

Phil 20C Discussion Section Week 3
TA: Corey McGrath

Documents that you should have:

- This one
- Last week's section outline
- Glossary of terms from week 1

Forthcoming documents:

- Glossary of terms from week 2

Some questions that were submitted:

- Does Hobbes believe in a soul?
- Is it possible for a passion to cause an action contrary to what is typical for that passion?
- How is it possible for Hobbes to believe in free will without believing in a soul?

We'll handle question 2 next week, since it deals with the passions, and questions 1 and 3 today, since they have to do with Hobbes's action theory.

Hobbes's naturalistic approach to inquiry:

- Modeled after the best and most successful scientific processes and developments.
- Consistent with, and if possible based upon, the best science available.
- Should not introduce terms and concepts not definable in mechanical terms.

What's the upshot?

- The 'New Science' is materialistic and mechanistic - everything should boil down to *matter in motion*.

But wait. It seems like there are aspects of nature that aren't simply mechanistic processes. When I think about mental processes, I don't think in terms of any sort of mechanistic process.

In particular, how do we account for free will, when all material objects, are subject to laws of nature that dictate, before the fact, how events will play out? Hobbes's answer is compatibilism - determinism and free will coexist. A freely performed action is a special sort of action, one that has a mental cause.

An incompatibilist, on the other hand, says that either determinism is false or there is no free will (or both). Incompatibilists disagree on the details (some are determinists, some aren't), but they agree that we can't have determinism and free will.

"Hard" determinism: incompatibilist determinism

Libertarianism: the belief in free will and incompatibilism

Hobbes has to show that we can explain mental processes in a naturalistic way. He does this by showing that two things:

- That there are certain physical processes that occur whenever any mental process occurs.
- That the physical processes in question explain everything characteristic of such a mental process.

The aspects of the mental that Hobbes seems fundamentally concerned with (to me, anyway) are *sense perception* and *action*. We'll mostly focus on those in this section.

Sense perception:

- The interaction between a sense organ and a perceived object via some physical medium.
- The medium causes changes in the organ, which are registered internally.
- This internal registering is experience as a 'phantasm', some change in conscious state.

The 'great deception of sense':

- We take the world to be as it appears to us; but the immediate objects of our perception are phantasms.
- We take perception to reveal to us objects as they are; but our understanding of the world is shaped in part by the form that our phantasms take.
- Since all knowledge of the world ultimately comes to us through perception, our knowledge of the world is mediated by our knowledge of phantasms - that is, we know phantasms first, and infer knowledge of the external world through them.
- Recall Hobbes's contrast between the way we represent the sun, and the 'real sun' - we infer the existence of a very, very large object from a phantasm that takes up very little of the visual field.

Hobbes explains memory and imagination in terms of sense perception:

- The stimulation of sense organs leaves a lasting effect in the brain.
- The effect is experienced as 'decaying sense'.
- That this process occurs just is the having of imagination. Imagination and memory are two ways of thinking about the same process.

A good account of actions explains how they are different from all other events. For instance, there is a difference between *my arm rising* and *me raising my arm*. The former is an event, but not necessarily an action, while the latter is an action as well. What makes an event the latter, instead of merely the former?

Hobbes's account of action, being mechanistic, classifies actions as certain sorts of motions, voluntary motions. Voluntary motions:

- are vital motions: associated with very basic life processes shared by all living things.
- begin with the having a conception of some desired end.

- are therefore goal-oriented - directed toward accomplishing or obtaining something.

The mechanistic explanation of action is pretty straightforward:

- You have a conception in your mind.
- The conception causes an appetite or an aversion.
- The appetite or aversion puts in place a pursuit or avoidance of the object of conception.

Hobbes thinks a few interesting results fall out of this theory. For instance:

- Compatibilism: to will is just to have the conception that leads to action.
- A certain semantic view about moral terms: 'good' and 'bad' name the objects of appetite and aversion, respectively.

Perhaps surprisingly, despite having a sort of relativism about the way moral terms are used, Hobbes does think that a science of morals is possible, and that's the subject of this week's lectures.