

## Notes on Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*<sup>1</sup>

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### I. Sensation as Motion [in a **plenum**, i.e. where space is full and there exists no vacuum.]

1.1.1 Hobbes begins by stating and adopting as an assumption the **representational theory of the mind**.

1.1.2 His next premise is that the mind is a **tabula rasa**.

1.1.4 Argument opposed to the Aristotelian/Scholastic view of perception (form impressing itself on the mind). All sensible qualities are motions of the object which are impressed on the perceiver. Thus, qualities perceived are in the subject, not the object. It is for this reason that Hobbes claims all sensation is reaction – an outward movement of **resistance**. The result is that the object sensed is experienced as outside of oneself. [See Martinich, HD, "sensation", 271.]

### II. Imagination

1.2.2 Motion of objects [in a plenum] has a "ripple effect" on the mind. The decay of [immediate] sensation is imagination – the traces (ripples) left by the **dominant** external motion acting on the senses.

1.2.3 The effects of sensation (imagination) are quickly obscured and diluted by all other incoming sensations. Thus, the intensity of imagination decreases due to the actions of other sensations. [Note: Sensation is **necessary** for imagination.] "Memory" refers to the mental representation as a "decaying" sensation. Thus, imagination and memory are essentially the same. [Note: "Decay" is misleading.]

1.2.4 Experience is the memory of many things. Imagination can be either **simple** (man, woman, horse, chair, etc.) or **compound** (centaur, seated woman, man on a horse, unicorn, etc.)

["Afterimages" are also discussed by Hobbes as phenomena with which we're familiar but have no name as such.]

1.2.5-6 Dreams are the imaginations of one who is asleep. The mental representations are also derived from sensation, but the compounding of images is initiated by internal motions ("distemper").

[Hobbes offers a brief argument intended to refute the claim that the dream state is indistinguishable from the waking state. Cf. Descartes.]

1.2.7-9 Hobbes launches into an extended discussion of apparitions, visions, etc., accounting for them in terms of imagination, dreams, and deception. Belief in such things as ontologically distinct from dreams and compound imaginings deters the proper development of civil obedience in people.

1.2.10 Understanding is the result of language and other signs that stimulate or give rise to mental representations = imagination. [correspondence theory of truth?]

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<sup>1</sup> Hackett Edition

### III. Train of Imagination (Thoughts)

1.3.1-2 Mental discourse is contrasted with discourse in words. Mental discourse is a train of thoughts, i.e. a succession of imaginations. Thoughts are related by means of association of past sensations of motions.

1.3.3-4 Mental discourse can be either **unguided**, e.g. when the mind wanders, or **regulated** by desire or design. The former may allow for a pattern. But the latter is typically **rational** in the sense that *a desire is linked to a goal*. The mind then moves to an imaging of the succession of the means to accomplish that end and, thus, formulates a **rational plan**.

1.3.5 There are two kinds of regulated thoughts; the first is a search for the **cause** of something that has occurred, the second is the consideration of the **possible effects**. This "regulated thinking" is a defining feature of the human being. [Consider the notion of "projecting oneself into the future". What would this mean in Hobbesian terms?]

1.3.6-10 One can think about the actual past (remembrance) as well as the possible future (foresight). These projections are called **prudence, foresight, providence, or wisdom**. Hobbes' point is that their reliability is proportional to one's experience. Prediction is guesswork, not prophecy. [Argument for the impossibility of providence ("the foresight of things to come"). Causal reasoning and inference is based on experience.]

1.3.11 This constitutes the basic operation of the mind. All other activities are based on sensation and imagination. They are acquired and improved with practice and the use of language.

1.3.12 Finally, there is no imagination of **infinity**. Rather it is a conception of our inability to imagine something as boundless. The limits of thought follow from the empiricist assumption that all imagination derives ultimately from sensation, i.e. experience. All ideas are determinate.

[Analyze Hobbes' argument for the limits of human thought. Discuss this radical empiricist doctrine. Does it make sense?]

### IV. Speech

1.4.3 The function of speech is to "transfer" thoughts into sentences. Names are marks to aid in **remembering** and **signifying** things. (Words used to communicate thoughts, feelings, etc. are called "signs".) Speech is used in

- the representation of a pattern of reasoning,
- the communication of a pattern of reasoning to others,
- the communication of our desires and interests, and
- play and self amusement.

1.4.4 The abuses of speech include

- the misrepresentation of one's thoughts
- deception by means of metaphorical language
- misrepresentation of one's desires and intentions
- harm caused to others

1.4.6 Names can be **proper** when designating a particular thing (Peter, Mary, this tree, this chair, etc.), or **common** when designating a general type (tree, chair) or "universal". Nothing follows from this however about the **existence** of universals. Nothing is universal except names. [Here Hobbes subscribes to the view known as **nominalism**.] Names can also be expressed as descriptions and, so, are not necessarily single words.

1.4.7-8 Hobbes points out and gives examples of the variety in the breadth and extension of general terms.

1.4.9 Language allows the relations among **particular** things to be expressed as **general** rules, e.g. that the sum of the interior angles of a triangle are equal to  $180^\circ$ .

1.4.10 Words are also necessary for calculating and reasoning with numbers.

1.4.11 **Truth** and **falsity** are attributes of *language*, not things. **Error** is distinguished from truth and is not its opposite.

1.4.12 Truth is the right order of names in a statement. Thus, it is important to know the meanings of names. Hence, the necessity of **definitions**. A definition is an accurate representation of a thing.

1.4.13-21 [Note: Hobbes talks about definitions as if they were assumptions.] Names apply to the following kinds of things:

1. matter (body)
2. quality (accident, property) of matter
3. fancy (mental representation of a sensation)
4. names and sentences
  - a. positive (existentials)
  - b. negative (non-existentials)
  - c. invented word (meaningless sounds)
  - d. oxymoron (contradictory words)

1.4.22 Understanding is having the **thoughts** that correspond to a set of **sentences**.

1.4.24 "Inconstant names" ("wisdom", "fear", "cruelty", "justice", etc.) are variable and roughly equivalent to connotations. These are not fit elements of proper reasoning. Nor are figures of speech proper elements of reasoning.

## V. Reason and Science

1.5.1-2 "Reason" is defined as reckoning (calculating) with general names (words) for the purpose of marking or signifying one's thoughts. (Reckoning with numbers is arithmetic.)

1.5.4 Hobbes claims that to use reason properly one must start from first definitions and proceed from one consequence to the next carefully examining the steps to make sure no mistakes have been made. If one accepts the conclusions (sums) offered by another without examining the calculation (reasoning), one can at best form beliefs about things but never reach the level of knowledge.

1.5.5 **Error** is a mistake in calculating without the use of words about **particular** things. **Absurdity** arises when one uses **general** names without reference or draws inferences from false premises. Geometric reasoning, which starts from definitions, is superior to the reasoning of philosophers [which presumably starts from assumptions].

1.5.8-15 Causes of Absurdity (common errors in reasoning)

1.5.17 Hobbes concludes from this brief survey that reason is not innate nor acquired through mere experience but achieved *only* through effort. The end result of correct reasoning is **science**, i.e. the knowledge of consequences based on fact (sense and memory).

**History** ~ knowledge of the sequence of facts. **Science** ~ knowledge of the sequence of facts **and** dependence of one fact on another.

1.5.18 Speech (language) is necessary for reasoning.

1.5.20 Benefit of mankind is the goal of reason and science.

## VI. Passions

1.6.1-53 Animal motion

### Hobbes' Definitions and Classification of Motions

- I. **vital** (involuntary) – not dependent on thought (heart beating, breathing, etc.)
- II. **voluntary** – dependent on thought (movement, speech, etc.) and beginning with imagination.
  - A. **endeavor** – the first movements toward or from a thing; not sensed due to its minute scale; initiates movement that is visible.
    1. **appetite** (desire) – love of an object which is seen as good.
      - a) presence – love or hate
      - b) absence – desire or aversion
      - c) natural – present from birth.
      - d) acquired – through experience, trial and error.
    2. **aversion** – hatred of an object seen as bad.
      - a) presence – love or hate
      - b) absence – desire or aversion
      - c) natural – present from birth.
      - d) acquired – through experience, trial and error.
    3. **contempt** – immobility or resistance with regard to a thing; that which is held as worthless; object is called "vile" or "inconsiderable".

[N.B. 1.6.7: There are no absolute rules about what is good or bad. **Value** is not in the objects themselves, but is entirely subjective and determined either by the individual, the sovereign in a commonwealth, or the judges set up by consent of those in disagreement. (This follows from materialist assumptions.)]

### Definitions

- **pleasure** – awareness of motion (desire) directed toward an absent or present good.
- **pain** (displeasure) – awareness of motion (aversion) directed toward an absent or present evil.

- **deliberation** – alternation of appetites and aversions and thoughts of the good and evil consequences. This puts an end to the **liberty** of doing or not doing something according to appetite or aversion. (Cf. reason ~ calculation in general; deliberation is about particulars. [1.6.49])
- **act of will** – the last appetite or aversion which culminates in the execution or omission of an action. [1.6.53] [Note: Will is not always a **rational** desire.]
- **felicity** (happiness)– the continual achievement of good. [1.6.58]

## X. Power

1.10.1 **Power** is the present means (ability) to achieve future apparent good [goal].

1.10.2 **Natural power** is that which resides in the faculties of a human being. **Instrumental powers** are the means one has for increasing one's power.

1.10.3 Greatest power is the sum of all individual powers united in one entity, e.g. a **sovereign** or commonwealth.

1.10.4-15 Hobbes enumerates and defines the various forms of power.

1.10.16 The **worth** of man is the "exchange value" of his power.

1.10.18 **Dignity** is the public worth of a man, "the value set on him by the commonwealth".

1.10.53 **Worthiness** is one's fitness to be valued as powerful.

## XI. Difference of Manners

1.11.1 **Manners** are "those qualities of mankind that concern their living together in peace and unity". **Felicity** is the continual satisfaction of one's desires. All desire and human action is movement toward both the achievement of contentment and its security or permanence. All that varies are the ways taken to reach the goal. The variations are determined by one's passions and knowledge of the means to achieve the desired ends.

1.11.2 All human beings are motivated primarily by a desire for ever increasing power. The reason for this is that more (future) power is necessary to secure the power of living well that one has already secured in the present.

1.11.3 Competition for limited resources leads to contentious relations, strife, and war among individuals.

1.11.4-5 Conditions under which one would obey a "common power"

- desire for comfort and pleasure
- fear of death
- desire for knowledge, peace, and security.

## XIII. State of Nature

1.13.1 All human beings are by nature equal with respect to body and mind. [Insert: Hobbes' rather enlightened view of women.]

1.13.2 Intrinsic mental abilities are distributed more evenly among humans than physical strength. "For there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of anything than that every man is contented with his share." [Cf. Montaigne and Descartes.]

1.13.3-5 From this equality arises **competition** and **distrust** ("diffidence").

1.13.4 And since, in response to diffidence, one is inclined to take preemptive action, the pervasive distrust leads to **war**.

1.13.5 Finally, to extract from others the same sense of worth that one places on one's own life, and to promote respect for one's strength, men often set out to conquer one another.

1.13.6 Thus, the three principle causes of war are **competition**, **distrust**, and **glory**.

1.13.8 Without a sovereign power over them, men live in a state where all are at war with all. This state of war does not necessarily entail battle, but that all are enemies of one another.

1.13.9 Conditions of life in a state of war are "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short".

1.13.13 Under such conditions, the ordinary notions of justice and morality do not apply. Since everyone is forced to act accordingly to preserve their own lives, they are doing what they have a right to do.

1.13.14 The passions that may lead to peace are **fear of death**, **desire for comfort and security**, and the **hope of attaining them**.

[See "argument for the absolute sovereign".]

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