

# Hobbes's Materialistic Psychology

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As a materialist, Hobbes rejects the idea that the mind and the body are distinct things. Rather, he believes human beings are material through and through, and even their mental states and processes can be described in an exclusively physiological vocabulary. He writes of the human body:

For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within, why may we not say that all *automata* (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the *heart*, but a *spring*; and the *nerves*, but so many *strings*; and the *joints*, but so many *wheels*, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer?

In the context of *Leviathan's* introduction, Hobbes is advancing the claim that in founding a government we are quite literally bringing into being an artificial person, just as God brought us into being. Where our body parts carry out our functions, we, as individuals and groups, carry out the functions of the state insofar as it is an artificial person.

There is no controversy that the human body is a material object, but it continues to this day to be a contentious claim that the human mind is material as well. In Chapter 6 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes attempts to account for some of the fundamental categories of the human mental life. Psychology for Hobbes concerns a special subset of bodily events, *voluntary* motions, as opposed to merely *vital* motions like, e.g., digestion and circulation.

The building blocks of human mental life are *appetite* and *aversion*, states that cause voluntary motions. In the simplest case, the process goes something like this:

1. A person has a mental image (in Hobbes's terminology a *conception*) of something, either through sense perception or memory.
2. The conception causes a change in the body, which is either an appetite or an aversion.
3. If the conception causes an appetite, the person pursues the thing they imagined; if an aversion, the person avoids the thing they imagined.

Hobbes believes that he can account for all of a person's mental states by defining them as certain combinations of appetites and aversion under particular circumstances.

To give an example, consider first Hobbes's definition of *hope*: 'appetite with the opinion of attaining'. This is just a particular sort of appetite - that where one believes obtaining what is desired is likely to happen. Now consider the definition of *Confidence*: 'Constant hope'. Here we just have a particular pattern of having the state of hope, which is in turn defined just in terms of appetite. Confidence is simply a matter of having appetites one believes will be satisfied.

Hobbes treats all mental states as if they, as well, can be broken down into combinations of appetite and aversion had under particular circumstances. Some of these analyses become quite complex. Try for yourself to break down the analyses of the following mental states into terms of appetites, aversions, and circumstantial components:

- Envy
- Vainglory
- Religion

Do you see how Hobbes tries to systematically account for psychology in terms of appetites and aversions? Since these in turn are defined simply as motions within the body, they provide Hobbes with an austere materialist psychology.