

Hobbes's *Leviathan*

G. J. Matthey

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Hellenistic Ethics

- In the generation after Aristotle (the “Hellenistic” period), there arose two new philosophical schools to compete with the schools of Plato and Aristotle.
 - Stoicism,
 - Epicureanism.
- Although both schools made important claims about reality and knowledge, their chief concern was with ethics.
- The Stoics took Socrates as their model and developed a doctrine of an ideally virtuous person—the sage.
- The Epicureans advocated a life of “pleasure.”
- The names of both schools have been preserved in contemporary English:
 - “Stoic”: Dispassionate person who is indifferent to pleasure and pain.
 - “Epicurean”: Sophisticated pursuer of pleasure.

Stoic Ethics

- The main concern of the Stoics was to live the best possible life, which is a life of happiness.
- The key to good living is the recognition of the limits of our *autonomy* or control over our own lives.
- The only things under our control are our:
 - Opinions,
 - Impulses,
 - Desires and aversions.
- We become unhappy when we confuse what is in our control with what is not.
- The key to a smooth life is to treat that which is not in our control with indifference, as being nothing to us.

Epicurean Ethics

- Epicurus, like Aristotle, took happiness (*eudaimonia*) to be the goal of life.
- He taught that one must practice the things that produce happiness.
- Epicurus is most famous for his identification of happiness with pleasure.
- Pleasure is what all animals seek, and as such it is the end of all human action.
- The highest pleasure is not sensual gratification, but rather the absence of pain.
- We attain pleasure and avoid pain through the exercise of prudence in all of our actions.

Christian Ethics

- The ethical and political theories of the ancient Greeks and Romans were swept away as Christianity became the dominant religion of the West.
- The “good life” in Christianity is the “Godly life”: the life which conforms to the will of the Christian God.
- “Happiness” for human beings is understood to be union with God, which takes place after death.
- The fundamental virtues for the Christian are:
 - Faith (unquestionable belief in God),
 - Hope (for a better world beyond the physical world),
 - Charity (love for other human beings as creatures of God).
- Unlike the Aristotelian virtues of character, these virtues are directly instilled in the soul by God.

Christian Political Philosophy

- Some passages of the *New Testament* suggest that political affairs are not relevant to the well-being of the soul.
 - “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; render unto God the things which are God’s” (Mark 12:14-17).
 - “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).
 - St. Paul instructed the Roman believers to submit to governing authorities (Romans 13).

- The meaning of these quotations are the subject of *hermeneutical* debate.
- Early Christianity was apolitical.
- St. Augustine (354-430) argued in *The City of God* that political entities are instituted by God to prevent harm to believers.

Church and State

- In the Christian era, “temporal” authority (the authority of the state) was frequently merged with ecclesiastical authority (the authority of the church).
 - God grants, through the church, temporal authority to the ruler.
- When the unity of the church was shattered by the Protestant Reformation in Christianity, the basis for the authority of the state became an issue.
- A number of religious wars were fought in Europe, and civil war between Catholics and Protestants was fought in Great Britain.
- Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) sought to place the authority of the state on a non-religious, philosophical basis.

The Leviathan

- According to Hobbes, the state (“Leviathan”), is an “artificial man” which is intended for the protection and defense of natural men.



Artificial Life

- Hobbes was a materialist who believed that life is nothing but motion of the body which begins in a principal part of the body called the “soul.”

- There is no real difference, on this view, between a natural living thing and an artificial life or *automaton* (robot).
- The state is an artificial life, with features like those of natural life:
 - Sovereignty (power of the state): Soul (principal source of motion),
 - Reward and punishment: Nerves,
 - Laws: Reason and Will,
 - Harmony: Health,
 - Civil war: Death,
 - Pacts and covenants: God’s fiat creating humanity.
- *Leviathan* describes all aspects of the artificial life of the state.

Natural Man

- To understand the character of the artificial man, we must first understand the make-up and operations of natural men.
- The workings of the mind are divided into two types:
 - Representational (sense, imagination, reason),
 - Passionate.
- We will focus here on the human passions, as they are most directly relevant to the foundations of the state.
- The passions are the result of “endeavors” or beginnings of motions:
 - Desire (an endeavor toward something, which we call “good”),
 - Aversion (an endeavor away from something, which we call “evil”).

The Basis of Human Action

- Human action is based on the passions.
- Voluntary actions are directed at satisfying desires or avoiding that to which we are averse.
- There is no Aristotelian “highest good” as the natural end of our action.
 - There is only a continual series of desires.
- People seek to increase their power as the only way to guarantee the continued satisfaction of their desires.
- This self-interested power-seeking is the basis of enmity and war between people.

The State of Nature

- People are equal enough in their strength that no one person can by himself gain predominance over all others.
- In general, if everyone acts on their own, each person has some chance of satisfying his desires to some extent.
- If there is no common power restraining individual pursuit of power, people will act to deprive others of their lives and productions.
- The state of unrestrained human beings is called by Hobbes the “state of nature.”
- The state of nature is a state of war of everyone against everyone else.
- In the state of nature, life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Evidence for the State of Nature

- The state of nature just described is deduced from the character of human passions, on the assumption that there is no common restraining power.
- But there is corroborating evidence from experience for the truth of the conclusion.
- Even with a common power in place, people go to great lengths to secure themselves and their possessions against others who would take them away.
- In undeveloped areas (e.g., seventeenth century America), states of nature actually exist.
- States of nature also exist when the agents are nations which act without external restraint.
- In a state of war, there is no justice or injustice, only pursuit of power by one nation against another.

Laws of Nature

- Moral philosophy is the science of immutable and eternal theorems of human behavior.
- These theorems are called “laws of nature.”
- Laws of nature are closely connected to a fundamental “right of nature.”
 - Each person is at liberty to do what is necessary for his self-preservation.

- Therefore, every person has a right to every thing, including the body of others.
- Generally, a law of nature is a rule that forbids one from doing what undermines the preservation of one's own life.
- The first two laws of nature are as follows:
 - Strive for peace.
 - Give up the right to every thing, to the same extent as do others, in order to gain peace.

Contract and Covenant

- A contract is a mutual transfer of rights (and a covenant a deferred transfer), which may be undertaken in two ways:
 - By expressly entering into it (“I agree to . . . ”),
 - By implication.
- Contracts made in the state of nature are binding only insofar as they do not undermine the right of nature.
- Contracts made under a common power are binding without exception, since the power will provide enforcement for both sides.
- We can now lay down a third law of nature:
 - Contracts must be kept (since without them, there is war).
- Breaking a contract is injustice, and injustice can only exist if there is a higher power to enforce the contract.

Two Types of Justice

- Two types of justice are commonly recognized:
 - Commutative justice,
 - Distributive justice.
- Commutative justice is thought to be equality in exchanges of goods.
 - The equality of exchange is based on the value to the contractors.
 - So, commutative justice is equity in carrying out terms of the covenant.
- Distributive justice is thought to be the distribution of goods according to merit.
 - Merit outside the covenant “is rewarded of grace only.”
 - So, distributive justice can only be the distribution of goods on the basis of the covenant.

The State

- In accordance with the second law of nature, we enter (by implication) into a covenant with a common power: the state or commonwealth.
 - The commonwealth is a permanent strong power that will enforce covenants and provide security.
- The power in the commonwealth is the *sovereign*, which may be a single person or an assembly.
- The will of the sovereign is identical to the will of the people whose covenant gives the sovereign his power.

Two Types of Commonwealth

- There are two possible types of commonwealth:
 - By institution (arising by agreement),
 - By acquisition (arising by force).
- An agreement to institute the sovereign is made out of fear of the others in the state of nature.
- An implicit covenant allowing one to continue living is made out of fear of the conquering force.
- In both cases, the power of the sovereign may not be justly overturned by a new covenant.
- The reason is that the sovereign is not capable of violating the covenant, so he is incapable of injustice.

Human Liberty

- A person is free insofar nothing stops him from doing what he wills to do.
- However, every act of will by a person is necessary, because it has some cause, which has its cause, up to God as the first cause.
- In this way, the liberty of a person is consistent with the necessity of his actions.
- Although God is the ultimate cause of human actions, God is not the “author” of all of them, since many human actions disobey the command of God.
- In a commonwealth, there are civil laws, which form “artificial chains” which bind subjects to the commands of the sovereign.
- Although these bonds may be easy to break, there is great danger in so doing.

The Liberty of the Subject

- The laws of a commonwealth cannot be so extensive as to cover all types of human actions.
- Insofar as an action is not forbidden by law, the subject is at liberty to perform it for his own benefit.
- Moreover, subjects who are not imprisoned are free to do what they wish, within the confines of the law.
- Subjects who demand liberty may wish to be exempt from the laws that restrict the behavior of others.
- But this is contrary to the reason that laws are established: to protect the individual, which requires law enforcement.
- So, the only liberty subjects have is what the sovereign permits, such as engaging in trade, raising their families, etc.

The Liberty of the Commonwealth

- The only absolute liberty is that of the commonwealth itself, which is like an individual in the state of nature, with a natural right to defend itself by any means.
- Thus, a commonwealth arms itself against neighboring countries.
- Subjects believe that they have absolute liberty as a result of reading about ancient states whose people were hostile to their sovereigns.
- In fact, the restriction of liberty is part of the contract made to avoid the state of nature.
- The subject retains those liberties, such as self-defense, which cannot be given up by agreement.
- The variation in liberties of subjects in different times and places depends entirely upon the laws that the sovereign sees fit to institute.

Sovereign and Subject

- The liberties of the subject depend to a great extent on the actions of the sovereign.
- If the sovereign acts on the basis of established law, then the subject is to be afforded the protection of the law.
- But if the sovereign acts on the basis of power alone, he must be obeyed, because his will is that of the subject.

- If the sovereign fails in his role of protector of the subjects, then the obligation to obey him ceases.
- If the sovereign gives up his own and his family's sovereignty, or dies without heir, a state of nature ensues.
- People are subject to the sovereignty of the commonwealth in which they are present.
- The sovereign may surrender in war and thereby transfer his sovereignty to the victor, but if he is held prisoner, his subjects remain obligated to him.

The Diseases and Dissolution of the Commonwealth

- The commonwealth is an artificial body, and like a natural body, it is subject to "diseases," such as the following doctrines:
 - That "every private man is judge of good and evil actions,"
 - That religious beliefs should govern the behavior of the subject toward the sovereign,
 - That the sovereign is subject to civil laws,
 - That the sovereign has no rights to one's private property,
 - That some other form of government is superior to the present one.
- A strong monarch is needed to put down writers who defend democracy on the grounds that the subjects of monarchy lack liberty and are slaves.
- The commonwealth is dissolved when the subjects are no longer afforded protection and hence lose their obligation to obey the sovereign.

The Lesser of Two Evils

- Sovereigns can and do exercise their sweeping powers in a way that harms many people.
- Some think that the form of government (monarchy, democracy) is at fault.
- But in fact, it is simply the human condition to suffer from harmful behavior.
- We must always weigh one harm against another.
- The harm brought about by civil war is much greater than that brought about by the abuses of the sovereign.
- Avoidance of civil war (which in England caused Hobbes to flee the country) is the best result we can get.