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Introduction

Thomas Hobbes: A Pioneer of Modernity

If the philosophy of the state, and of the nature of political authority as such, had long been a neglected, even expressly despised, area of study, there is certainly no doubt about its acute contemporary relevance. In view of an ongoing wave of wars, and particularly of civil wars and internal social conflicts, we no longer simply talk of “prosperity” or “emancipation” as the ultimate ends of political action and intervention. These ends now seem more basic and elementary, namely: peace and freedom, in immediate conjunction with the principle of justice.

The quest for a social order capable of securing such ends has now lost any suggestion of musty irrelevance. The fundamental question for any philosophy of politics—the legitimation and limitation of the public exercise of power—has emphatically passed beyond a merely antiquarian interest in intellectual history and has returned to occupy the place where it has always belonged: the center of a truly political philosophy. And Thomas Hobbes is one of the most important representatives of political philosophy in this sense.

Yet this thinker was concerned with far more than simply “the state” and the nature of law and political authority. For the body of work that Hobbes left us is essentially encyclopedic in character. This philosophy embraces an ontology and a natural philosophy; it examines the nature of language, reason, and knowledge; it investigates human feelings and emotions, and many other issues in what we would now call the philosophy

of mind; and, last but not least, it engages with fundamental questions of morality and religion.

If we ignore the field of mathematics, where Hobbes occasionally lost his way (for a judicious account of his views in this respect, see Grant 1996), he addressed his chosen problems in a way that is almost always original, and indeed *radical* in two senses of the word. In his thorough and resolute pursuit of understanding he penetrates below the apparent surface, illuminates hidden corners of experience, and thereby opens up new perspectives that are highly challenging in both substantive and methodological terms. Hobbes is an intellectual revolutionary who undertook nothing less than a fundamental re-grounding of philosophy, one comparable in its radicality with the new beginning proposed by Descartes. But apart from the methodological significance that he assigns to mathematics—something that he shares with the French thinker—Hobbes develops an entirely different revolution in the field of philosophy. He regards the famous Cartesian argument from the *cogito* as fallacious, he repudiates all mind-body dualism, and he replaces ideas with *nomina* or names. Hobbes is an emphatic nominalist. And instead of beginning with an exercise in radical doubt, the English thinker begins by offering a radical new construction of the world.

It is, above all, in his philosophy of the state, of the nature of law and political authority, that Hobbes reveals the full originality, radicality, and consistency of his thought, engaging explicitly with principles and forms of argument (concerning the concept, grounding, and normative criteria of the state and legal authority) that have remained an object of systematic discussion to this day. In this respect too, Hobbes is still our philosophical contemporary.

In the courage that he shows in making full use of his own understanding, Hobbes can be seen as an Enlightenment thinker in the Kantian sense, and one who demands a similar courage on the part of his readers. He struggles against all superstition, derides uncritical reverence for books and supposed authorities, and subjects religious and political communities of every kind to the most thorough critical examination.

This son of an uneducated country priest (who was apparently more interested in drink and cards than in matters of theology), a university student who stoutly rejected the scholastic disputes that were common in such institutions, Hobbes sought to overcome superstition of all kinds by appeal to natural forms of explanation. He is a rigorous naturalist and

an equally rigorous materialist, whose views in this regard are not merely intellectually suggestive but remain profoundly challenging. And since he was forced to engage directly with theological questions, he also developed an intimate knowledge of the Bible itself, thus becoming a notable exegete and even a significant theologian.

1.1. Three Challenges of the Epoch

In terms of cultural and intellectual history, Hobbes is very much a philosopher of the seventeenth century. This was an age that witnessed momentous advances in mathematics and the natural sciences, but it was also a period of great political insecurity, marked by numerous wars, social conflicts, and civil wars. In addition, it was an epoch in which many commonly shared moral and religious convictions were beginning to disintegrate. In directly addressing the three challenges created by these specific developments, Hobbes was able to produce an eminently political philosophy that was not merely focused upon political issues in the narrower sense.

In these historical circumstances, especially the situation of political insecurity and the weakening of once shared moral convictions, the philosophers of the time were generally preoccupied with discovering some “firm ground” on which to build. And since they understood this search either under the aegis of mathematics or under that of reliable factual knowledge, the philosophical debate emerged as a struggle between a rationalism that privileges “understanding” or “reason” (*ratio*, in Latin) and an empiricism that privileges “experience” (*empeiria*, in Greek). But the philosophy of Hobbes cannot be understood exclusively in terms of either approach, which only serves to show that rationalism and empiricism are not necessarily mutually exclusive positions after all.

Both the rationalist and the empiricist sides of the debate promoted the notion of a unified and universal science that was supposed to serve the cause of human well-being. There were three fundamental ideas involved here: philosophy must assume a rigorously scientific character and adopt a single unified method (i.e., be a unified science); it must investigate the whole of the natural and social world, including the nature of language (i.e., be a universal science); and it should serve the welfare of human beings (i.e., be an expression of practical interest). To fulfill the first of

these demands, philosophy must begin from the simplest possible elements; and to fulfill the second, it must attempt to present the totality of its insights as an organized whole, as a system. This unified and universal science is thus essentially systematic in character. Yet it no longer answers to the classical, and above all, Aristotelian ideal of a pure autarchic *theoria*, and indeed explicitly renounces this ideal. Hobbes's unified and universal science (as we can see from *The Elements of Law*, 1640) is intended to be useful for human beings.

Hobbes seeks this dimension of utility above all in the political state or "commonwealth," an area of reflection that is conspicuously absent from the philosophical system of his outstanding contemporary René Descartes (1596–1650). It was through addressing this theme that Hobbes stepped out onto the contemporary philosophical stage and responded to the challenges in question. He recognized the direct relationship between this novel theme and all of these challenges: in methodological terms, the exemplary character of science and of mathematics as the ideal of rigorous demonstration ("reason is reckoning"); in political terms, the bloody reality of civil war and religious conflict, along with the crisis of received moral convictions and religious beliefs. It is in this context that Hobbes introduced the idea of the "covenant"—the theoretical model of the social contract that is typically mobilized by modern political thought against all established usage and tradition—and thereby also created one of the most important philosophical theories of the state and the nature of political authority in the history of Western thought. Some of the peculiar features, or perhaps even incoherencies, of this philosophy can be explained by reference to the social and economic conditions of the time, and the transition from a feudal to a bourgeois social order. These new conditions can be roughly characterized in terms of the market society of early modern capitalism and the possessive individualism associated with it. Jean-Jacques Rousseau already drew attention to such developments in his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men* (1755), and they have been specifically analyzed and investigated by Franz Borkenau (1934), a thinker close to the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, and more recently by C. B. Macpherson (1962).

Hobbes himself, on the other hand, ascribed little or no significance to social and economic developments as such, and one looks in vain in his writings for any incipient contributions to a general theory of economic life or social development. The all-defining political experience

for Hobbes was the civil wars of the time, or rather simply the English Civil War. For in spite of his early travels in Europe, and his long period of exile in Paris later, he was exclusively interested in the political affairs of his home country.

Nonetheless, Hobbes's theory of the state is significant far beyond the limits of his time, beyond the English Civil War and the emergence of early modern market society. For, after all, it is not only capitalist or bourgeois society that requires an international condition of peace if our material and intellectual powers are to be developed and realized. Furthermore, the English Civil War was only one case of many such political and religious wars in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As another example, we might recall the Huguenot wars in France that, two generations earlier, had inspired Jean Bodin (1530–1596), the most important theorist of international law in the second half of the sixteenth century, to compose his *Six Livres de la République* (*Six Books on the Republic*, 1576). These writings develop a theory of sovereignty on the part of the prince (that is to say: the French king) and reject any rival authority in relation to pope or emperor, or to the feudal rights defended by the nobility. Hobbes explicitly agrees with Bodin in this regard (E part I, ch. 8, §7).

With his own translation of Thucydides, the English philosopher reached back into the distant past in order to warn his contemporaries of the horrors of civil war. And the things that led to civil war in the early modern period, such as the ruthless rivalry between religious positions each claiming absolute authority for itself, have their later counterpart in the exclusive claims of other competing political and indeed religious factions. Finally, it is clear that the relevance of Hobbes's philosophy of the state is certainly not limited to historical situations of civil war. The position that has often been maintained, under the ultimate influence of Carl Schmitt, that the whole philosophy of Hobbes only acquires its full coherence and plausibility in relation to the civil war (see Kosellek 1959, chapter I.II and Willms 1970, p. 34ff.), is unnecessarily reductive.

The principal question of Hobbes's philosophy is this: Why, and in what form, is a state, an institutionalized order of peace, needed in the first place? Other political philosophers before Hobbes, such as Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) or the aforementioned Jean Bodin, still essentially appealed to the lessons of political experience, to considerations of prudence, and to established historical knowledge, to justify their claims.

But right from the beginning, from his first contribution to political thought onward (*The Elements of Law* of 1640), Hobbes always developed his argument on the basis of general or universal principles. But these most basic principles are confirmed in turn by constant reference to experience. And they are systematically derived from a philosophical anthropology that is itself grounded in a philosophy of nature. It is thus in terms of a rigorously scientific form of argument that Hobbes attempts to resolve the fundamental political problem of his time, that of civil war, in a way capable of commanding universal agreement in spite of the loss of earlier moral beliefs and convictions. Hobbes undertakes to pursue the fundamental questions of politics without appealing to a now problematic system of moral values, and solely by recourse to a truly scientific form of philosophy.

If we ignore the specific way in which he relates it to human experience, this scientific approach to the political belongs, methodologically speaking, to the rationalist tradition. And with a particular variation on the title of Spinoza's principal early work, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata* (*Ethics demonstrated in accordance with Geometrical Method*), the entire life work of Hobbes, dedicated as it was to the fundamental questions of politics, could plausibly be described as *Politica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata* (*Politics demonstrated in accordance with the Geometrical Method*). It is clear, of course, that we should not understand geometry here merely in the narrower sense as the mathematical treatment of space. Since Hobbes also speaks of the "reckoning [that is, adding and subtracting] of the consequences of general names." (L ch. 5: 18; cf. C ch. I, §2) his life work could also be entitled "Politics demonstrated in accordance with the Mathematical Method." Whether geometry or mathematics is taken as the methodological model, Hobbes is essentially interested in the exemplary clarity, coherence, and completeness that they both share, and above all in a process of justification that starts with the most basic possible assumptions and proceeds from here to develop its results step by step.

But in spite of his methodological rationalism, Hobbes argues that all our representations derive from sense experience, and his theory of knowledge is emphatically sensationalist (from the Latin *sensus*: the faculty of sense). And since he also defines "the good" in naturalistic rather than in normative terms, he must be classed as an empiricist. With this singular combination of methodological rationalism and substantive empiricism,

Hobbes effectively undercuts the bald opposition between the two principal philosophical movements of his age.

The political result of Hobbes's reflections also fulfills another fundamental cultural hope of the period, namely the idea of the state as a guarantor of internal peace. Since religious and confessional conflicts also underlie many civil conflicts, so that controversies regarding religious truth endanger the internal peace or security that is the necessary condition of any community, Hobbes expressly removes the political order from any influence or interference on the part of the contending religious confessions. In this way, Hobbes prepares the way for the modern idea of the state as an institution that is supposedly neutral with regard to differences of philosophical outlook or religious belief on the part of its members. It is true, of course, that Hobbes is usually regarded as the philosophical apologist of unlimited state power, and is widely interpreted, not without reason, as the leading theorist of political absolutism. Yet Hobbes clearly thought of himself, as we can see from the dedication of *Leviathan*, as a thinker who sought a middle way between excessive freedom on the one hand and excessive authority on the other. Nonetheless, he hardly expected his theory to be universally welcomed or readily accepted. And as if anticipating the typical reaction that his philosophy of the state has indeed provoked ever since, he expects to find his labors "generally decried," as he says in the dedication. But the real reason for this reaction probably lies in the way Hobbes actually pursues his goal. For in spite of the way he interprets his own work, he clearly adopts a strongly autocratic rather than a moderate or middle way.

The threefold intention behind his thought finds particularly clear expression in *Leviathan*, his most important work. Here Hobbes develops his argument with remarkable methodological rigor. On the one hand, he refuses to weaken his claim to provide a strictly scientific grounding for philosophy. Indeed he reinforces the appeal to mathematical method (*more geometric vel arithmetico*), here reduced to a simple notion of calculation in terms of addition and subtraction that hardly does justice to the thinking actually practiced in the book. Finally, and this is why it is so instructive, Hobbes's work is not governed by any purely theoretical interest but by an essentially practical and political one: that of promoting the power and authority of the state (as the dedication makes clear) on the one hand, and of helping human beings to become obedient citizens of the state on the other (L ch. 2: 17). This already strongly evokes

the side of his thought that is so concerned with authority and obedience, while the other side of the coin, the concept of liberty, is rather obscured.

1.2. A Pioneer in Three Senses

When we speak of a pioneer, we usually think of someone who does not simply discover a new field but actually explores and recognizes its significance. In this sense Hobbes deserves to be regarded as a pioneer of modernity, for he did not merely anticipate or prefigure the new epoch that was beginning to emerge, but was an emphatic representative and protagonist of this development, even a crucial part of it. Hobbes was both acutely aware of a fundamental issue and made a fascinating attempt to resolve it, and the heart of his response to this issue has proved relevant and instructive for a considerable period of time, and in a certain sense still remains so. At least as far as political philosophy is concerned, what we understand as early modernity begins in the seventeenth century.

At first sight this claim may seem paradoxical. For both the central issue and the proposed solution, and the specific way in which they are presented, are obviously prompted and influenced by the particular historical time in which they arose. They thus appear to be limited to this time and place, rather than directly relevant in the present. But the claim only appears paradoxical as long as we regard the time in question as utterly different from our own. In fact, the differences are not so fundamental after all.

Of course, Hobbes's repeated, and indeed copious, reference to the Bible is a reflection of the age. In a period that was obsessed with adducing scriptural support and justification of one kind or another, Hobbes appealed with remarkable frequency to both the Old and the New Testament, even if he often cites Scripture for purposes quite different from the usual ones (as he himself points out in the dedication of *Leviathan*). The emblematic figures that furnish the titles for two of his most important works, *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*, are monsters from the pages of the Old Testament. And in *Leviathan*, the two parts of the work that directly concern the philosophical system itself, namely his anthropology and his philosophy of the state, are followed by two further parts that deal with religious and ecclesiastical questions. And it is above all here that we find the most frequent references to biblical figures: Aaron, Adam, and David,

John the Baptist and Moses, Paul, Peter, Solomon, Samuel, and Saul. Finally, Hobbes also appeals to “the law of the Gospel”—the so-called Golden Rule—as confirmation at a particularly important point of his argument regarding the second law of nature (L ch. 14: 65).

Since some version of the Golden Rule can be found in many different cultures, it can be regarded as a core element of a cross-cultural morality. It thus serves to support Hobbes’s principal interest in providing a universally convincing justification for the authority of the state even in times when generally shared values and beliefs can no longer be presupposed. It is striking that Hobbes does not introduce the Golden Rule as an expression of cross-cultural validity (which he probably did not recognize as such), but simply as a citation from the New Testament.

Hobbes’s contemporaries not only possessed considerable biblical knowledge of this kind, they were also educated in a deeply humanistic culture. And this culture encouraged the facility to express ideas in terms of images and to decipher the message communicated in this way. The famous engraving on the title page of *Leviathan* is a masterpiece of emblematic depiction and a consummate expression of political iconography. Hobbes also revealed himself as a highly cultivated humanist through his profound knowledge of the ancient Greek and Roman authors, from Homer to Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, from Cicero and Juvenal to Augustine and Justinian. And some of Hobbes’s most celebrated and eloquent sayings—such as *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to man) or *sed auctoritas, non veritas, facit legem* (it is authority, not truth, which makes the law)—can be traced back to classical sources.

While a systematic evaluation of Hobbes’s philosophy may largely pass over his knowledge of Scripture and his humanistic cultural background, it certainly cannot ignore the three fundamental intellectual provocations that we have already mentioned, and these remain as topical as they ever were: the quest for a philosophy that can legitimately claim the status of a science, the threat to peace posed by war in general and civil war in particular, and the absence of generally shared and well-established moral beliefs and convictions.

Hobbes’s system of philosophy possesses a threefold structure. It begins with a natural philosophy (*De Corpore: On Body*), proceeds with an anthropology (*De Homine: On Man*), and culminates in a philosophy of the state and political authority (*De Cive: On the Citizen*). By way of introduction to each of these three parts, we can simply indicate Hobbes’s pioneering achievement in each case. The last two of these achievements,

in particular, have proved so influential, and indeed so plausible, that the history of subsequent Western philosophy could, to a significant degree, be read as a series of footnotes to Hobbes. And this judgment would not require that much qualification even with respect to the first of these achievements.

Hobbes expressly described his philosophical system as *Elementa philosophiae* (Elements of Philosophy) after the example of the most celebrated work in the entire history of mathematics, Euclid's handbook of geometry composed around 300 B.C. (the *Elementa*, according to its Latin title, or *Stoicheia* in the original Greek). Since he also endorsed a Euclidean conception of method, he developed a philosophy we would now call "scientistic": one that derives its ideal of knowledge and the type of arguments it deploys exclusively from the realm of science (from the Latin *scientia*: a body of knowledge). A philosophy is described as scientistic in the strong sense of the word when it regards mathematics and, under the influence of Galileo in particular, the type of causal explanation pursued by the natural sciences as the ideal of all genuine knowledge. It is in this strict and narrower sense that Hobbes can be said to pursue a scientistic program in philosophy.

Thus Hobbes analyzes the state, the essential object of his investigations, into its ultimate constituents, namely the individual human beings that compose it. Then he undertakes, in turn, to trace their activity—their action and interaction—back to the underlying laws of motion. Hence the first part of his system, a "natural philosophy" in the broadest sense, culminates in the concept of "matter in motion." In his theory of nature itself, of human knowledge, and of the objects of knowledge, Hobbes defends a rigorous materialism or, more precisely, a mechanistic position based upon the elementary laws of motion. And "mechanistic" here also implies calculability and potential controllability, since everything is ultimately subject to causal explanation. The world appears to Hobbes like a great clock or "engine." He denies any special or independent status to the realm of mind or spirit, and resolutely defends this mechanistic materialism, rejecting the notion that "there be in the world certain essences separated from bodies" as mere "jargon" and nonsense (L ch. 46: 371).

The second part of Hobbes's system extends and elaborates this materialism as a naturalistic anthropology. As far as living things are concerned, the movements of the body are geared to self-preservation, and find expression in (the higher) animals as feelings and sensations. In human beings we also find "reason" as the ability to conceive or anticipate the end, the

means, and the content of our behavior (L ch. 6: 23). This scientifically defined naturalism is the first of Hobbes's pioneering achievements in natural philosophy. This position, of course, is hardly uncontroversial from a philosophical point of view, and this pioneering thinker is also a deeply provocative one. Today, in an intellectual world that is predominantly influenced by an empiricism shaped by analytical philosophy, such pioneering and provocative achievement deserves greater recognition than ever. One should be prepared to look back beyond David Hume, and even beyond John Locke, and recognize Hobbes as the ultimate pioneer in this regard.

In accordance with this naturalistic perspective, the "normative" foundation of Hobbes's fundamental project—the construction of a convincing philosophy of the state—is provided by a purely hedonistic and individualistic concept of the good that has been deprived of any ideal or normative considerations. Here everyone identifies the good as what he desires, and the bad or evil as what he avoids, and happiness as enduring success in obtaining the object of desire (L ch. 6: 23–24 and 29–30). The skeptical attitude that this approach embodies, the doubt regarding the possibility of furnishing any objective judgments with regard to good and evil, reflects a fundamental suspicion of the authoritative rules or principles that the modern age has continued to share and endorse in the political sphere at least. The skepticism that finds expression in this moral, political, and anthropological context is thus Hobbes's second pioneering achievement.

There is no doubt that modernity has also explicitly pursued the opposite approach, namely attempting to ground objective assessments and judgments regarding what is good or bad/evil without recourse to any given or external forms of authority. But even if this attempt proves plausible or convincing, we may still ask whether the legitimation of political power can be justified in this way. If we renounce this particular path and instead follow Hobbes's second pioneering approach, we shall have to defend an individualistic model of political legitimation. This approach, as distinct from individualism as a social theory, does not need to reject the argument that human beings are essentially social. But instead of simply claiming that this is why human beings require a state or political community invested with coercive power, this approach subjects this claim to careful examination. In the course of this examination we recognize, according to the individualistic theory of legitimation, that the political community (or "commonwealth," as Hobbes would say)

must justify itself in the eyes of every individual involved. For if political authority cannot justify itself in this way, it remains nothing but a case of mere force in relation to each individual. Thus the individualistic theory of legitimation is only properly satisfied if political authority assures a distributive advantage that is applicable to every individual. It is quite true that Hobbes does not explicitly defend this individualistic theory of legitimation, but the “egoistic” argumentative strategy that he adopts certainly brings him very close to this position.

In the contemporary debate on questions of right, law, and political authority, we encounter a broad family of theories regarding the nature of consensus and agreement in the social and political context. The individualistic theory of legitimation, which also belongs to this family of ideas, relies on a strict notion of consensus that requires universal agreement and presupposes the distributive capacity to participate in creating it. Thus the theory systematically begins by positing a basic freedom that implies an equally basic equality among the participants. Given the premise that each individual must be capable of freely giving consent, every individual must be regarded as a free and equal person. It is with this premise that Hobbes grounds the social contract theory that has provided a preeminent model of legitimation for the public exercise of power. And the theory of contract, or “contractualism” as it is also known, furnished the fundamental conceptual framework of political thought from Locke through to Kant and Rousseau, and after a considerable period of neglect, has been revived in the work of John Rawls and Robert Nozick, of James Buchanan and David Gauthier, and in my own contributions to this area. Hobbes is the first and most outstanding defender of the contractualist approach, and he has therefore rightly been recognized to this day as an exemplary and fundamental partner in any discussion of the subject.

It is quite true that Hobbes, unlike Locke or Rousseau, does not typically speak of a “contract” in the crucial passages of his work. He prefers to employ the term “covenant,” a word used to translate the “agreement” or relationship (*berith* in Hebrew) established between God and the Israelites on Mount Sinai according to the Old Testament. And the Scots, as Presbyterians who opposed the imposition of the Anglican form of worship, also described their own ecclesiastical union in terms of a “covenant,” namely a covenant with God.

Perhaps Hobbes wished to enhance the “plausibility” (Krause 2005, p. 11) of his own abstract contractualist proposal by exploiting an analogy with a concrete expression already well established in the literature

of the period. But one should not ascribe too much systematic significance to the term “covenant.” Hobbes actually redefines the concept by introducing other equivalent terms that derive from jurisprudence rather than the Bible. Thus he can speak of a “pact or covenant.” And although Hobbes refers abundantly to the Scriptures in *Leviathan*, he does not do so when he introduces the notion of the “covenant.” He does not contrast the idea of a covenant with that of a contract, but regards it as a specific form of the latter (L ch. 14: 66). What defines the contract-character of the covenant is that one party—for Hobbes this is the “Sovereign”—may “perform his part at some determinate time after, and in the mean time be trusted” (ibid.).

The alternative to this pact or covenant model of human association is a model of social cooperation that goes back to Aristotle. This approach had provided for centuries the almost canonical way of legitimating the social order, and in emphatically rejecting it Hobbes accomplished nothing less than a revolution in social and political philosophy. In accordance with the second pioneering achievement that we have indicated, “reason” plays a purely instrumental rather than autonomous role in this connection. Here too, in responding to our fundamental aspirations for peace and security, Hobbes belongs in the “empiricist” tradition of contemporary philosophy to which so many increasingly are drawn today.

But the substantive “absolutist” direction of Hobbes’s thought represents only one strand in the development of modernity, and one that in the context of political philosophy is directly opposed to the “republican” tradition that was inspired by the example of ancient Rome and believed that the freedom of the citizen was undermined by the arbitrary exercise of state power (see Brugger 1999).

Hobbes’s third pioneering achievement lies in his theory of law and his defense of the claim *sed auctoritas, non veritas, facit legem*, as he puts it in the Latin version of *Leviathan* (Opera, vol. III, p. 6). In the light of this claim, he seems to side with positivism in the modern dispute between legal positivism and the theory of natural law. But in fact the formula “it is authority rather than truth that makes a law” discovers the appropriate conceptual form for the phenomenon of positive law. In fact, Hobbes recognizes the concept of natural law, and thus does not defend a positivist theory of law. What the formula does do is effectively capture the minimal conditions for a proper concept of positive law.

One should not exaggerate the immediate relevance of Hobbes’s thought, and he cannot simply be turned into our philosophical

contemporary. One major deficiency of his thought is particularly evident to us: there is no global dimension to his philosophy of law and the state. We could explain this deficiency in historical terms, namely by stressing the distance that separates Hobbes from our epoch of globalization. But since significant elements of this development were already beginning to appear in his time, we can speak of an early modern form of globalization in this connection. At the height of his life Hobbes was in a position to witness the international repercussions of the religious wars, the effects of the Thirty Years' War, and its final conclusion with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and its idea of establishing a lasting peace for Europe as a whole. In Hobbes's time we also see how England was already beginning to develop an empire of potentially global reach. And even before his birth we recognize an exemplary "age of discovery" that would soon turn into the age of colonization, thus generating the many questions that mark the beginning of the notion of international law in the European context.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Hobbes's philosophy of law and the state does not open up directly to a properly international or supranational perspective. In this regard perhaps his particular understanding of sovereignty obstructs his own governing preoccupation with establishing peace among human beings. For it is even more difficult, as far as global relations are concerned, to imagine something that is already difficult enough in the context of an individual state: the idea of the absolute sovereignty of the state. But since Hobbes believes that a condition of war obviously prevails between individual states (L ch. 13: 63), he would have to reflect upon the problem of establishing a peaceful order here too.

1.3. The Continuity of Hobbes's Development

There is a certain break in the evolution of Hobbes's thought, namely that marked by his "conversion" from a rhetorical humanistic culture to a rigorously scientific form of argument inspired by Euclid's *Elements*, even if this approach is not itself entirely devoid of rhetorical aspects. But once he had fundamentally committed himself to this method, around the age of forty, Hobbes's philosophy remained remarkably constant throughout all his significant philosophical texts. The basic features of his theory of law and political authority in particular remain the same, but this is also true for the other parts of his philosophy. In contrast to the claims advanced

by Skinner (1996) with respect to the role of rhetoric, or the position of Ludwig (1998) with regard to different theoretical accounts of obligation, I do not believe that we can identify any significant ruptures or discontinuities, any subsequent intellectual conversion or “turning” that would allow or even encourage us to distinguish between a less “enlightened” or “pre-critical” outlook and the more enlightened and critical position of Hobbes’s mature work.

From *The Elements of Law*, through *De Cive* (the final part of his *Elementa philosophiae*), down to *Leviathan*, and even *Behemoth* and the *Dialogue*, we can identify an impressive range of shared features throughout: (1) the same basic method that is derived from mathematics and the mathematical investigation of nature, although the manner in which the argument is presented also permits significant scope for rhetoric; (2) the same basic issue regarding the legitimation of the state and its authority; (3) the same basic thesis that the sovereignty of the state also has the last word where confessional conflicts of religion are concerned; (4) the same logical structure of argument, one that starts from an empiricist philosophy of nature, develops an anthropology based upon the concept of self-preservation, and culminates in a philosophy of political sovereignty and a corresponding theory of religion; (5) the same two leading strategic arguments based on a twofold philosophical realism: (5a) a realist anthropology that takes “men just as they are,” although the precise execution of the project admittedly reveals a certain one-sidedness (E part I, ch. 1, §2; cf. L ch. 13) and (5b) this one-sidedness should be understood as a strategic argument from “egoism,” which eschews moralistic or even altruistic claims and recognizes only what such egoism would be prepared to concede (see the epistle dedicatory in E); and finally, (6) the same fundamental claim that philosophy should be at once rigorously scientific and useful or beneficial to human beings, and here above all politically beneficial. Hobbes hopes to gain recognition for views that will bring an “incomparable benefit to commonwealth” (*ibid.*). Thus while there are certain changes in the presentation of Hobbes’s argument, with regard to the theory of freedom for example, his basic philosophical assumptions remain predominantly unchanged throughout. And as Skinner (2008, p. 123) concedes himself, these changes in his account of freedom do not affect his crucial argument for submitting to the authority of the state, namely our desire for security and protection.

The remarkable continuity of Hobbes’s thought probably results from the long period of preparation and gestation that preceded its explicit

philosophical formulation. The intellectually precocious Hobbes was exposed to the world of science, learning, and politics from an early age, but he only made his presence felt in the area of political philosophy at the relatively advanced age of fifty-two, by which time he had developed a range of carefully considered views that were no longer so open to challenge or significant revision. Even if we prefer an alternative explanation in this connection, the notable continuity of his thought allows us to present Hobbes's philosophy effectively by reference to a single text, his philosophical masterpiece *Leviathan*, although we shall also draw on some of his other important writings in the course of our interpretation. Like Plato's *Republic* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, his most mature and comprehensive work, resembles an "encyclopedia" of the philosophical sciences. If we consider the specific organization of the text, it is quite true that it only officially presents us with parts II and III of the philosophical system (the anthropology and the political philosophy), supplemented by two further parts entitled "Of a Christian Commonwealth" and "Of the Kingdom of Darkness." But the first part of the text, "Of Man," begins with a discussion of themes (such as sense, imagination, speech, reason, and science), which belong thematically to part I of Hobbes's system. The relevant text of *De Corpore* is itself divided into four parts, but many themes of the first part on "Logic" (on philosophy, on names, on method) and some themes of the second part on "The First Grounds of Philosophy" are also addressed in chapters 4, 5, and 9 of *Leviathan*. And some of the material treated in the first chapter of the fourth part of *De Corpore*, on "Physics or the Phenomena of Nature," is also taken up in the discussion of sensation and animal motion in chapters 1 and 6 of *Leviathan*.

Our description of Hobbes as a pioneer of modernity is not simply intended to emphasize his outstanding contribution to philosophy, but also indicates the intentions of the present work, which has no interest in promoting a purely historicist or archival approach to its subject. For to take a philosophical work seriously means acknowledging the double claim that it raises: that it addresses fundamental problems presented by the natural and social world, and that it seeks an answer to these problems that is not merely consistent or internally coherent but genuinely extends our knowledge.

In accordance with this hermeneutical premise, the reading that follows cannot content itself with providing a merely historical reconstruction of the intellectual background, with simply understanding Hobbes's

philosophy while eschewing any further substantive assessment. Such an approach may serve to shield the “great masters” of the past from presumptuous criticism of posterity, but this protective and devotional attitude only reduces the intellectual challenge and potential of its subject. Instead, we shall attempt to uncover our own concerns within the political philosophy of Hobbes, given that it certainly addresses problems that remain very much alive. They may be encapsulated in two questions: firstly, why do we need a “state” at all?; and secondly, what is the appropriate basic structure of such a state?

Hobbes’s answer to the second question in particular (involving an established church and, especially, an absolute conception of sovereignty that does not depend on the separation of powers or the idea of fundamental rights) naturally provokes not only significant reservations but downright rejection on our part. But a suitably differentiated reading of Hobbes’s work would do well to resist the widely shared view that his philosophy as a whole and the philosophy of the state that it involves is so stringently developed that we must often reexamine its basic foundations if we are to challenge the general chain of the argument. In fact the problems encountered in the overall argument are not confined to its initial starting point. For the way in which the argument is subsequently developed is by no means as free of difficulties or inconsistencies as Hobbes and many of his interpreters would like to claim.

Assuming the continuing substantive relevance of his thought, I shall argue that we should distinguish—at least analytically—the two aforementioned questions involved in Hobbes’s attempt to justify the necessity of the state: the justification of the state as such, and the justification of an absolute and undivided sovereignty on the part of the state. I shall claim that Hobbes’s answer to the first question remains basically convincing. Political rule or dominion is indispensable, and it is legitimated, formally speaking, through the consent of those who are affected, and, substantively speaking, through the shared concern for security and prosperity, which we can identify with Hobbes in the guarantee of free self-preservation. The third claim, defended in the course of our interpretation, is that even the specific failings of Hobbes’s thought prove highly instructive, through a kind of “determinate negation,” for any attempt to furnish an appropriate justification for the authority of the state.

Although enlightened thinkers like Hobbes desire to challenge all forms of arbitrary or external authority, they would also like to become an authority in their own right (cf. L ch. 31: 193). And this naturally

involves them in a performative contradiction. It is true that sometimes, as in the “The Author’s Epistle to the Reader” with which he introduces *De Corpore*, Hobbes rhetorically professes a certain modesty: “For I do but propound, not commend to you anything of mine.” But in fact this theory, which challenges all authorities, must present itself as an authority, indeed as the decisive court of judgment. Hobbes expects his theory to be acknowledged not just temporarily, but for all time (“eternally”). For it contains a truth that is supposed to be unassailable on account of the strictly scientific method that grounds it.

By way of conclusion to these preliminary observations, I should like to add a further personal word. In my previous writings on central thinkers of the Western philosophical tradition I have principally concentrated, apart from the work of Kant, on the thought of Aristotle. It may appear astonishing that I should turn here to a consideration of Hobbes, certainly one of the most famous critics of the Aristotelian tradition. But ever since I began as a professional teacher of philosophy, and indeed from the time of my own earliest studies in philosophy, I have engaged intensively with the thought of Hobbes. Thus on the occasion of the three-hundredth anniversary of Hobbes’s death (December 4, 1679), I was able to arrange a symposium on Hobbes’s philosophical anthropology and his philosophy of the state (Höffe 1981), and have subsequently published a number of articles that also touch on Hobbes’s contribution to political philosophy (see bibliography below, 3.3, and 4). It is against the background of an interest in Hobbes that has persisted for more than forty years now that I have here undertaken to assess the broader significance of this pioneering thinker of modernity who has often been neglected outside the sphere of political philosophy. In what follows I have not attempted to present or introduce the now enormous body of secondary literature that has grown up around Hobbes, although I have often discussed disputed points of interpretation that have arisen in this connection. Rather, in order to take Hobbes seriously as a philosopher, I have undertaken to consider his fundamental claims and the kinds of arguments he deploys from a systematic point of view, and have attempted to examine their philosophical significance and their intellectual plausibility in this light.

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