

PHIL 20C Discussion Section Week Five  
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You have a paper due later this week. A few things to note:

- Staple your paper.
- Don't start off with a cheesy line like "Since the dawn of humanity, philosophers have debated about hedonism". It's bad writing and it sounds stupid. Really, really stupid. But lots of people write that line every quarter.
- Don't parrot the text or your notes. Put things in your own words, say it the way you would say it to me in conversation!
- When you use technical philosophical terminology, make sure you define your terms! This should be easy since I've been making glossaries for you.
- If you're having a hard time getting started or getting finished you should go to CLAS (the writing center). They're very helpful. I also recommend them very much if English is not your first language.
- Hobbes uses androcentric (male-centered) language - for instance, he says 'man' instead of 'human' and only uses male pronouns. Quote him as he writes, but make sure you don't adopt these conventions yourself. Aside from being sexist, it will make your writing sound archaic and pretentious.

Let's talk about paper structure. You're being asked to do two things here. First, explain how desire and goodness are related. Second, say whether it follows from this that Hobbes is an ethical or motivational hedonist. So your paper should have the following structure:

- Introduction: be very brief - just introduce the topic, and say what the general sections of your paper are and what you're going to do/show in each. 4 sentences should suffice.
- Exposition: this is the first part of the question. What is Hobbes's view about the relation between desire and goodness? Here you can explain Hobbes's theory of voluntary motion, with particular emphasis on the roles of desire and pleasure in the production of voluntary motion. In your exposition, you will want to make sure you define any special philosophical terms. In fact, this is the first thing you should do, since you will need to use the terminology to explain pretty much everything else, including your thesis, evidence, and especially direct quotes from Hobbes.
- Persuasion: this is the second part of the question. Tell us whether you think Hobbes is an ethical hedonist and give at least one reason why. Tell us whether you think Hobbes is a motivational hedonist and give at least one reason why. Make sure to back up your points with evidence from Hobbes's texts themselves, and be thorough in explaining yourself. You should be able to give a couple of paragraphs for each reason in support of your theses.
- The very best papers will anticipate some counter-argument or objection to the evidence you present in favor of your thesis. For instance, if you use a quote from Hobbes to prove

your point, you might take some alternative interpretation of that quote and show that it's mistaken. This is above and beyond what you need to get a B, though.

- Conclusion: wrap things up; remind us what you demonstrated in your paper.

Note that you're free to disagree with what we're saying in class, e.g. that Hobbes is not a motivational hedonist. You have to make sure you can back up your thesis with good evidence, though. The safest route is probably to argue in line with Rob's interpretation of Hobbes, but you have freedom to dissent.

Last section, your idiot TA made a grave error by calling Hobbes a motivational hedonist. We characterize motivational hedonism in the following way: pleasure and pain are what motivate all of our actions. But Hobbes's model of voluntary motion is not like this. Conceptions cause our actions - they motivate us. This motivation is accompanied by pleasure or pain, but those feelings are not what motivate us per se. The mental association of pleasure and pain with certain conceptions teaches us what we like and don't like, which causes us to call things 'good' or 'bad', but that association is sort of tangential to motivation per se. **Since Hobbes thinks conceptions, rather than feelings of pleasure and pain, are what really motivate us, he seems not to be a motivational hedonist.**

It's an interesting question about Hobbes's moral epistemology (his theory of how we learn about right and wrong) whether we can learn about good and bad without the capacity for pleasure and pain. Since Hobbes isn't an ethical hedonist, this certainly seems logically possible. I suspect Hobbes would say that simply in virtue of the way human beings are, we don't, and can't, learn about good and bad, or right and wrong actions, except by experiencing pleasure and pain.

We can state this in a more specific way. Hobbes says that pleasure is the appearance of good and pain is the appearance of evil. This sort of mental association between pain and pleasure, on one hand, and good and evil, on the other, exists, pleasure and pain allow us to learn about good and evil. But this connection is contingent - that is, it would be no contradiction for the connection to be reversed, and for appetite to be accompanied by pain and aversion by pleasure. This is practically and biologically absurd, of course, because if we were constituted that way we'd very quickly die.

I asked Rob about this and he sent back the following response: 'Yeah, I'm inclined to think something like this is right. Pleasure is, on his view, analogous to the sensations of color and light -- they are the "phantasms" of the good. We know, or are cognizant of "luminous bodies" via our sight, by means of light and color. So too with pleasure. Good and bad are determined by the appetites. But, a different sort of animal might find that the good, i.e. the objects of desire and appetite, present themselves differently to their senses. Perhaps ants are like this. Sugar is a good for them, for they are disposed to desire and pursue it; however, it could be the case that they feel no pleasure from sugar. Robots from the outer reaches of the galaxy may crave tungsten, yet experience no pleasure when they contemplate or consume it (as we experience pleasure when we contemplate or consume beer).'

Basically what seems likely the correct interpretation of Hobbes is that to desire something is to think of it as good - desirability is goodness. It is a biological fact about human beings that obtaining our desires is pleasing, i.e., that it has a good feeling to it, but that pleasure could have been absent if our biology were different.