



THOMAS HOBBES

# LEVIATHAN

REPRINTED FROM THE EDITION OF 1651

WITH AN ESSAY BY THE LATE  
W. G. FOGSON SMITH

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## PREFACE

It was well known to all students of philosophy and history in Oxford, and to many others, that W. G. Pogson Smith had been for many years engaged in preparing for an exhaustive treatment of the place of Hobbes in the history of European thought, and that he had accumulated a great mass of materials towards this. These materials fill many notebooks, and are so carefully arranged and indexed that it is clear that with a few more months he would have been able to produce a work worthy of a very high place in philosophical literature. Unhappily the work that he could have done himself cannot be done by any one else unless he has given something like the same time and brings to the collection something like the same extensive and intimate knowledge of the philosophy of the period as Pogson Smith possessed. It is hoped indeed that, by the permission of his representatives, this great mass of material will be deposited in the Bodleian Library and made available for scholars, and that thus the task which he had undertaken may some time be carried out.

Among his papers has been found an essay which presents a very interesting and suggestive treatment

of the position of Hobbes. The essay is undated, and it is quite uncertain for what audience it was prepared. It is this essay which is here published as an introduction to the *Leviathan*. It is printed with only the necessary verification of references, and one or two corrections of detail. It is always difficult to judge how far it is right to print work which the author himself has not revised, but we feel that, while something must inevitably be lost, the essay has so much real value that, even as it stands, it should be published. Something may even be gained for the reader in the fresh and unconstrained character of the paper. The pursuit of the ideal of a perfect and rounded criticism, which all serious scholars aim at, has sometimes the unfortunate result of depriving a man's work of some spontaneity. In Oxford at any rate, and it is probably the case everywhere, many a scholar says his best things and expresses his most penetrating judgements in the least formal manner. Those who were Mr. Pogson Smith's friends or pupils will find here much of the man himself—something of his quick insight, of his unconventional directness, of his broad but solid learning; something also of his profound feeling for truth, of his scorn of the pretentious, of his keen but kindly humour.

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF HOBBS

## AN ESSAY

WHEREIN does the greatness of Hobbes consist ? It is a question I often put to myself, as I lay him down. It was a question which exercised his contemporaries—friends or foes—and drove them to their wits' end to answer. If I were asked to name the highest and purest philosopher of the seventeenth century I should single out Spinoza without a moment's hesitation. But Spinoza was not of the world ; and if a man will be perverse enough to bind the Spirit of Christ in the fetters of Euclid, how shall he find readers ? If I were asked to select the true founders of modern science I should bracket Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, and resolutely oppose Hobbes's claim to be of the company. If his studies in Vesalius prepared him to extend his approbation to Harvey's demonstration of the circulation of the blood, his animosity to Oxford and her professors would never allow him seriously to consider the claims of a science advanced by Dr. Wallis ; the sight of a page of algebraic symbols never elicited any feeling but one of sturdy contempt, and the remark that it looked ' as if a hen had been scratching there '. To the end of his days he dwelt among points

of two dimensions, and superficies of three; he squared the circle and he doubled the cube. 'Twas pity,' said Sir Jonas Moore, and many more, 'that he had not began the study of mathematics sooner, for such a working head would have made great advancement in it.'<sup>1</sup>

Of inductive science he is very incredulous. Bacon, contemplating 'in his delicious walkes at Gorham-bury', might indeed better like Mr. Hobbes taking down his thoughts than any other, because he understood what he wrote; he probably learnt to understand my Lord, who dictated his alphabet of simple natures, his receipts for the discovery of forms, his peddling experiments and his laborious conceits. I mention this because most German critics, with perhaps more than their usual careless audacity of assumption, find a niche for Hobbes as the spiritual fosterling of the great empiricist Bacon. Now if there was one thing for which Hobbes had neither sympathy nor even patience, it was experimental science. The possession of a great telescope was no doubt a curious and useful delight; but 'not every one that brings from beyond seas a new gin, or other jaunty device, is therefore a philosopher'.<sup>2</sup> Let the gentlemen of Gresham College, whose energy it must be granted shames the sloth of our ancient universities,—let them apply themselves to Mr. Hobbes's doctrine of motion, and then he will deign

<sup>1</sup> Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, in 2 vols., edited by A. Clark, 1898: i. 332.

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey, i. 335-6.



to cast an eye on their experiments. He did not think their gropings would carry them very far. 'Experience concludeth nothing universally.'<sup>1</sup> If he despaired of wringing her secret from Nature, he never doubted that he held the key to every corner of the human heart. He offers us a theory of man's nature which is at once consistent, fascinating, and outrageously false. Only the greatest of realists could have revealed so much and blinded himself to so much more. You cry angrily—It is false, false to the core ; and yet the still small voice will suggest, But how much of it is really true ? It is poor, immoral stuff ! so you might say in the pulpit, but you know that it probes very deep. It is only the exploded Benthamite philosophy with its hedonistic calculus tricked out in antique piquancy of phrase ! If you really hold this, if you think that Hobbes's man is nothing more than a utilitarian automaton led by the nose by suburban pleasures and pains, you have no sense of power, of pathos, or of irony. It is only the trick of the cheap cynic, you retort in fine. Yes, it is cynicism ; but it is not cheap. Nature has made man a passionate creature, desirous not of pleasure but of power ; the passions themselves are not simple emotions, but charged with and mastered by the appetite for power ; honour consisteth only in the opinion of power ; the *worth* of a man is, as of all other things, his price ; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power ; the

<sup>1</sup> Hobbes's *English Works*, iv. 18, ed. Molesworth, 1839.

public worth of a man, which is the value set on him by the commonwealth, is that which men commonly call dignity. Leave men to themselves, they struggle for power; competition, diffidence, vainglory driving them. Sober half-hours hush with their lucid intervals the tumult of the passions; even so on earth they bring no beatitude. Care for the future is never banished from thought; felicity is a continual progress of the desire from one object to another.

‘So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.’<sup>1</sup>

‘For as Prometheus, which interpreted is, *the prudent man*, was bound to the hill Caucasus, a place of large prospect, where an eagle, feeding on his liver, devoured in the day as much as was repaired in the night: so that man, which looks too far before him, in the care of future time, hath his heart all the day long, gnawed on by fear of death, poverty, or other calamity; and has no repose nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep.’<sup>2</sup>

Such, then, is the lust and the burden of man. What is the deliverance? Spinoza found it in philosophy; the truth shall make you free: but Hobbes was a philosopher who had no faith in truth. Pascal found it in the following of Christ; but I doubt whether religion ever meant much more

<sup>1</sup> p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> p. 82.

than an engine of political order to Hobbes. Rousseau, whose survey of human nature often strangely and suspiciously resembles that of Hobbes, advocated—in some moods at least—a return to nature. Rousseau's 'nature' was a pig-sty, but Hobbes's state of nature was something far worse than that.

Hobbes was never disloyal to intellect, grievously as he affronted its paramount claims; he was not of those who see virtue in the renunciation of mathematics, logic, and clothes. Passion-ridden intellect had mastered man in a state of nature; a passion-wearied intellect might deliver man from it. If man cannot fulfil his desire, he can seek peace and ensue it by the invention of fictions. It is not prudence, but curiosity, that distinguisheth man from beast. He wonders; he is possessed; a passionate thought leaps to the utterance; the word is born; the idea is fixed; from henceforth he will boldly conclude universally; science has come in the train of language. This most noble and profitable invention of speech, 'without which there had been amongst men neither commonwealth nor society, nor contract nor peace, no more than amongst lions, bears, and wolves,'<sup>1</sup> is man's proudest triumph over nature. By his own art he fetters himself with his own fictions—the fictions of the tongue. You shall no longer hold that men acquired speech because man was a reasoning animal; in truth man became capable of science, i.e. reason, because he invented speech. It was not

<sup>1</sup> p. 24.

nature which in secular travail brought reason to the birth ; but man saw nature's poverty of invention, and boldly substituted his own. He created reason in the interests of peace. Voltaire profanely said that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent one ; convictions of similar cogency drove the Hobbean man to bow his neck to the dictatorship of the neologist. ' The Greeks have but one word, λόγος, for both speech and reason ; not that they thought there was no speech without reason, but no reasoning without speech.'<sup>1</sup> Truth is a necessity ; but necessary truth is a will-o'-the-wisp. Seekers after truth—how Hobbes despised them, all that deluded race who dreamt of a law whose seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world : all things in heaven and earth doing her homage ! Rather, boldly conclude that truth is not to be sought, but *made*. Let men agree what is to be truth, and truth it shall be. There is truth and truth abounding when once it is recognized that truth is only of universals, that there is nothing in the world universal but names, and that names are imposed *arbitrio hominum*. Fiction is not, as people hold, the image or the distortion of the real which it counterfeits ; it is the very and only foundation of that reality which is rational. Here is Hobbes's answer to that question which, in its varied phrasing, has never ceased to trouble philosophy. Are there innate ideas ? What is the ultimate criterion of truth ?

<sup>1</sup> p. 29.

Is there a transcendent reason? What is common sense? Are there any undemonstrable and indubitable axioms fundamental to all thought? How is a synthetic *a priori* judgement possible?

The same temper which leads him to stifle thought with language carries him on to substitute definitions for first principles. *Prima philosophia*—metaphysics in Aristotle's sense—is first a body of definitions. These definitions are our points of departure: we must start by agreeing upon them. For 'the light of human minds is perspicuous words, by exact definitions first snuffed and purged from ambiguity'.<sup>1</sup> A definition must be held to be satisfactory if it be clear. The master claims a free and absolute right of arbitrary definition. The scholar queries: Is the definition true? is it adequate? does it assort with reality? To whom the master testily replies: You are irrelevant; your only right is to ask, Is it clear? Unless my definitions are accepted as first principles, science, i.e. a deductive system of consequences, is impossible, and inference foreclosed. Let me remind you again that agreement on definitions is the *sine qua non* of intelligible reasoning; and then for the sake of peace and lucidity let me beg—nay insist—that you accept my ruling on the use of names. Are they not arbitrary? Is not one man's imposition as good as another's? Mine therefore—at least for purposes of argument—rather better than yours? Hobbes knew what he was about;

<sup>1</sup> p. 37.

he was 'rare at definitions', said the admiring John Aubrey.<sup>1</sup> It was because he very clearly saw that in the prerogative of definition lay the sovereignty in philosophy.

But, you say, he must recognize some real, unconventional, transcendent standard of truth somewhere: for otherwise by what right does he distinguish between truth and error? And what is the meaning of the charges 'absurd' and 'insignificant' so freely lavished on opinions with which he disagrees? I can only reply that his distinctions between truth and falsehood, sense and absurdity, are perfectly consistent with the doctrine I have been expounding. Man's privilege of reason 'is allayed by another: and that is, by the privilege of absurdity; to which no living creature is subject, but man only. . . . For it is most true that Cicero saith of them somewhere: that there can be nothing so absurd but may be found in the books of philosophers.'<sup>2</sup> 'As men abound in copiousness of language, so they become more wise, or more mad than ordinary. . . . For words are wise men's counters, they do but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, or a Thomas, or any other doctor whatsoever.'<sup>3</sup> The causes of this endowment of absurdity are but want of definition, want of adherence to definitions, want of the power of syllogizing. A glance at Hobbes's relentless application of this fundamental principle

<sup>1</sup> Aubrey, i. 394.

<sup>2</sup> p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> p. 29.

will be sufficient. Good and evil are terms of individual imposition ; by tacit agreement one may say they are left to a personal interpretation ; there is no common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves. But the moral virtues and vices are universal names : they take their definition *ex arbitrio hominum*, i.e. from the will of the State. 'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no such thing as justice ; and sometimes also with his tongue.'<sup>1</sup> The fool might arrive at his conclusion by an easy deduction from the principles of Hobbes. For if he had studied Hobbes's code of nature with ordinary care he would have discovered that the justice of which *Leviathan* is begotten is carefully emptied of all ethical content. There is indeed a justice, an obligation arising out of contract, which naturally refuses to discuss its own title ; and there is another justice, the parody of equity, which explains itself with a humorous grin as the fiction of equality playing the peace-maker. You, X, say you're as good as any one else : Y says he's quite your match, and he'll take you on : permit me to assume them for purposes of codification a hypothesis of universal equality, and to refer you to the golden rule for your future behaviour !

At length man's pride and passions compel him to submit himself to government. *Leviathan* is set on his feet ; he is the king of the proud ; but his feet are of clay ; he too is a fiction. This time

<sup>1</sup> p. III.

Hobbes resorts to the lawyers, borrows from them their mystico-legal fiction of the *persona moralis*, the corporation, and sends the mystical elements in it to the right about. 'It is the *unity* of the representer, not the *unity* of the represented, that maketh the person *one*: . . . and *unity* cannot otherwise be understood in multitude.'<sup>1</sup> The sovereign is the soul, the person, the representative, the will, the conscience of the commonwealth; i.e. the sovereign *is* the commonwealth in that fictional sense which alone is truth in science and in practice. Once again there is no such thing as objective right: therefore we must invent a substitute for it by establishing a sovereign who shall declare what shall be right for us. On this point Hobbes is unmistakably emphatic.

'The law is all the right reason we have, and (though he, as often as it disagreeeth with his own reason, deny it) is the infallible rule of moral goodness. The reason whereof is this, that because neither mine nor the Bishop's reason is right reason fit to be a rule of our moral actions, we have therefore set up over ourselves a sovereign governor, and agreed that his laws shall be unto us, whatsoever they be, in the place of right reason, to dictate to us what is really good. In the same manner as men in playing turn up trump, and as in playing their game their morality consisteth in not renouncing, so

<sup>1</sup> p. 126.



in our civil conversation our morality is all contained in not disobeying of the laws.’<sup>1</sup>—*Hobbes’s debate with Dr. Bramhall, Bishop of Derry.*

‘For, but give the authority of defining punishments to any man whatsoever, and let that man define them, and right reason has defined them, suppose the definition be both made, and made known before the offence committed. For such authority is to trump in card-playing, save that in matter of government, when nothing else is turned up, clubs are trumps.’<sup>2</sup>—*A Dialogue of the Common Laws.*

It is idle to qualify or defend such a political philosophy: it is rotten at the core. It is valueless save in so far as it stimulates to refutation. We may be content to leave it as a precious privilege to the lawyers, who need definitions and have no concern with morality. And yet no thinker on politics has ever probed its fundamental conceptions more thoroughly; and I say it advisedly, if you would think clearly of rights and duties, sovereignty and law, you must begin with the criticism of Hobbes. For any philosophy which is worth the name must spring out of scepticism; and every system of philosophy which is worth serious attention must achieve the conquest of scepticism. It is only a very botcher in philosophy or a very genial personage who can really rest content with a merely sceptical attitude. Hobbes was no Carneades of riotous

<sup>1</sup> Molesworth, v. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., vi. 122.