cause for its existence. Sometimes, however, we are not able to determine the causes of the things we experience and instead imagine what the causes are or we trust those we think of as friendly or wise and we adopt their views. Whatever the case may be, our acceptance of the identified "cause" leads to anxiety about a future time.

Religion comes about, then, either as a human invention or from God's commands and direction. As a human creation, religion is necessarily related to politics and to the duty of subjects to a king. As a creation of God, the seed of religion is divine politics and it concerns the duty of subjects to the kingdom of God.

It may seem at first glance that there is therefore a great chasm between religion invented by human beings and that given by God, but for Hobbes, there is no such divide. Note, for example, that he says that even in the kingdom of God, policies and civil laws are part of religion. For now, let it suffice to say that for Hobbes, all religious beliefs begin with faith in a person others think can help them. The danger, however, is that if the faith others have in a person begins to fade because that person is doubted with respect to the love he or she has for others, when his or her sincerity is doubted, or when it is impossible to prove divine revelation, the religion the person has introduced will come to be doubted as well. In other words, it is necessary, according to Hobbes, for the people who have faith in someone claiming divine revelation to trust that person's truthfulness and virtue. He notes, for example, that Catholicism failed in England because of the questionable virtues of priests and the fact that they introduced absurdities into religion by bringing in Aristotle's doctrines. Changes in religion therefore come

about as a result of priests who fail to live up to the expectations of those to whom they minister—for example, by the Catholic Church adopting Aristotelian ideas, and by the Protestant Reformation. Hobbes is leading us here to his claim in Part III that the sovereign is not only the sovereign of the secular state but is also the supreme authority in religious matters. The sovereign is sovereign, ultimately, because whoever holds sovereign power is trusted; so if the sovereign is already trusted and is, in addition, the interpreter of religious doctrine, revolutionary and therefore dangerous changes cannot occur, even in religion.

Up to this point in *Leviathan* Hobbes has been primarily concerned with explaining the origin of ideas and how human thought works; differentiating between science and opinion; showing how these concepts are related to human power, worth, and dignity; and identifying how assessments of one's power, worth, and dignity—in relation to others and in relation to one's own fears and lack of knowledge of causes—can lead a person to adopt religious beliefs. How these elements of the first twelve chapters of *Leviathan* play themselves out from this point on in Part I centers on the Hobbesian conception of human nature and our relationships with other people. Chapter XIII is the center-point of the entire work because it is the culmination of the first twelve chapters and provides the background for the remainder of *Leviathan*.

Chapter XIII, "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning their Felicity and Misery," as its title indicates, changes the mode of *Leviathan* from an inquiry into the origin and nature of human ideas, knowledge, dignity, and value to an investigation of the "natural condition" of humanity—an investigation in which "misery," and not so much felicity, is the primary concern. In this chapter the need for social organization in the form of government is made most clear. Hobbes' concern is not to claim that there was ever a time in which people lived without any social organization at all, or that we are anti-social or non-social beings who must be forced to live and get along with each other. Rather, what Hobbes describes is a hypothetical condition in which human beings would exist if there never was political organization and into which people would fall should political organization, the state, fail.

Hobbes intended this description of human nature and human behavior in a condition of “mere nature” to be frightening and gloomy. His depiction of human nature is less than flattering, and many of his readers, both in his own time and beyond, considered it unacceptable and inaccurate.<sup>24</sup> Whether Hobbes' description of the nature of human beings and their behavior in the state of nature is accurate is left to the reader to decide. Without that description and the arguments associated with it, however, Hobbes would not have been able to argue for the institution and power of government that develops in the rest of the *Leviathan*.

Hobbes begins Chapter XIII with the assertion that human beings are naturally equal to each other. As unpleasant as it may be, their equality amounts to the ability to destroy other human beings, either through deception or by associating themselves with others to overpower another person or group. To be clear, Hobbes does not contend that every person is literally equal with every other. That could hardly be the case given the fact that he has insisted that one of the ways to assert equality with others is to associate oneself with others “in an equal danger” with oneself to be able to destroy someone else who is considered a threat. As for equality of mind or intelligence, Hobbes' position is that there is nothing more equally distributed in the world than the fact that everyone thinks himself wise enough.

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<sup>24</sup> Ironically, the Presbyterians (some of Hobbes' most vocal critics) are among those who would most easily identify with this state of nature given their views of total depravity of humans in the postlapsarian state (that is, after the Fall). The Westminster Confession IV.II and IV (1646) states: “By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.” This is available in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present, 3rd edition*. ed. by John H. Leith (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982). Some Anglicans would share similar views.



From equality of ability to destroy each other comes equality of hope in attaining one's ends. Even though Hobbes has already noted that people desire different things and often consider something that one person desires to be undesirable, there are enough who desire the same things or the same sorts of things—especially those objects necessary for the maintenance of life—to cause immediate trouble in the endeavors of all to amass whatever objects, things, and powers they think are necessary in their constant struggle to obtain power. What happens, ultimately, is that if two or more people desire the same thing that they cannot both or all possess, they become enemies of each other. They will, in short, fight with each other for that which they all deem necessary to their own survival.

For Hobbes there is no ultimate good (i.e., no *summum bonum*), but that does not mean that there is no ultimate evil. The ultimate evil is death. Everyone seeks to avoid this as much as possible. It is not as though Hobbesian natural persons think that they have the chance to become immortal. That certainly is not the case. What they are trying to avoid is early, dangerous, violent death at the hands of others with whom they are competing for resources necessary (or at least deemed necessary) for survival. Because no one can ever know when “enough is enough,” which Hobbes has indicated clearly in his statement that human beings are in a constant process of obtaining “power after power that ceases only in death,” there is no such thing in this condition as having obtained what is necessary for continued survival.

So even in a case in which there are enough natural resources to go around in a geographic region populated by a number of people, natural acquisitiveness might lead to shortages even if there is only one person who takes more from the common stock of available resources or “things” in that region. So people will be in constant competition with each other for what they need, and the person who hoards resources will create enmity with others simply by doing what he thinks necessary to survive. The point is that the person who does so is creating a condition in which others are now unable to obtain what they need, and as they recognize that the hoarder has caused this condition and he becomes their enemy, the non-hoarders have to

compete with each other, and they become enemies to each other. In such a condition, the likelihood that there would be one and only one person who hoards resources or who takes even just a little more than is necessary for survival is slim. So everyone, for Hobbes, becomes an enemy of everyone else. To be able to escape the fear, anxiety, and uncertainty of a future time in which there may not be enough resources to ensure survival, and to prepare for the “fact” that people will invade each other to get what they need, creating diffidence (a stance taken by people in the natural condition in which they ready themselves for defensive action), everyone must constantly augment their dominion—that is, they feel they must continue to amass power so that they may defend themselves against death itself and against other people who may hasten it.

The condition that Hobbes describes in Chapter XIII is one in which everyone considers himself or herself<sup>25</sup> the equal of every other person; it is a condition in which every person competes with every other person for resources (either naturally scarce, made that way by human acquisitiveness, or suspected to become scarce for any number of reasons) and in which every person is either the actual or potential enemy of every other. In this condition, people will fight with each other or at least be at the ready to do so because they compete for resources, they are constantly vigilant about self-protection, and because of their belief that they

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<sup>25</sup> While Hobbes is a traditional philosopher writing in a time period in which women’s interests and contributions to society, government, and philosophy were rarely noticed, there is nowhere in Hobbes’ works where he indicates in any way that women and men are not equal to each other in the natural condition. Feminist theorists have investigated the matter, trying to determine how it is possible that women, from a condition of equality with other women and with men, have ended up in a position of social and political inferiority in political systems modeled on Hobbesian grounds. See S.A. Lloyd, “Power and Sexual Subordination in Hobbes’s Political Theory,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Thomas Hobbes’ Political Theory*, Nancy J. Hirschmann and Joanne H. Wright, eds. (University Park, PA: Penn State UP), 52.

are all naturally equal, they will become enemies of each other even for something as seemingly insignificant as a social slight—such as a smile or an acknowledgement. In short, every person wants all other people to value him at the same rate he sets on himself. But when people are in constant competition for resources, they naturally consider their own interests before they consider the interests of others (the creation of a slight against another person), and there is, as Hobbes puts it, nothing but grief in a condition in which there is no power set in place to “overawe” them all. The most famous and well-known phrase from Hobbes at this point in his description of humans in the state of nature is that the life of man is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Not only is the phrase regarding life’s misery in the natural condition famous in general, it is a source of some considerable discussion and theoretical importance in the history of modern political theory. Among the theoretically important aspects of Hobbes’ position are the claim that commentators and theorists after Hobbes lodge against his theory that he has described human beings as psychological egoists<sup>26</sup> and the use and value of the rhetorical device of the state of nature. It is to these topics that we now turn before returning to Hobbes’ own description of the state of nature and its implications.

One of the first striking features of Hobbes’ characterization of people in the natural condition is that they are all self-interested. That is certainly true. From Hobbes’ contention that all people are self-interested, a common conclusion reached by readers of Hobbes is that he has thereby asserted that human beings are psychological egoists. This is not certainly true. Because Hobbes has described us generally as beings who avoid death and consider death to be the *summum malum*, for some reason not necessarily justified by Hobbes’ text, it has been

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<sup>26</sup> Psychological egoism is a descriptive ethical concept usually described by philosophers as characterizing people who are concerned solely with their own interests, who are often if not always selfish and self-absorbed, and whose actions are done always and only with a view to their own benefit.

common to attribute to Hobbes the view that everyone cares all and only about herself or himself and that everyone and anyone would trample the lives, rights, property, and interests of all and any others who happen to get in their way or who simply look askance at them. These are not facts about Hobbesian natural persons, and characterizing them as psychological egoists is inaccurate.

Bernard Gert, for example, has pointed to the fact that commentators on Hobbes often point to the behavior of human infants and small children as indicative of psychological egoism. However, the behavior of infants and children is hardly psychological egoism simply because they are only capable of recognizing, especially in the case of infants, their own interests. And further, Gert notes that the fact of adults acting on their natural passions and others describing them as psychological egoists for doing so does not establish that they *are* psychological egoists. There are other indications, too, that belie the claim that Hobbes has described the whole of natural humanity in this way. Hobbes describes mothers and families in the state of nature who live in association with each other, and he has described caretaking relationships with respect to children in that condition. Beyond this, Hobbes describes virtues in Chapters VI, VIII, and XI that are clearly other-regarding and are present in human beings, naturally.

On the other hand, Hobbes does clearly describe people in the natural condition—and in fact in all conditions—as self-interested. This, however, is not the same as claiming that they care only about themselves. And while Hobbes' descriptions of the state of nature are clearly pessimistic, that people find themselves in a condition in which they fear for their lives and attempt to accumulate what is necessary for survival is not much more than what people in conditions of relative or actual peace and stability do when they maintain jobs to support themselves and their families, buy or grow (or steal) food and other necessities, and engage in other activities that are clearly self-regarding but, for all that, are not other-disregarding.

But what of the pessimistic view of the natural condition coming from natural acquisitiveness and fear that Hobbes has described? Perhaps it is not a *pessimistic* view, but is

instead *realistic*. Some commentators have claimed that Hobbes is describing a condition in the state of nature that is not an actual historical state of affairs, but is instead the condition in which people would find themselves if and when social organization breaks down. Consider, for example, the ways in which people in hurricane-prone regions around the world behave when they must compete for scarce resources on hearing of the approach of a storm. I know, for example, of cases in which elderly women will fight with other customers in a grocery store for the last few gallons of water left on the shelf and people troll parking lots at hardware stores looking to steal plywood and other materials for securing windows from flying debris. And these are people who otherwise most likely would not consider doing such things except under the conditions in which they now find themselves. So it is possible that this is not a pleasant or flattering description of human behavior (or even of human nature), but if there is a shred of accuracy in it, and if conditions are so bad that they lead people to engage in these types of behavior, then Hobbes is far from simplistically pessimistic. He is instead offering a view of the importance of social organization and law among beings whose passions and desires are often stronger than their reason.

If it is true that people occasionally or often do behave in ways in which passion overrides reason, the device of the state of nature as a tool of argumentation is persuasive. But it is persuasive in other ways, even among theorists who do not take the more bleak and realistic Hobbesian view presented in *Leviathan*. Theorists from John Locke to John Rawls utilize either a state of nature position or one very much like it in argumentative function to argue both for the need for political organization and how it ought to be realized. We will turn to the extensions of state of nature theory later in this online companion to *The Essential Leviathan: A Modernized Edition*, but for now suffice it to say that Hobbesian argumentation has not been forgotten or ignored in social and political philosophy.

Returning to Hobbes' description of the natural condition, and to the conclusion that it leaves or would leave human life in a most precarious position, something must be done to

alleviate the horrible condition in which people in the state of nature would find themselves. If we who are comfortable and secure while reading Hobbes' words think that the behavior and conditions Hobbes has described are vile and sinful, that Hobbesian persons do not deserve or are unfit for safety and security because of their behavior, we should look more carefully because, Hobbes insists, the desires and passions of human beings are not sins. Such behavior is not sinful because there must be laws in place for people to violate in order for them to be able to commit sins, and in the state of nature there are no laws.

Far from viewing people as sinful, mean, and irremediably selfish, Hobbes again takes a realistic and practical view of human nature and behavior. Paul D. Cooke explains, saying that “Hobbes turned away from considerations of what human beings ought to be; his foundation is on what they are,” and, what is more, “there is no imperative to become a new sort of person. He is prodded by his own interests not to change himself, but to change the world to make it safe for what he is. The Hobbesian man described in *Leviathan* is not dissatisfied with himself, but with the state of nature, which is to say, he is dissatisfied with the world that inhibits his freedom.”<sup>27</sup> People in the state of nature are, as Hobbes asserts in Chapter XIII, naturally free to do whatever they believe is conducive to securing what they need to maintain their lives in conditions in which violent, early death are likely to persist. And because the state of nature is a condition in which there is no effective law to which to appeal, there is in effect no law at all.

Simply put, it is impossible to know what a law is until it is made and it is impossible to make laws until people agree on who will create them.<sup>28</sup> And even if we disagree with Hobbes

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<sup>27</sup> Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996) 10, 105.

<sup>28</sup> For those who believe that there are absolute moral rules that pre-date and come from a source (divine, perhaps) above and beyond human behavior and experience, this position is problematic. Such people believe that there are moral rules perhaps written on human hearts, so to speak, or that are inherent in human beings. Hobbes denies that this is the case. Whether he is right about it is another matter entirely.

about the status of law in a natural condition that could or should be followed, Hobbes has a ready answer from human behavior. He notes that even in a civilized condition in which there are laws to protect people and their property, we still behave in ways that show we agree with the Hobbesian analysis of human nature with respect to the likelihood of an attempted or successful invasion of our persons and property. Hobbes notes that even in well-ordered societies we behave in ways that accuse others: when we leave our homes and lock our doors, when we go out armed, and when even within our own homes we lock our chests against children and servants. (Think back to the example of the behavior of elderly women during dangerous weather conditions.) Hobbes' position is that such people who secure themselves and their property even in organized political conditions accuse mankind by their actions just as much as he does by his words.

Further, Hobbes realized that some would disagree with his description of the natural condition of mankind on the basis of the lack of historical evidence that there was ever a time in which people lived without a common political power above them all that would be capable of controlling or channeling their passions. In response to the claim that there was never a historical state of nature, a claim that would in turn for his detractors generate doubt about the quality of Hobbes' argument, there are at least three replies. First, Hobbes did not believe that there was any such historical time period. His description of the state of nature is not some prehistoric condition, but anywhere and anytime there is “no effective government to impose order” and “a state of nature is one into which any civil society will lapse if government breaks down.”<sup>29</sup> He is therefore describing a condition in which people find themselves in times of civil

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His arguments, however, depend on the contention that without a law-maker there can be no law and without agreement among people who will be the law-maker, there is no such thing as even the ability to break a law.

<sup>29</sup> Edwin Curley, “Introduction,” in *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), xxi.

war.<sup>30</sup> Second, even if Hobbes did think there was ever a time in which people lived with no common power over them at all, such a conviction would not detract from the force of his arguments or the relevance of the claims in arguing for the need for social organization subsumed under political power to ensure peace and security. Third, Hobbes also notes that for those who do not believe that there was such an historical time as the state of nature, we need only consider the way that individual states behave toward each other to see how a natural condition between competing parties or enemies would be characterized. Hobbes describes states' relations as ones in which guns are pointed at each other, there are spies infiltrating and amassing information about their neighbors, and they are continually "in the state and posture of gladiators."<sup>31</sup> The description of the relations between states, however, is not as bad as that between individual human beings since, Hobbes claims, the sovereigns of states "uphold the industry" of their subjects.

An interesting and important question arises at this point. While Hobbes indicates that relations between states are not as severe as those between individual human beings in a natural condition, why did he not discuss the potential for international sovereignty? Some of the literature on Hobbes' position regarding international sovereignty may be instructive in understanding issues as broad as the potential need for international sovereignty and the reasons that Hobbes did not broach the subject of whether citizens are responsible for their own

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<sup>30</sup> We can also understand Hobbes' position from his personal point of view in the fact that at the time he was writing *Leviathan*, the English Civil War had broken out, Hobbes himself fled to France to escape the carnage, and he was describing conditions (even if somewhat exaggerated) that he found surrounding his own life and his own country at that time.

<sup>31</sup> The conditions between states that Hobbes has described are similar to those experienced between Soviet Bloc countries and the U.S. and its allies after World War II—a cold war condition. It is one in which even if there is no actual, physical fighting occurring, there is sufficient reason to believe that it could break out at any time.



acts of war in international contexts. Following are some insights from scholars concerned with international sovereignty and war. Timo Airaksinen argues that on Hobbesian grounds an international sovereign is certainly needed. Robinson Grover argues that if Hobbes would have argued against international sovereignty on the basis of it being a miserable condition like that of the state of nature between individual human beings, it would have backfired on him in then not applying to the condition of individual human beings in the state of nature. Other commentators, such as Chris Naticchia and Paul Johnson, concern themselves with a right to national preservation. Johnson argues specifically that international sovereignty is not likely to be appealing on Hobbesian grounds because of the tendency that people have to group themselves together on the basis of language, ethnicity, culture, and so on, and to develop an ideology of “us vs. them.” This seems a likely case since world government might have the potential to destroy important social and cultural differences that give a nation and its people a specific identity.<sup>32</sup> Glen Newey gives a detailed analysis of Hobbes and international sovereignty, and shows that the law of nature is insufficient as a normative basis to make Hobbes a “liberal internationalist.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See, in S.A. Lloyd, ed., *Hobbes Today: Insights for the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), the following articles: Chris Naticchia, “Hobbesian Realism in International Relations: A Reappraisal;” S.A. Lloyd, “International Relations, World Government, and the Ethics of War: A Hobbesian Perspective.” See also the following in Timo Airaksinen and Martin A. Bertman, eds., *Hobbes: War Among Nations* (Brookfield, VT: Gower, 1989): Robinson A. Grover, “Hobbes and the Concept of International Law”; Tommy L. Lott, “Hobbes on International Relations”; Paul J. Johnson, “Death, Identity, and the Possibility of a Hobbesian Justification for World Government”; and Timo Airaksinen, “The Whiteness of the Whale: Thomas Hobbes and the Paradox of War and Fear.”

<sup>33</sup> Glen Newey, *The Routledge Guidebook to Hobbes’s Leviathan* (London: Routledge, 2014), Chapter 10.

Regardless of whether there was (or was not) ever an historical state of nature from which Hobbes could derive conclusions, it follows from the description of a natural condition that in such a condition, nothing can be unjust in the same way that nothing can be sinful. In a condition without sufficient political power to ensure peace, the natural condition degenerates into a state of war, a war of everyone against everyone in which force and fraud (recognized in civilized societies as vices) are the “two cardinal virtues.”

Force and fraud are social qualities. That is, in the state of nature people have various sorts of relations with each other, they come into contact with each other, and they find themselves in competitive conditions because they associate with each other at least in minimal ways. Since people know it is necessary to accumulate property and objects that they believe will be conducive to their continued survival, they wish to keep those things to be able to use them. But that is the catch. In the state of nature that leads logically and necessarily to the state of war, there is, as Hobbes puts it, “no mine and thine distinct,” and all that we can say is that whatever a person possesses is his own for as long as he can keep it. So if another person acquires the “property” of another in the natural condition/state of war, ownership is a matter of the most recent possessor and has nothing whatsoever to do with the way in which a thing was originally obtained. So there is no propriety in the state of nature, and conditions become more and more grave the more people associate with each other because, to put it plainly, no one can trust anyone else. This does not mean that there are no trustworthy people, it simply means that no one can be reasonably sure that everyone else can be trusted. There may be some with whom the resident of the state of nature has established trusting family and friendship relations, but not everyone is a family member or a friend, or even known to every other, and the default position for the Hobbesian person is to take a defensive stance. It is not unlike the stance we (reasonably and rationally) take in not opening doors in the middle of the night to complete strangers.

Interestingly, Hobbesian natural persons engage in war-like behaviors in an attempt to ensure their survival. And paradoxically, engaging in war-like behavior makes it more likely that a person will be unable to ensure survival. The condition in which Hobbesian persons find themselves is a living contradiction, in other words, a situation in which the attempt to ensure survival essentially fails. The passions that incline people to peace, which are fear of death, desire for things necessary for survival, and hope by and through one's activity to be able to get and keep these things, fail miserably. There must be something that Hobbesian natural persons can do to alleviate the unbearable conditions of the state of nature and the state of war.

Since the actions people in the natural condition take to ensure their survival are insufficient—and in fact are in some sense unavoidably absurd since they lead away from the desired solution to their problems—to ensure peace and survival, Hobbes suggests that there are "convenient articles of peace" that rational human beings will recognize. If utilized, these articles of peace will lead people out of the state of war. The "convenient articles" are the laws of nature.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> There are different views among commentators of the Hobbesian laws of nature. Richard Tuck, "Hobbes's moral philosophy" in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 190-191, refers to such different views of the status of the laws of nature. Some contend that they are prudential imperatives conducive to self-preservation; some claim that Hobbes is a rule egoist whose laws of nature are a "better guide to preservation than any other general principles." Still others, like Howard Warrender, claim that the laws of nature are like Immanuel Kant's "Categorical Imperative" in which moral laws are requirements of reason alone, regardless of their consequences. (Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: This Theory of Obligation*. (London: Oxford UP, 1957)). Curley claims that the laws of nature ought to be seen "as a kind of hypothetical imperative, advice about how to obtain your ends. ..." (Edwin Curley, "Introduction to Hobbes' *Leviathan*," in *Leviathan* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), xxxi.)

Hobbesian laws of nature are not natural laws like those of physics because Hobbesian laws *can* be successfully violated. At least, they are rules of prudential behavior that must be followed *if* a person wishes to achieve the set goal of self-preservation. Note here that the laws of nature may be considered conditionally applicable and so they serve in a sense like Immanuel Kant's "hypothetical imperatives" in that the desire to reach a particular goal or conclusion determines the means by which to do so. The laws of nature, therefore, seem to be—and are rightly, given Hobbes' method—conditional.

Remember that Hobbes is explicit about the distinction between true science and mere observation. "Science," in Hobbes' view, derives from definitions with an end of reaching conclusions and not the other way around, as in the case of experimental inquiry in which we look to the conclusions and attempt to discover their causes. It is here, at this point in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, that the scope of his "science of politics" becomes very clear. From definitions and indisputable facts, we may, in areas of human inquiry that we have created ourselves, control the conclusions reached. In essence, we can set up the causes to produce desired effects. We want to create peace. Peace, for Hobbes, is obtainable (at which he has more than simply hinted previously) only with the existence of strong political organization. So if we apply our facts and definitions carefully, we may employ the science of politics to create political organization that will achieve for us what our individual or small group endeavors were incapable of achieving: a secure and lasting peace. The process of reasoning in which Hobbes engages throughout the remainder of Part I and the bulk of Part II of *Leviathan* is designed to make possible such a secure and lasting peace.

Before discussing the laws of nature in Chapter XIV, "Of the First and Second Natural Laws, and of Contracts," Hobbes first introduces and defines the "right of nature." This right expresses what Hobbes understands as the liberty of each person to do what he or she sees fit to preserve one's own life. This is a "right" or "liberty" in the sense of there being a lack of external impediments to action. A person is "free" to do, in other words, whatever is in her or his

power to do, and to use whatever means are available in the attempt to sustain and preserve his or her own life.<sup>35</sup> Immediately after introducing the right of nature, Hobbes derives the law of nature, that every person is obliged not to destroy his own life or do anything obviating the means to preserve life.

At this point, Hobbes has claimed that we are free to defend our lives and that, in fact, we are also obligated to do so. It is an odd combination of claims, to be sure, given what Hobbes has said so far with respect to the nature of laws that are capable of forbidding or requiring anything. Since he has already said that there is no law until there is a power sufficient in force to ensure compliance with it, there are many interpretations and views on what Hobbes could have meant by a "law" at this point in *Leviathan*.

One of the conditions in the state of nature that makes life unbearable—in addition to the danger posed to one's very existence—is the freedom of other people. Cooke notes that "there is great danger in freedom; Hobbes shows it to be so dangerous that the most important thing in each person's heart is to escape it, and this ... is how civil association originates."<sup>36</sup> Another possible way to put the case is to say that absolute freedom in the natural condition is actually no freedom at all. So law will serve the purpose—if it will be followed—to make some freedoms effective. The problem is that in the condition Hobbes has described, what reason do we have to believe that anyone will follow the laws of nature? Hobbes contends that the laws of nature in

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Filmer noted that Hobbes' statement of the right of nature seems inconsistent with Hobbes' own contention in Chapter XXX of *Leviathan* that every person's father in the state of nature was his sovereign and lord with the power of life and death over him. See "Observations Concerning the Originall of Government, Upon Mr Hobs Leviathan" in *Leviathan*, ed. Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 271-277; 273.

<sup>36</sup> Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 9.

the natural condition where they are first recognized bind *in foro interno*, that is, they bind in the desire that they ought to be followed. But they do not bind *in foro externo*, that is, they do not bind in fact because there is no one who has the power to force anyone to follow them.

It is surely the case that by "law of nature" Hobbes cannot mean the same thing as the ineluctable process of following or adhering to the law of gravity, say, since we are subject to the latter whether we like it or not. We can try as much as we would like to "violate" it, but we are subject to it nonetheless. On the other hand, the Hobbesian law of nature does not have this kind of force; in the state of nature and the state of war, a person is probably internally compelled (bound *in foro interno*) to follow the Hobbesian law of nature, but can in fact, and sometimes may, fail to do so. So at this point in his argumentation Hobbes is not claiming that the law of nature is something enforceable, except by the preferences of the individual human being. So the law of nature is a law insofar as every person desires self-preservation. How to implement the law of nature is another matter entirely, and it depends instead on the force of a strong central power able to interpret the law by creating rules and procedures that will not only allow people to follow the law of nature but it will also compel them by force to do so in a very specific way.

Another way to put the case is this. In the state of nature, human beings are rational and they do, in fact, seek to preserve their own lives and they do so freely with any means available to them in the attempt to achieve their subsidiary goals to avoid death. From experience, perhaps, people realize that they act in ways that are considered "good" for them with respect to the belief that their actions will be conducive to the goal of maintaining their lives. So, as a matter of observable fact, we could take it as a "law" that people do what they think is necessary to self-preservation and by their own actions and preferences find it reprehensible and perhaps even inconceivable that anyone would not try to maintain his or her own life. The problem is not so much with the status of the law of nature as a law as it is with the interpretation of the law of nature. Just what is it that I am required to do in the natural condition to preserve my own life?

Up to this point, my self-preservation has been attended with actions that lead to war, and war endangers life rather than preserves it. (Hobbes himself said in *Leviathan* that it will never be the case that war preserve life and peace destroy it.)

Assume that I am doing my best in the state of nature to preserve myself, and I am "following" the law of nature to achieve that goal. The problem is that I am the sole interpreter of the law of nature (just as is everyone else), and I am apparently not doing a very good job of interpreting and applying it (and neither is anyone else) if the war in which I am engaged with others is likely to lead to my death. So it appears likely that by "law of nature" in the natural condition Hobbes meant just exactly what he said he meant—that it is a rule found out by reason. But the fact that the rule can be found out by reason does not mean—because Hobbes himself indicated that errors in reasoning are made without a reliable method on which to apply it—that every person will apply that rule in the same way or that its application will be effective.

At this point, another wrench is thrown into the Hobbesian works because people also recognize that in the state of nature, everyone has a right to everything, even to another person's body. As with law in the state of nature, "right" is not enforceable except by the individual. Hobbes has already defined a "right" as a freedom to do or to act. So having a right to everything means in the state of nature that I have the freedom to attempt to obtain anything I believe I require for the maintenance of my own life. And if I have this right, so do you. And again, we find ourselves compounding the problem of our uneven or erroneous application of the law of nature with the simple freedom that every person has without a common power over everyone to take whatever he is able to take from nature or from another person. So the rational human being in the state of nature will conclude from experience that the attempt to preserve life by fighting is self-defeating, and further, he or she will understand that believing we have a right to everything comes into conflict with every other person's belief that they have a right to everything and in fact results in a condition of irrational chaos. From these observations the rational human being will come to realize that it is necessary to endeavor peace and, if that is

impossible, to "seek and use all helps and advantages of war." From this conclusion reached from reason, the first two laws of nature are derived in Chapter XIII.

The first and fundamental law of nature is to seek peace and follow it, which Hobbes notes contains the right of nature in doing whatever is necessary to preserve life when achieving peace is not possible. While Hobbes does not mention this fact, it seems apparent that simply noting in the state of nature that one must seek peace and follow it (while at the same time understanding that to use all helps and advantages of war is an option) does not tell the resident of the natural condition much, if anything, about how to go about seeking peace and thereby ending war. It is clear enough, in fact, that people in the natural condition already know that peace is better than war and that they need to defend themselves. So it follows naturally from the first law that an instruction concerning what to do to achieve peace and to sustain it is necessary. The second law derived by Hobbes is just that instruction. The second law is to give up the right to all things and "be contented with so much liberty against others" as a person would allow against himself.

Renouncing the right to all things (a right that residents of the state of nature possessed because there was no distinction between "mine and thine") does not, however, mean literally renouncing the right to everything. That would be tantamount to a violation of the first law of nature since a person would be left completely devoid of all things necessary for the sustenance and protection of life. Instead, a person is to give up the *right to everything*—that is, give up believing that she has the right to take and possess anything and everything she desires for any reason whatsoever. This way, she retains a right to what is needed for survival and she reasonably believes others should also be able to retain this right as well.<sup>37</sup> Further, it is

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<sup>37</sup> The requirement to lay down the right to all things may at first seem to be a problematic in that if everyone is required to give up the right to all things, what happens in a case in which some people do not do so? To give up one's right to all things when others do not do so is to set oneself up to be the prey



necessary also to recognize and to act on the recognition that we must not do to others what we would not wish for them to do to us. So if we require being left alone to use and enjoy the necessities for life's preservation and other things making life more pleasant, we must recognize that others share the same general goal. To violate others' rights to things to which they have retained a right is to act contrary to the second law of nature and the reason it requires.

It is at this point that Hobbes takes great care in explaining what it means to "lay down" a right and the difference between renouncing and transferring a right. First and foremost, in giving up the right to all things, I am not giving to anyone else any right that others did not already have in the state of nature. Everyone, according to Hobbes, has a right to everything in that condition. But, with respect to renunciation and transfer as specific means by which to lay down a right, the distinction is simple enough and easily grasped. It is also one that has significant consequences. To lay down a right is to engage in what later commentators on the issue of rights have identified as taking a "negative rights" view. Hobbes himself does not refer to rights in this way, but his position is essentially a negative rights one. Hobbes is arguing that people will retain a right to what they need to survive, but that they will not interfere in others' retained rights to the things they need themselves. A negative rights view is essentially that the rights (freedoms) of one person are not to be interfered with by others. As a position directing people not to interfere in the rights of others, there is no (clear or otherwise) obligation to do anything to uphold or protect the rights of others.

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of others, which would be self-defeating. So to give up the right to all things requires some assurance that everyone else will also do so. Recognizing this leads Hobbes in the next chapter to the third law of nature, that everyone must keep their promises—and in this case the promise to give up the right to all things on the condition that others do so as well. Further, however, this law of nature does not require anyone to give up literally all rights to everything, but only to the belief that absolutely anything a person believes he would like to have is his own.

When Hobbes explains that laying down a right is not hindering another person in using his or her right, we see that laying down a right is a matter of not interfering—that is, getting out of the way of another person who is exercising his or her right. For example, suppose that I "lay down" my right to a \$20 bill by handing it to another person to whom I wish to give it either as a gift or in exchange for some product or service. In doing this, it is none of my business how the other person uses the \$20 she has received from me. The \$20 bill now belongs to the other person, and in giving it to that person, I renounce or transfer my right to it. There is a distinction between these two ways of laying down a right.

In the case of a gift of \$20 to another person, I do not expect to receive and most likely will not receive anything in return for it—I renounce my right. It is now the right of the person to whom it was given to dispose of it or use it any way she sees fit. But in the case of transferring a right, I expect in doing so to receive something for it. If the \$20 bill is given in exchange for a particular product or service that I and the seller have agreed is worth \$20, I have every reason to expect to receive that thing in exchange, but it is still the case that what the person to whom I have handed \$20 has the right (*i.e.*, the freedom) to do as she wishes with the cash. But when I transfer a right, it is important to remember that I do, in fact, receive something in return.

The unfortunate truth of the matter, however, is that we are in the state of nature and you have no security in the \$20 you have received from me—that is, I might well take it back from you, abscond with the product, or refuse to provide the service we had agreed to exchange. The condition is even worse when we consider the fact that not all agreements that people make in transferring rights are cases of immediate gratification regarding the exchange. This is the point at which Hobbes makes a distinction between contract and covenant. A contract is an exchange in which a right to one or more things is exchanged in return for the right to some other thing or things immediately. A covenant, on the other hand, is a contract in which the first person performs his end of the bargain but must for whatever reason wait for the second party to the contract to perform theirs. No matter whether it is a simple contract or

covenant, the problem that may loom in the background is that the first person who performs may be left out in the cold because the second party to the contract does not live up to their end of the agreement. As Hobbes notes, it is absurd for someone to make an agreement and then go back on it. When he claims that it is absurd, what he means is not that there is any absurdity in the action, but that there is absurdity in the fact that our voluntary acts are always done with a view to the good we will receive from having performed them (where making an agreement is also a voluntary act done by words or by actions) and we cannot make void any voluntary act of our own because it amounts to an absurdity.

It is at this and related points in *Leviathan* that commentators often note the relevance of the game-theoretic prisoner's dilemma with respect to contracts in the state of nature. The reason that contracts in the natural condition are in such a precarious position has to do with trust. Consider a case in which two criminals are caught by the police, separated from each other in two different interview rooms at a police station, and they are both offered the same deal by the police. The deal is that if prisoner A confesses and implicates prisoner B, prisoner A will receive only, say, a 3-year sentence and prisoner B will receive a 5-year sentence. But prisoner B is offered the same deal such that if prisoner B confesses he will receive a 3-year sentence and prisoner A will receive 5. To complicate matters, however, if they both stay silent they will each receive only a 1-year sentence and if they both confess, they will each receive a 10-year sentence. Supposedly, the prisoners will both confess, with each hoping that the other will not confess, in which case they both find themselves in the least optimal position. The problem of the state of nature, many commentators claim, is like this. If I am in the state of nature and cooperate with you by making an agreement with you, you might not live up to your part of the agreement—and I might not live up to mine. The best case for each individual is to receive a benefit without having to do anything in return. But the truly best case for both people is to satisfy the terms of the agreement. No one, however, can trust anyone else to honor those terms. But scholar Alan Ryan has noted that it is quite reasonable to think that the Hobbesian

state of nature is not really like a prisoner's dilemma. In a case in which two "warring" parties wish to remove themselves from dangerous conditions, suppose that

the other person disarms himself, and I take advantage of his unarmed condition to take what I want from him. Hobbesian man is supposed to repress this desire. This is why the state of nature is not a true prisoner's dilemma. The essence of a prisoner's dilemma is that the parties to it are utility-maximizers, so that opponents in the game will always try to exploit each other and they know it. Hobbesian man will not. He is not a utility maximizer, but a disaster-avoider.<sup>38</sup>

It seems likely that Ryan is correct here since Hobbes has indicated that people in the natural condition will attempt to amass more than they need at any given time to ensure their survival for a longer period of time. But with respect to the mutual transfer of rights to the sovereign and not to each other, there is no opportunity for them successfully to violate their end of the agreement.

Another issue that may serve to show that the prisoner's dilemma is not necessarily part of or applicable to Hobbes' reasoning with respect to the transfer of rights (the first agreement in the state of nature that leads to the creation of sovereign power) is that of iterated prisoner's dilemma cases. A common objection to simple, one-time prisoner's dilemma cases is that they are rarely so simple, and two people who have committed a crime together, for example, are not isolated individuals. They have cooperated with each other to make a plan to commit a crime and to act on that plan, so, even given that they are criminals, they have cooperated with each other before and may complicate simple prisoner's dilemma reasoning by being aware of each

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<sup>38</sup> Alan Ryan, "Hobbes's political philosophy" in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 224.

other's propensities. They may, in fact, cooperate (stay silent), in which case both will receive the best possible outcome. They have, in short, engaged in iterated (repeated) prisoner's dilemma conditions or other cooperative enterprises allowing them to transcend, so to speak, the stringent nature of a simple prisoner's dilemma scenario.

Acting according to the second law of nature, residents of the state of nature have experienced cooperative conditions prior to transferring the right to all things, they have at least limited knowledge of how agreements tend to play themselves out, and they make an agreement to give up their right to all things to someone else who is *not* part of the agreement. So Ryan is correct that the Hobbesian state of nature is not like a prisoner's dilemma also because the agreement people make is only to do one thing for each other, one time—that is, they transfer the right to all things to the sovereign (not to each other), and the sovereign ensures that they will not renege on the agreement. A voluntary act that is a contract creates a bond of obligation, but the problem, as Hobbes astutely notes, is that nothing is as easily broken as a person's word. The sovereign's receipt of the benefit of the transfer of right helps to solve the problem of those who may not keep agreements. It is impossible for the sovereign not to keep an agreement with the subjects because, as Hobbes makes clear in Chapter XVI, the sovereign is not part of the agreement at all.

While the people in the natural condition have recognized the need to transfer their right to all things to a person or persons having the power to make such rights effective, there are some rights that are impossible for a person to renounce or to transfer. Among those are the right to life, self-defense, and to avoid wounds and imprisonment. Again, even though the contractors will agree with the law of nature requiring them to give up their right to *all* things, they recognize that there is no obligation under any interpretation of "law" to renounce or transfer literally every right that a person has by nature. To do so would be absurd.

Hobbes moves on to a discussion of the ways in which contractual agreements are made. Some contracts are express and others are tacit. The obligations are the same in either

case. The distinction, however, is an important one in that there are people who might claim, for example, that they never made an agreement to do something because they never signed a "contract" or expressed in words their agreement. For Hobbes, this will not do in cases in which a person, through their actions, has indicated consent to the terms of an agreement. A simple example should suffice to see the difference between express and tacit consent. Suppose that you move to another country. In moving there and intending to stay there, you have under this sort of understanding tacitly consented to be subject to the laws of that country. If you wish not to be subject to them, you should not have gone there. This is the manner of thinking that allows Hobbes to state in Chapter XVI that in the authorization of the sovereign, those who "voted" for the sovereign's creation, as well as those who did not, are bound to the agreement and those who refuse to submit have made themselves enemies of all others.

The case regarding contract or covenant is completely different in the state of nature, however, because in that condition there is no power in place to assure the first performer in a contract that any other(s) will live up to their promises. So the distinction is a very important one between statements people make in the state of nature and those made after the institution of sovereign power because those made in the state of nature lack any reliable guarantee that the first performer will not be disappointed—more specifically, cheated—in having performed his end of the bargain first. The same case in the state of nature, however, appears to arise concerning the agreement that people in that condition make to authorize the sovereign. What guarantee do any of us have that those who give up the right of nature (the right to do and have absolutely anything they see fit for the preservation of their own lives) will live up to the agreement? That is, we might ask whether the first supposedly reliable agreement (the one to institute the sovereign and create the political state) is strong enough to do the work it is designed to do.

Hobbes' answer to our question must be that because the sovereign is instituted at the very moment of agreement, the insecure conditions of the state of nature have now given way

to the much more secure conditions of the state; in which case, as noted earlier, prisoner's dilemma conditions do not accurately apply. Most of the people who have now moved from the state of nature to the political state will want the agreement to be enforced, and as Hobbes will show later it is the duty of those individuals to support the sovereign in enforcing it, those who would renege on the agreement have become enemies of all others (in essence, they are enemies of the state) and are subject to whatever devices of compliance the sovereign sees fit to use. So even though the last agreement in the natural condition might at first seem to be as uncertain as any others made before the institution of the sovereign, to persist in that notion would be to assert that it is effectively impossible ever to institute sovereignty.

Another issue of some significant import regarding covenants generally is whether they are free decisions on the part of the contractors. Hobbes notes that covenants are acts of the will and are the result of deliberation. Since the last act of the will is the conclusion of deliberation, and what is the subject of deliberation has to be possible at the time deliberation is undertaken, the person who covenants with another is now bound to the agreement. Hobbes contends that there are only two ways in which to be freed from an agreement: to perform the requirements of it or to be forgiven. It is clear that those who wish to remove themselves from the natural condition and the state of war are not likely to "forgive" any others and allow them to return to a condition of war with all others, so the expectation is that the person who has freely covenanted is required to perform the requirements of agreement, especially since upon the institution of government, there is reasonable fear that one will be subject to severe punishment and labeled an enemy for non-performance.

At this point, however, one may wonder whether it is rational for us to believe that an agreement made from fear is valid. The Hobbesian answer is "yes" and Hobbes thought that the matter was simple and settled. However, that answer is problematic for us even if it was not so for Hobbes. For Hobbes, if covenants arising through fear were not valid, the creation of political society would be impossible. He therefore accepts them as unproblematic especially since in

both the natural condition and even to some extent after the creation of political society, fear is simply part of the human condition. In the state of nature we fear each other due to competition, diffidence, and glory; even after the creation of government, we are still in fear of those who might not live up to the expectations of rules governing a civilized condition; and even more, the sovereign who is created from the agreement in the state of nature is designed to instill fear in citizens that will reasonably ensure their compliance with the original agreement as well as with all the subsidiary laws that will ultimately be created to regulate social life.

As much as Hobbes is comfortable with his position that covenants derived from fear are obligatory and that they are “free,” we might take a different and more jaundiced look at the case. The author and philosopher Sam Harris, in discussing the distinction between conceptions of “free will,” noted that compatibilists (and Hobbes was a compatibilist<sup>39</sup>) “generally claim that a

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<sup>39</sup> There are three basic positions, very broadly construed, regarding freedom of the will. One is hard determinism, or fatalism, in which all actions are either determined through all eternity to be what they are (fatalism), or less stringently, that all actions must be performed as they are performed because of ineluctable causal processes outside the agent’s control. A second is a kind of radical free will theory, or a theory of chance, which is closely associated with the work of William James. His view, put forth in the “Dilemma of Determinism” (New York: Hafner, 1948) is that hard determinism, or fatalism, leads to logical absurdity (and a dilemma) because people who claim to be adherents to it often claim that they “wish” that some things that occur had not happened. The dilemma is that it is often or usually the case that a fatalist not only believes that things must happen as they do, but that it is good that they do. So to claim that one wishes things had not happened as they did puts one in a dilemma. Either judgments of regret are good and what happens is bad; or judgments of regret are bad and even the most extremely violent and evil things that occur are good. In its place, James proposes a doctrine of “chance” in which things are not known to happen until they actually do, and that they are not impossible until some other occurrence has taken place. Placed somewhere (uncomfortably) between hard determinism and a doctrine of chance is “soft determinism” (also often called “compatibilism”) in which the existence both of



person is free as long as he is free from any outer or inner compulsions that would prevent him from acting on his actual desires and intentions” and contends that “compatibilism amounts to nothing more than an assertion of the following creed: *A puppet is free as long as he loves his strings.*”<sup>40</sup> A similar and much more powerful analysis of purportedly “free” actions that come from compulsion is found in Marilyn Frye’s work. In “In and Out of Harm’s Way: Arrogance and Love,” Frye argues that patriarchal societies engage in machinations that render women in positions of oppression, exploitation, control, and coercion that are not, under any reasonable interpretation of action, conditions in which a person is free. While Frye is concerned with the problem of patriarchal societies’ manner of subjugating women, her argument is just as applicable to Hobbes’ contention that agreements made in fear are valid.

Frye’s argument helps us realize that the Hobbesian position on free action is at best incomplete and probably a bankrupt notion of “freedom.” Hobbes and other compatibilists believe that a person is free when one is doing what one wants to do and is capable of acting otherwise. So, for example, to draw from an example in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, a person who is locked in a room and does not wish to leave is “free” because he does not want to leave. He is, in short, doing what he wants to do. But what if, we might ask, he subsequently wants to leave and finds the door locked? For compatibilists, the answer is at this point that he is not free and cannot act on his desire to leave. So being “free” is a product of what one desires to do, and not the product of external conditions. That seems simple enough, even if not completely satisfying, especially since we can always revert back to the freedom of

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freedom with necessity and necessity with moral responsibility for one’s actions are in supposed harmony with each other. For an accessible discussion of these and more subtle distinctions, see Clifford Williams, *Free Will and Determinism: A Dialogue* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980) and articles in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on free will, determinism, and compatibilism at <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

<sup>40</sup> Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 15, 19.

the person in the locked room who does not, in fact, desire to leave; we can satisfy ourselves with the notion that he is therefore “free.”

It is at the point at which we begin to consider a person’s desires that the case is significantly different because it is then that we consider freedom not simply from the point of view of whether a person is “constrained” and we turn to consider the nature of the person’s desires. That is, we consider the case much differently when we turn from simply acknowledging the desires a person has and asking whether there is anything external to the person keeping him from acting on his desires; instead, we inquire into the characterization of his desires and delve more deeply into external forces that affect them. More specifically, from Frye’s point of view, we need to know not simply whether a person can (physically) act according to her or his desires, we need also to know whether the desires themselves are consistent with freedom.

Frye takes a much more liberal stance on the notion of freedom and freedom of action than that which follows Hobbesian definitions. Take, for example, cases of theft in which a thief points a gun at one’s head and says, “Hand over your money.” You comply because your desire to live is greater than your desire to keep the money (and so you act on your strongest desire and are therefore “free” in this sense), but someone outside yourself has created a condition in which it would be unreasonable for you to refuse to hand over the money. Under ordinary circumstances, you would not intend simply to hand everything over to a thief, so the thief’s action affects your decision. For the Hobbesian, this means you are still free because you could have refused—that is, there was nothing physically keeping you from saying “no” to the thief. The thief in this case was doing nothing to physically necessitate your action. However, on Frye’s analysis of such conditions, a Hobbesian view like this is simply insufficient as an explanation of freedom. The action of the thief with the gun to your head is an act of coercion and no reasonable person unable to overpower the thief would refuse to comply. In short, where is the freedom in such conditions?

For Frye, it is clear that people who are subjected to unpleasant or nearly unbearable conditions may also have been subjected to more subtle forms of control in which coercers consistently behave in ways that make the person coerced seem to be acting freely. Frye describes these subtle forms of coercion and control as “detachment of the victim’s will and intelligence from the victim’s own interests and their attachment to the interest of the exploiter.”<sup>41</sup> Frye describes a condition in which the coerced person loses self-respect and acts contrary to her own interests because she has conflated her interests with those of the person who is controlling her.

While Frye’s description of such conditions is primarily applicable to cases in which a person is the victim of abuse at the hands of another individual, it is simple enough to see its application to the realm of human relations that Hobbes has described in the state of nature. Conditions as he has described them in the state of nature are so bad that, perhaps, a person covenants with others to institute a commonwealth that, given other and less severe conditions, he would have never consented to create. So it is possible that many of the claims Hobbes later makes regarding responsibility for actions performed subsequent to agreement are themselves questionable. As Sam Harris has pointed out, “to say that you are responsible for everything that goes on inside your skin because it’s all ‘you’ is to make a claim that bears absolutely no relationship to the feelings of agency and moral responsibility that have made the idea of free will an enduring problem for philosophy.”<sup>42</sup> Further, it may be that Frye’s analysis of conditions of coercion make Locke’s description of the state of nature in the *Second Treatise of Government*<sup>43</sup> one in which the decision to enter into an agreement to create a commonwealth

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<sup>41</sup> Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Crossings Press, 1983), 60.

<sup>42</sup> Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>43</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), Ch.

is more “free” than the agreement described by Hobbes. Locke describes a natural condition in which most people are cooperative and live up to agreements made before the sovereign is instituted and the commonwealth is formed, claiming that it is a “noxious few” who make it necessary to institute government in the first place. Locke describes a condition, contrary to that portrayed by Hobbes, that is not unpleasant or unbearable and, in fact, is sometimes preferable to government. Hobbes' position is, instead, that any government is better than no government at all.

In any case, for Hobbes the important point is that covenants are begun in fear and they are sustained in fear. Fear takes many different forms, whether in a fear of “invisible spirits,” of some greater power (such as God or a political sovereign), or of other people. Fear is a potent impetus to action, and Hobbes capitalizes on it in crafting his political theory, as well as in his arguments later in *Leviathan* regarding religion and its place in the commonwealth.

In Chapter XV of *Leviathan*, Hobbes begins the process of deriving other laws of nature. All of them are the result of reason and derive in part from the right of nature that each person has to defend her or his own life. They are rules of reason, and in fact Hobbes contends that what is more is that the laws of nature are the origin of the only true moral philosophy (more specifically, they are part of a science of politics) that has ever existed.

There is much controversy in the Hobbes literature concerning the type of moral theory that he creates. Some have claimed that it is a deontological ethics because it is based on laws of nature and are obligatory by reason and independently of consequences. Others have argued that his moral theory is more utilitarian because the laws of nature are designed to lead to consequences that are beneficial to all people. Others have claimed that his view is more akin to virtue theory in that Hobbes shows how the laws of nature are related to virtues that all people ought to cultivate in themselves. Given the controversy among commentators and Hobbes' own vacillations in describing and applying moral arguments and conclusions, Bernard

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Gert seems to have taken a reasonable position. Gert claims that Hobbes' moral theory incorporates all three of these views—deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue theory.<sup>44</sup> It is also not clear that we might simply call Hobbes' ethics “social contract” ethics since the elements of his ethical theory precede the implementation of government structures (the sovereign and commonwealth on the whole) that has the power to enforce the rules of morality.<sup>45</sup> His moral theory is clearly also not related to any conception of divine command theory since, as Tuck has noted, Hobbes

never advanced the view (which some modern scholars have attributed to him) that the *reason* for doing what the laws prescribe is that they are the commands of God: our reason for following them is that they are general principles which tell us how to preserve ourselves effectively. We do not have to know that there is a God in order to know that we must follow the laws of nature, because we obviously do not *need* to know that there is a first cause in order to believe any other true propositions about the world, and no other idea of God is admissible into philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

Paul D. Cooke makes an even simpler claim regarding Hobbesian morality that it is a person's own good, and not God, that obligates him.<sup>47</sup> If it were otherwise, it seems there would then

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<sup>44</sup> Bernard Gert, *Hobbes: Prince of Peace* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 69.

<sup>45</sup> If Hobbes' moral theory were simple contractarian morality, the rules of morality would themselves have to be the result of agreement. There are at least two reasons to believe that “contractarian moral theory” does not apply to Hobbes' view of ethics. First, he will argue later in *Leviathan* that the sovereign of the political state has moral obligations to God (with whom agreements or contracts are not applicable—that is, the sovereign simply has such obligations and did not make any “deals” with God to have them). Second, the laws of nature exist independently of human agreements because they are the product of reason. This does not mean that the laws of nature are not enforced after the contract to create government, but their existence as requirements (that may not be followed, but they are requirements nonetheless) are discovered prior to the institution of government.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 91.

<sup>47</sup> Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 58.

appear to be in Hobbes' system of thought no reason for a non-believer to seek his or her own good, and that would be contrary to the doctrine of *human* nature that is independent of theological concerns that Hobbes puts forth.

Hobbes derives several more laws of nature. A brief discussion of them, including their relationships to each other and their application, will be helpful in understanding how they apply in Hobbes' combined ethical and political theories. To begin, Hobbes derived the first and second laws of nature in Chapter XIV, which were to “seek peace and follow it” and to give up the right to all things. It is simple enough to assert that these are laws of nature, but they are not, in themselves, enough to tell us what we ought to do. From the first two laws, therefore, a third follows, which is a central feature of Hobbes' entire political position.

The third law of nature is so important and central to Hobbes' political system that the virtue of justice is associated with it as a consequence of performing one's covenants (or simply, living up to one's promises and agreements). Hobbes says that performing covenants is the fountain or origin of justice and without this third law, people remain in the state of nature. Remember that in the state of nature, Hobbes has already made it clear that there is no “mine and thine distinct,” which means that there is no property. Keeping agreements makes stable property possession possible, and the relationship between justice and propriety (property ownership or possession) is so close that Hobbes describes adherence to this law as the beginning of commonwealth and commonwealth as the beginning of justice and propriety.

At this point Hobbes discusses one of his most well-known contentions, that the fool has said in his heart that there is no justice (parallel to the fool saying in his heart that there is no God). The fool is wrong about justice, because a person who believes—and acts on the belief—that there is no such thing as justice (and so no property rights, just the condition of getting what he can and keeping it for as long as possible) makes himself unfit for society. To be unfit for society is more than simply to be a “misfit.” It is to be unsuitable to others for entrance into society. The only way for a person to deny justice *and* be retained in society is by fooling other

people into believing that he does, in fact, believe in justice and will act on the third law of nature while secretly doing all he can not to act in accordance with it. In this case, the nay-sayer's position is no better than it was in the condition of nature since he is trying to hide the fact that he does not follow the law of nature. If others find out they will cast him out of society or kill him. A possibly worse scenario, he who denies justice might do so on the grounds that he believes that *others* are not sincere in the covenant they have made. In that case, the person who claims there is no justice is now preparing (like the gladiators in Chapter XIII) for war with others and not living the decent life that could be lived otherwise.

The fourth law of nature, regarding grace, is that a person who receives benefit from others through grace (as a gift) should have no reasonable cause to regret his own good fortune or the good will of the benefactor. This law of nature is complicated in some ways because it seems at first glance to apply to the person who receives the right of nature (from application of the second law of nature to give up the right to all things) such that the recipient of the rights of all others must act in some particular way or ways that will ensure that those who gave up their right to all things are not ultimately sorry that they did so.

Sometimes Hobbes' work is confusing because, in early chapters of the book, he mentions details that apply more clearly to later chapters of the book. This, regarding the fourth law of nature, is one of those cases. On the other hand, as you will see as you progress through *Leviathan*, the first three laws of nature apply to people from the state of nature who are covenanting to get themselves out of the natural condition and there is no application of the fourth law to them. So it seems reasonable to suppose that the notion not to repent of having given up the right to all things refers to the expectation that each person has that everyone else will live up to the agreement to give up the right to all things to the sovereign (whose existence is not fully discussed until Chapter XVI). That is, the free gift that each person gives to the sovereign using the fourth law of nature is the right to all things. The free gift that people give to

each other using the fourth law of nature is in their outward actions of complying with that law and maintaining peace.

In fact, it is reasonable to assume that the fourth law of nature does not apply only to the sovereign later in *Leviathan*, but also to individuals from the state of nature since the fifth law follows from and is consistent with the fourth. The fifth law is to accommodate oneself to all the rest. In essence, the requirement of the fifth law of nature is for each person to “fit in” with all other people with respect to behavior. A person who violates the previous laws of nature is “unsociable” and is to be cast out of society. Remember that not following the third law of nature leads to the same result—to be cast out of society. But, in the fifth law of nature, the case is made more stringently because the person who fails to keep covenants is not only unjust, that person is simply *not fit* for society.

The sixth law of nature, that past offences (of a person who repents for those offences) ought to be pardoned, is a more complicated case than the fifth law. Because, as Hobbes has described it, the state of nature is a condition in which there is nothing unjust (because there is no power to enforce the laws of nature), the placement of a rule requiring pardon for past offenses for those who desire to be pardoned is odd. If in the natural condition there are no binding rules, there are two possible applications or implications of the sixth law of nature.

First, Hobbes indicates that there are at least temporary agreements possible in a natural condition, in which case someone who reneges on an agreement in the state of nature and asks for pardon (or forgiveness) should be pardoned to avoid “war” with one or a few people. Second, however, Hobbes provides—after the creation of the sovereign—for the right to punish and forgive to belong to the sovereign. This sixth law of nature, then, might apply most specifically and importantly to an act of the sovereign than to individual people. Overall, the reason to pardon past offenses is to promote peace.

On the other hand, not all offenses are candidates for pardon since the seventh law of nature, regarding revenge, is that punishments are to be directed toward the good for the



correction of offenders and for the instruction of others. Any other use of punishment is cruelty, a vice that leads to war.

The eighth and ninth laws of nature clearly apply only to individuals. When Hobbes discusses the nature of the sovereign of the state, he contends that all subjects pale in comparison to the excellence of the sovereign and that any inequality that exists between and among people after the creation of political society has come from the civil laws (9th law of nature), so all people should treat each other as equal by nature. While it is probably prudent on the part of a political sovereign not to have contempt for or to hate subjects of the commonwealth, and while it might even be self-defeating for the sovereign to do so, it is comparisons between and among subjects that can cause considerable hard feelings and disagreements about a person's worth and value. In the sight of the sovereign, however, all subjects are equal—in the same way in which many theists hold that in the sight of God all human beings are equal.

The tenth law of nature clarifies the second. Recall that the second law of nature required that everyone give up the right to all things (not to everything, but to all things) and “be contented” with the liberty one would allow against oneself. The tenth law requires that in entering into conditions of peace no one keep a right that he or she is not willing for others to keep. No one, according to Hobbes, can give up the right to what maintains life or give up the right to life itself. This law, therefore, is rather broad in application.

It is probably the case that the next several laws pertain to the decrees of the sovereign. While it is conceivable that those in a natural condition might recognize the rule to judge equally between people (eleventh law), it is also the case in that condition that everyone is judge of what is good for himself and everyone has a right to everything (even to another person's body). In disagreements after the creation of commonwealth, judging equally between people is the duty of the sovereign. Hobbes discusses the office of the sovereign in Chapter XXX.

Like the eleventh law, the twelfth and thirteenth laws—stating that goods that cannot be enjoyed individually must be enjoyed in common where possible, and that where goods cannot be enjoyed in common their possession is to be determined arbitrarily by lot (lottery)—appear closely associated with application in political society. Hobbes notes that there are two means by which to determine distribution in this case. One is arbitrary and the other by natural means, by first possessor or first born.

The fourteenth and fifteenth laws concern mediators and arbitrators, both of which are offices of a person that cannot exist except in organized, political society. Mediators of peace are to be permitted safe conduct (fourteenth law) and people are required to submit to the decisions of an arbitrator (fifteenth law) since to be the judge in one's own cause is tantamount to unfairness and doing so leads to war. This also means that the arbitrator must be a person who cannot gain benefit of any kind from consideration of who wins and who loses in a disagreement; otherwise the arbitrator could take bribes, lose trust, and turn conditions back to war.

The result of considering all the laws of nature together is that one should not do to another person what he would not have done against himself. It is a negative version of the law of nature which one commentator has called the "Copper Rule" in that it "glitters less brightly as an inspiring ideal of moral conduct than does the Golden Rule."<sup>48</sup> Regardless of how we refer to the sum of the laws of nature, Hobbes' position is that they are binding internally in conditions of security and that they ought to be followed. But the problem is that, externally, people will not always put the laws of nature into action. And it follows, for Hobbes, that the laws of nature are eternal and immutable because "it can never be that war shall preserve life and peace destroy it." Being eternal and immutable, he says, makes the science of the laws of nature the only true moral philosophy ever put forth to mankind. In other words, Hobbes is convinced that he has

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<sup>48</sup> Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 348.

produced the first and only true science of morals. Another way to state the case is that, because the laws of nature specify what our desires should be if we are to live peacefully among each other, the science of morality becomes a more or less demonstrative science. Before the laws of nature are implemented, moral terms are like terms we use with regard to perception such that “though common language and common sense might lead us to think that something is really and objectively good, in the same way as we might think that something is really and objectively red, in fact such ideas are illusions or fantasies, features of the inside of our heads only.”<sup>49</sup> The laws of nature serve as a means by which the changing nature of human conceptions of what is good and what is evil can be transformed into absolute statements of the “reality” of things in the moral realm that is determined by definition.<sup>50</sup> Hobbes, therefore,

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 63.

<sup>50</sup> In some ways, Hobbes' discussion of ethics parallels his upcoming discussion on religion although the sincerity of Hobbes' ethics is less contentious. He uses natural law (laws of nature) which is an established doctrine of the Scholastics: natural law is a moral code written into creation, discoverable through human reason, and emanating from God himself. In some senses, he is carrying on the tradition. In other ways, he is reappropriating it outside of its traditional understanding and application for his larger political goals. Samuel Mintz contends that Hobbes' use of the laws of nature were “a doctrine of ethics grounded in positive law [that] conveyed irresistibly the notion of atheism. Hobbes, it was felt, had cut the laws of nature off from their divine source.” See Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1962, 1996), 27. The natural law tradition maintains importance in this general sense through modernity, and even the present day. (The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America is an example, showing that the Colonies had the right to break free from the British crown because of the self evident truth that all have equal rights and are created equally. Likewise, International war crimes are outside of any national code of law, and are prosecuted on grounds of natural law).

transformed the notion of a law of nature from the way in which it was traditionally conceived.

Cooke explains that:

The law of nature in Hobbes has a deflated status in that it is no longer tied in any meaningful way to the law of a God who cares for human beings. But at the same time it has an elevated status since it has, as it were, 'moved up' to fill the place formerly held by God's commandments. They are now nature's commands, found out by human reason.<sup>51</sup>

Up to the end of Chapter XV of *Leviathan*, Hobbes has discussed the nature of natural human beings. One might ask why, in a work of political philosophy, so much attention is paid to perception, the origin of knowledge, and the requirements of science. While there is considerable discussion among Hobbes scholars about these issues, one thing seems quite clear: it is necessary for Hobbes to look closely at such issues because they are the foundation of his political thought. They are also essential to Hobbes' refutation of the doctrines of moral and political philosophers and theologians before him.

If the doctrines of the Scholastics and the ancient philosophers regarding the origin and nature of knowledge are ill formulated—as Hobbes was convinced they were—it might be possible, as Hobbes contended, to find the source of their errors in what they take to be knowledge and its justification. Aristotle, for example, believed there were abstract essences of things, and his theory of perception, adopted by the Scholastics, led to absurd conclusions (which Hobbes discusses in previous chapters and which he attacks with considerable vehemence in later chapters of *Leviathan*, especially in Parts III and IV). So if Hobbes can show that their doctrines lead to absurdities and ultimately to civil unrest and instability, then a system of thought not subject to such inconveniences of argument and absurdity of premises and

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<sup>51</sup> Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 61.

conclusions will likely have the opposite effect—that is, there will be no absurdity. Cees

Leijenhorst states the case nicely in the following:

According to Hobbes, [the] doctrine of ‘separate essences’ [and others like it] underlies some of the most politically dangerous scholastic doctrines, namely that of an incorporeal soul after death, the idea of ghosts haunting graveyards, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the idea that faith is infused, or as he mocks it, ‘inblown,’ virtue. Whereas the first ideas are papist bizarreries, the last is a Puritan notion. What all these absurd conceptions share is that they serve to sustain the clergy’s position of power, regardless of denomination.<sup>52</sup>

So, showing that the ancients and medievals were wrong about metaphysical and epistemological claims and replacing their positions with one that is not subject to such problems will, on Hobbes' reasoning, produce a rational justification for the power of government.

Since Hobbes has identified civil philosophy (political philosophy) in Chapter IX as one of the exact sciences, the conclusions he will reach regarding political organization will have the benefit of being indisputably true on the model of geometrical reasoning. Note that geometrical reasoning is applied clearly in Chapter V in Hobbes' description of ratiocination as the method by which to reach indubitable, even if conditional, conclusions on the basis of definitions that are carefully constructed and applied.

But further, understanding human nature (ideas and their associations, science, human tendencies to action, and varying views of good and bad) will allow Hobbes to move seamlessly into the creation of an artificial man, the sovereign, who represents the people and whose existence, while not “natural” in the sense of a natural life, is much like that of natural human beings. The people in the state of nature, then, are god-like in their creation of an artificial man

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<sup>52</sup> Cees Leijenhorst, “Sense and Nonsense about Sense: Hobbes and the Aristotelians on Sense Perception and Imagination,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 101.

whose power is constituted by the power of all natural human beings, and whose words and actions are law. The creation of the artificial man, the sovereign, is the subject of Chapter XVI.

Commentators note that it is only in *Leviathan* that Hobbes introduces the concept of authorization in the creation of the commonwealth. It is an important addition that has implications for social contract theory through the ages in that it solidifies the notion—which is not unique to Hobbes, but for which Hobbes may be rightly credited with making clear and eminently useful—that political power exists *only* by the authorization and consent of those who are to be governed by it.

A person is either natural or artificial, and a person is a being whose words or actions are his own or which represent the words and actions of another. A natural person owns words and actions while an artificial person owns the words and actions of another by “fiction,” that is, by artifice. A person “personates” in acting or representing himself or another person. In the latter case, the artificial person, who represents another, acts in the “name” of the other as a representative. Hobbes gives examples of those who may personate another, such as a representative, an attorney, or an actor. So when a person authorizes another person to act or speak for him, the actor (the person authorized) may make an agreement that binds the author as if the author made it himself. So, for example, when a political sovereign enters into a contract with another political state, it is “as if” the people who gave authority to the actor made this agreement themselves. So the authors “own” the actions and words of the actor. But only animate things and those human beings who are in command of their mental faculties are capable of being authors.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> It is interesting that Hobbes makes this claim regarding those who are mentally incompetent not being able to authorize another to act for them. While he mentions in this particular context only inanimate things and people who are insane as being incapable of being authors, it is also clearly the case that children cannot “authorize” anyone else to act for them or on their behalf because they do not have the

A commonwealth is formed through the institution of the sovereign by the multitude of people being represented by one man or an assembly by their consent.<sup>54</sup> And for Hobbes, it is not the unity of those who are the authors (that is, the unity of those who are represented), but it is the unity of the representer (the sovereign) that makes the “person” one. It is imperative to understand in Hobbes' system of thought the requirement that it is the unity of the sovereign that constitutes the commonwealth because, as Hobbes has already indicated, a general will of the people is impossible because the preferences of individuals are subject to variation over time within themselves (e.g., a thing I desire today I may not desire tomorrow) and variations between individuals are of even more concern because their preferences and desires are even more variable than those of a single individual. So the decisions of the person who is the representer are more stable, and hence more peace-protecting, than the decisions of the multitude. It is simple enough: if the multitude of people were themselves “one,” there could by definition be no disagreements between people, in which case there would be no need for the creation of sovereign power at all.

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intellectual maturity to do so. This may constitute an inconsistency on Hobbes' part since he claims that children tacitly consent to the rule of their parent or parents because and when they are protected by parents, it essentially makes the parents, by the children's consent, those who act on behalf of (and therefore represent) children.

<sup>54</sup> Sir Robert Filmer, a contemporary of Hobbes, noted that one problem with Hobbes' doctrine of consent and authorization concerns the institution of a democratic government, which Hobbes contends is consistent with his philosophical system. Filmer notes that “if every man covenant with every man, who shall be left to be the representative? If all must be representatives, who will remain to covenant?” See the selection, “Observations Concerning the Originall of Government, Upon Mr Hobs Leviathan,” in Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston, eds. *Leviathan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 271-277; 272.

Chapter XVI is central to Hobbes' political thought because it sets up the conditions and particular aspects of commonwealth presented in Part II of *Leviathan*. Hobbes' position on authorization and its essential connection to self-government, or the government of the people by their consent, marks the beginning of a serious and even more complete look at self-government that grows and culminates in the American and French Revolutions. Further, the notion of self-government finds variations in the celebrated works of contemporary political philosophers such as John Rawls, Robert Nozick, David Gauthier, and many others in the contractarian tradition.

While Hobbes' work on the authorization of the sovereign is so important, it is not without its detractors and critics. For example, while Hobbes ultimately argues for absolute government through the act of authorization of the sovereign in Part II of *Leviathan*, A.E. Taylor notes that the concept of authorization and Hobbesian absolute government are problematic in that “when once it is granted that absolute sovereignty is only defensible if it can be shown to be for the general interest, the door is opened for further inquiry whether absolutism really is for the general interest or not, and, if it can be shown that it is not, for the rejection of absolutism itself.” So, on Taylor's view, “Hobbes' theories really contain the germ of constitutionalism which he combated. To declare that absolutism requires an utilitarian justification is to be already half-way on the road to revolution...”<sup>55</sup> Taylor is referring here to Hobbes' similarity to political theorists such as John Locke, who argued for limited sovereignty and government power on the basis of a concept of the state of nature and law of nature from principles much like those found in Hobbes. A primary difference between them, however, is that Locke is usually understood to have argued for limited constitutional monarchy largely on the basis of a much less severe view of human nature and the state of nature. There are those, however, who do not believe that Hobbes' view of human nature and behavior is so pessimistic or severe as is usually assumed.

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<sup>55</sup> A.E. Taylor, *Thomas Hobbes* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., Ltd., 1908), 92.



Richard Tuck claims that the “common idea that Hobbes was in some sense ‘pessimistic’ about human nature is wide of the mark, for his natural men ... were in principle stand-offish towards one another rather than inherently belligerent.”<sup>56</sup> Locke’s position in *The Second Treatise of Government* is that government is certainly necessary, but it is necessary to solve the “inconveniences” of the state of nature, and that remaining in the natural condition is better than submitting to absolute government. Hobbes, on the other hand, gives us such a bleak view (even if not pessimistic) of human nature and human relations in the natural condition that the only solution he can find is absolute government with absolute power and authority to “overawe” everyone.

Hobbes' position on authorization and the creation of absolute sovereignty remains problematic since it may be that the theory of social contract itself does not really achieve the goals claimed for it. A.E. Taylor, referring to Jeremy Bentham and Edmund Burke, argues that “the rights of governments must be based on the actual needs of society, and not on any theory of the primitive rights of man.” From historical research into social origins,

the conception of government as having arisen at a definite time by means of a definite voluntary compact [is] even more unreal, by revealing the enormous extent to which definite political institutions have arisen out of an earlier stage of ‘customary’ law. Indeed, when we look the matter squarely in the face, it becomes evident that free association by voluntary agreement belongs to the culmination rather than to the beginnings of civilisation, and that the recognition of the binding force of such agreements presupposes the existence of a highly organised public opinion against their violation, so that contract depends upon society more than society upon contract. It is therefore quite impossible for us to take Hobbes's account of the compact by which savagery is ended and civilised life begun as serious historical fact.<sup>57</sup>

Taylor’s commentary is applicable and accurate on its face and on the assumption that the state of nature is a real historical condition from which people manage to escape. However, it is not at all clear that Hobbes contended that the state of nature was a real, historical state of affairs.

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 65.

<sup>57</sup> A.E. Taylor, *Thomas Hobbes* (London: Archibald Constable & Co, Ltd, 1908), 78-79.

Rather, it is likely either that the state of nature is simply a tool used to create the argument for the need for government or, perhaps more broadly, it is a hypothetical condition in which human beings would find themselves if there had never been social organization. More likely, it is a description of conditions among people after a political state has broken down from internal (civil) war.

Because there is significant uncertainty regarding the status of the natural condition, which is central to Hobbes' argument for the creation of the sovereign and the political state over which the sovereign will rule, accepting Hobbes' description of the natural condition may be enough simply to understand his argument for government power. However, there is another use for which Hobbes' (and other) contractarian arguments that employ the state of nature or some other pre-political condition, whether hypothetical or actual, may be employed in contractarian arguments generally. It is no accident that in the contractarian tradition, much ink is spilled on creating an argument for the need for government, for its reformulation, or for its replacement by utilizing some variation on a "state of nature" scheme. Many theorists have used a version of the state of nature or some argumentative device of a pre-political condition to justify the position that government or the principles upon which government exists or operates are created by the consent of the governed.

It is not possible or necessary here to survey the many philosophers and theorists from Hobbes' time to our own who have used contractarian argumentation in political theory. But there are some who stand out in their own right and owe a debt to Hobbes as the first modern political theorist (and therefore the first fully entrenched individualistic contract theorist) using the state of nature theme to justify political conclusions. Further, interpretations of the use of quasi-state-of-nature conditions may show some ways in which Hobbes' state of nature and the political structure built from it are more respectful of and fully consistent with human equality than at least some others.

Interest in social contract theory waned in the 19th century, especially given the influence of the Utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, the former having referred to contract theory as “nonsense on stilts.” Further, in the 20th century, the influence of the logical positivists’ emotivism, with its adherence to the notion that statements are meaningful only if they may be verified in actual or possible experience, seemed at the time to render moral, social, political, and religious claims little more than emotional outbursts of approval or disapproval with no place for argument or analysis. So social contract theory took hold after Hobbes, proceeded through Locke in the 17th century, was adopted by the American Revolutionaries, was reconfigured in Rousseau, and then began to die out until John Rawls, in the middle of the 20th century, published “Two Concepts of Rules” and “Justice as Fairness” in 1955 and 1957,<sup>58</sup> respectively. At about the same time, emotivism and logical positivism were losing their hold on philosophers’ attention, and ethical inquiry, too, came back to life as something much more than mere emotional claims.

Hobbes' influence in the history of Western political thought should not be underestimated. John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* is nearly identical in argumentative formulation in utilizing the structures of the state of nature, the law of nature, state of war, and the creation of sovereign power. Certainly, Locke came to drastically different conclusions from those reached by Hobbes. Where Hobbes described the state of nature as despicably unpleasant and unbearable, Locke described it as “inconvenient” most of the time and leading to “war” in only limited instances caused by “noxious” people who would refuse to follow the law of nature. Where Locke derives one and only one law of nature, Hobbes had (depending upon which work of Hobbes is consulted) at least fifteen of them or more than twenty. Where Locke argued for limited constitutional monarchy, Hobbes argued for absolute

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<sup>58</sup> “Two Concepts of Rules,” *Philosophical Review* (Jan 1955) 64(1):3-32 and “Justice as Fairness,” *Journal of Philosophy* (Oct 1957), 54(22): 653-662.

government. Locke does not mention a debt to Hobbes in any way at all, but the structure of the *Second Treatise of Government* and the very clear disagreements with Hobbes' work, to which Locke most certainly had access and would have read carefully, point clearly to a significant influence. The American Revolutionaries, most notably Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, were clearly and unabashedly influenced by the work of Locke, and one American Revolutionary in particular, John Adams, was also a thoroughgoing Hobbesian in his description of humanity and human behavior in *Discourses on Davila*. Similar to Hobbes' account in *Leviathan*, Adams' *Discourses* contain a "pessimistic" account of human nature where people are motivated by competition and glory.<sup>59</sup>

The American Revolutionaries looked to the work of Locke to justify revolution, even citing some of the very same reasons for the dissolution or change of government mentioned by Locke, such as unfair taxation and the quartering of soldiers in private homes, among other issues. Thomas Jefferson went so far as to proclaim in a 1787 letter to James Madison that "a little revolution now and then is a good thing." This in no way means that Hobbes justified political revolution. He argued vehemently against it. That certainly is not the case, and in fact he argued vehemently against it. The most important aspect of the reason that Hobbes' argument prohibits revolution is that the sovereign is not part of the contract made between subjects to give up their right to all things to the sovereign, and that attempting to overthrow government is the height of absurdity since it throws people back into the state of war. Further, Hobbes claims that revolution is contradictory and logically absurd because to limit sovereign power is to put oneself under a power stronger than the one being limited.<sup>60</sup> Locke, Jefferson,

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<sup>59</sup> John Adams, "Discourses on Davila," (1805) Online Library of Liberty at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2104> .

<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, Locke, who disagreed with Hobbes regarding justification for revolution, claimed that it is absurd to argue for absolute sovereignty since no one can give to another that which he does not himself

and Paine, however, held that the sovereign is part of the contract and that if a sovereign fails to live up to the terms of the contract, revolution may be a more appealing alternative. As Locke indicated, a sovereign who fails to protect property or who violates clearly established rules might actually make revolution preferable to living in a regime with so much power that it is like putting oneself in a condition in which we wish to protect ourselves against polecats and end up being devoured by a lion.

In the 20th century, Jean Hampton argued that Hobbes' justification for absolute power fails. In *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, Hampton puts forth a straightforward argument: the supposed right of the subject to resist sovereign punishment in itself indicates that the sovereign does not have absolute power, and since Hobbes contended that absolute power is necessary to secure peace, Hobbes' argument fails. It means, also, that Hobbes' "geometric deduction" of absolute sovereignty is not successful.<sup>61</sup>

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possess. In other words, it is not possible to transfer absolute power to a sovereign because no human being has absolute power over himself. See John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), Chap. IV, 17. Hobbes' contemporary, Bishop John Bramhall, argued against absolute sovereign power as well. A contemporary author, John Parkin, puts the point in this way: "God's prior law mean(s) that it was never lawful for private men to kill one another, and the right of self-defence is only a privilege granted by God for emergencies. The political implication of this last point is that the people could never grant the right of life and death to the sovereign, because they never had that general right to give way in the first place. Only God could grant such a power to sovereigns." See John Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England 1640-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), Kindle e-book Location 164.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 206. S.A. Lloyd also contends that Hobbes' argument does not seem to lead to absolute sovereignty. She notes that the "various Laws of Nature Hobbes articulates do require that we submit to arbitration of disputes, that we keep promises, be grateful, modest, fair, and the like. Hobbes offers no obvious argument to the

It is not only Hobbes' commentators from the Enlightenment to the present who dispute Hobbes' claim that absolute sovereignty follows from his description of the right of nature. It is also the case for his contemporaries, such as Bishop Bramhall, Robert Filmer, and Clarendon, among others. So Hobbes' argument for absolute sovereignty comes into serious question and therefore sheds doubt on the validity and quality of his argument. But again, the point is the influence that Hobbesian argumentation in the social contract tradition has had and continues to have on views of the justification of government and its power.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Rawls's work continues to be influential in social contract theory after the publication of his two seminal articles in 1955 and 1957. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1970) is a work in political philosophy that owes a debt to Hobbesian thought even though Rawls never once mentions any such influence on his own work. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls offers a different kind of contractarian thinking—one that does not require excursions into hypothetical or actual natural conditions, nor does it require revolution. Instead, Rawls's version of contractarian thinking involves reasoning from inside an already established political and social system to determine what sorts of principles ought to be employed in ensuring that it lives up to a just and fair system amenable to the rational desires of equally rational beings concerned to look out for their own interests. Rational self-interest of a Rawlsian variety is not really that much different from the self-interest of Hobbesian persons. Instead of trying to extract themselves from a natural condition, Rawlsian contractors are looking to ensure justice. The details of Rawls's system are not important in and of themselves in an analysis of Hobbes' work in *Leviathan*, but again, it is instructive to see what Rawls did with a "hypothetical" condition from which people in his "original position" will derive principles of justice.

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effect that any of these are, or even collectively add up to, a submission to an absolute sovereign." See S.A. Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Cases in the Law of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009; Kindle e-book location 164).

Rather than assume that people are in some pre-political or pre-social condition of war and extreme unpleasantness, Rawls simply assumes that people live in society and are concerned to see to it that the government under which they live will enact rules based on principles that answer the concerns of its citizens. Rawls describes the “original position” as being under the “veil of ignorance,” a position in which people would reason based on the assumption that they do not know their position in society, their physical strength, or other particulars about themselves that might lead them to make decisions about principles of justice that are inherently biased. So, in such a position, people would engage in a decision procedure without knowing whether they are rich or poor, male or female, strong or weak, very intelligent or only of average intellect, and so on. This is the veil of ignorance in the original position from which the principles are derived. The short story is that Rawls argues that these people will derive two principles of justice, the equal liberty principle (that everyone will have access to basic political process such as the right to vote, to assemble, and so on) and the difference principle (such that inequalities in wealth and opportunity will be handled such that the least advantaged members of society are not made worse off, and in fact are to be made better off, than they would be otherwise). In other words, everyone has a right to equal participation in the social goods that political organization provides, and all people are to be considered equally with respect to access to the goods and services necessary for living a good life in that society. The important part of all this (with respect to Rawls as compared with Hobbes) is that, just like Hobbes, there is no pre-conceived notion of what the good life is, and each person is able in this scheme of things to determine for herself the way in which she wishes to live her life and seek her own good. Scholar Tom Sorell’s explanation of Hobbes’ project in the natural condition shows that Rawls is more like Hobbes than might at first appear to be the case. This is because Hobbes “started from the hypothetical situation—the state of nature—in which no rights of kings

and no duties of subjects existed at all. This enabled Hobbes to ask whether it would be necessary to invent such rights, and if so, which.”<sup>62</sup> This is perhaps—at least on some interpretations of the case—one of the most important aspects of modern political theory that was ushered in with efficiency and clarity by the early modern political thinkers, of whom Hobbes was one of the first and clearly one of the most widely read.

The Hobbesian project of establishing government to ensure justice is the inheritance of many of our contemporary political theorists, and while they clearly do not all agree with each other, the importance of justice, which is the content of the third law of nature in Hobbesian thought, is clear. Robert Nozick, for example, who claimed to argue from a Kantian and Lockean background, disagreed strongly with Rawls in his *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, arguing that principles like those Rawls described were anything but just since they worked on “patterned principles of justice” that ignore and override the interests of individuals who have a right to particular things for which they have worked or that were willed or given to them. Nozick, too, holds with the notion that there is no specific and obligatory sense of the good to which everyone must adhere, but - at least we know - the possession of property is an elemental part of the foundation of justice. So any theory that violates such rights to property is not a good theory at all.

Michael Sandel strongly disagrees with the modern liberal notion that there is no viable overriding conception of the good to which people ought to strive. Sandel’s position is that theorists who focus so stringently on individualism inaccurately describe human beings as “unencumbered selves.” Hobbes’ work is often characterized as describing people who have no close or binding relationships with others, which, if accurate, renders them isolated, atomistic individualists. Instead, according to Sandel, we are actually radically social and encumbered

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<sup>62</sup> Tom Sorell, “The science in Hobbes's politics,” in G.A.J. Rogers and Alan Ryan, ed., *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 67-80; 75.



beings with all sorts of relationships with each other and conceptions of the good that are formed by all sorts of relations in real social groups. People are therefore not radically antisocial or asocial beings, and they have never been so

That Hobbes has had and continues to have significant influence in the reasoning of political theorists and philosophers is only the beginning of the story. Hobbes has much more in store, including a vibrant description of and arguments for social life at and after the creation of government and a position on the relationship of religious belief and action in social and political organization that is both shocking and brilliantly argued. One need not agree with Hobbes to appreciate his arguments and the influence he had on his contemporaries, on revolutionaries, and on societies and governments today. It is, then, to Hobbes' arguments regarding "Commonwealth" that we now turn.