Anxiety in the state of nature: a Heideggerian reading of the Leviathan.

Abstract

In the *Leviathan*, the Hobbesian man attempts to escape the state of nature through relinquishing all his rights to govern himself. Recent work has shown that a link can be made between the Hobbesian and existentialist notions of *fear* and *anxiety*, providing a new way to understand Hobbes's state of nature. However, limitations of this earlier research were that they focussed mainly on future uncertainty as the existential threat leading to the state of nature. As such, a fuller exploration of the relevance of the work of existentialist philosophers such as Martin Heidegger still bears relevance. This paper attempts to revaluate the link between the Hobbesian and existentialist traditions by looking into the question: Can the Heideggerian notions of fear, anxiety and authenticity be used to deepen our understanding of the Hobbesian man in the state of nature and provide a potential critique of his consequent escape? This paper concludes that the Heideggerian concepts of fear and anxiety can potentially be used to critique the Hobbesian man's escape into despotism as a fear driven attempt to not face the existential consequences of one's own death.

Introduction

A feeling, undoubtedly recognisable to many readers of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, is that of a sense of pessimistic dread. To many, Hobbes seems to paint a grim picture of human nature, as the Hobbesian man lives in *a state of nature*, which he defines as hypothetical state of affairs in which everyone is a war with everyone, and in which no reconciliation is to be found but to submit to an all-mighty despot. The picture he paints of the Hobbesian man is one of a fearful man who craves for security in an unsecure world:

> Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, **wherein men live without other security** [emphasis added], than what their own strength […] shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently […] no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; **and which is worst of all, continual fear** [emphasis added], and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. (Hobbes, p.84, 1998).

Existentialism as a philosophical tradition has long elaborated on the notions of fear, anxiety and insecurity that seem to present themselves in the writings of Hobbes (Blits, 1989; Crowell, 2020). However, rather than Hobbes's escape into despotism, existentialists such as Heidegger[1] have used the concept of authenticity to overcome the state they present to humans.

The most extensive work that has been done so far to reconcile these two traditions was done by Rumelili (2020, 2021). Using ideas from Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Tillich, Rumelili (2020) gives an existentialist reading of the *Leviathan* in terms of anxiety regarding future uncertainty. In his reading there is a critical link between power and foresight for

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[1] Heidegger himself rejected the label of 'existentialism' but this has arguably more to do with his rejection of Sartre's theories than with the notion of existentialism itself, see (Reynolds, 2014).

Hobbes, for instance citing Hobbes (p. 18, 1998) who wrote: "the foresight of things to come, which is providence, belongs only to him by whose will they are to come." Rumelili (pp. 263-264, 2020) concludes:

> [T]he human desire for power originates in anxiety about the future because the future can only be known to those who have the power to shape the future. Thus, anxiety leads the individual into a never-ending race to acquire greater power, because s/he can never know how much power will be necessary for future preservation. Conflict in the state of nature arises from the fact that all desire power and compete with one another in order to attain certainty about the future.

Limitations of Rumelili's (2020, 2021) work are that it has mainly focussed on the level of the state and international relations (IR), therefore neglecting the individual level analysis somewhat by not investigating the formulations offered by existentialists such as Heidegger as how individuals can overcome a state of anxiety. Additionally, Rumelili (2020) admits that his account draws mainly on what Abizadeh (2011) has called the *diffidence argument* for the state of nature. As such, his existentialist reading has heavily focussed on the work of Blits (1989) and has limited his analysis to anxiety induced by future uncertainty. However, Abizadeh (2011) recognised two other primary causes for anxiety and the state of nature that have been left relatively unexplored in terms of existentialist analysis so far.

This paper attempts to go one step further than (Rumelili, 2020, 2021) by exploring whether existentialism can also be used on the individual level of the Hobbesian man. Using the work of Heidegger to ask the question: *Can the Heideggerian notions of fear, anxiety and authenticity be used to deepen our understanding of the Hobbesian man in the state of nature and provide a potential critique of his consequent escape?* Central to this question is an exploration of the causes of the state of nature and a conceptualisation of the Hobbesian man. Additionally, the Heideggerian notions of fear, anxiety, and authenticity need to be explored, as well as how these concepts manifest in Hobbesian and existentialist thought.

This paper is structured as follows. In part 1 a brief outline is sketched of Hobbes's state of nature and his imagined escape from this state. In part 2 a deeper look is taken at the principle causes of war as outlined in Hobbes's *Leviathan* using (Abizadeh, 2011). In part 3 a very brief outline of Heidegger's philosophy is given such as to explain his notion of *authenticity*. Subsequently, in part 4 Heidegger's notions of *fear* and *anxiety* are explored and are clarified using the important example of the human fear of death. This is then made relevant in the light of Heidegger's notion of *authenticity*. Finally, in part 5 these ideas are held up against the picture of the Hobbesian man as painted in part 2. Additionally, some concluding remarks are given.

Part 1 – Hobbes's state of nature and his escape

Hobbes outlines the most important aspects of his *state of nature* in chapters 13 and 14 of the *Leviathan*. To better understand Hobbes's state of nature a brief sketch of its characteristics and Hobbes basis for escape is as follows.

Essentially, the state of nature is a hypothetical state of affairs describing a situation in which there is no government and no social order. In this state, individuals are motivated by their own self-interest and are in a constant state of competition with one another. As evidenced by the introductory quote, it is a state of constant insecurity and fear, which leads individuals to seek ways to protect themselves, such as by forming alliances or seeking out the protection of a stronger individual. However, Hobbes states that these measures are ultimately inadequate to

overcome the state of nature and establish a stable and peaceful society. The only way to achieve this, as Hobbes argues in chapter 17, is through the establishment of a Commonwealth: a strong, centralized government with the power to enforce laws and maintain order. This government, he argues, must have the authority to punish those who break the law and to ensure that individuals do not harm one another. The Commonwealth provides a sense of order and security that is lacking in the state of nature. By establishing a system of laws and a system of punishment for those who break the laws, the Commonwealth introduces the notion of *justice* and as such deters individuals from engaging in harmful or aggressive behaviour. Thus, dissolving the levels of insecurity and fear that are characteristic of the state of nature.

Part 2 – The principal causes of quarrel for the Hobbesian man

Hobbes's (p. 84, 1998) state of nature is thus characterized as a "war of every man, against every man" in which individuals are constantly at risk of being harmed or killed by others. The reason for Hobbes (p. 83, 1998), however, that there is conflict in the state of nature in the first place comes from what he calls the "three principal causes of quarrel". Namely, competition, diffidence, and glory. Different readings of Hobbes have identified a different principal cause as the primary cause for why the state of nature is inevitable. In the following section these three *arguments for war*, as Abizadeh (2011) calls them, will be outlined based on (Abizadeh, 2011), (Strauss,1963) and textual references to the *Leviathan*.

Firstly, the *competition argument* for war is based on the idea that humans will naturally result to violence in the competition over the same goods in the absence of a sovereign to regulate their actions (Abizadeh, 2011). All of Hobbes's arguments for war find their basis in his observation that humans are in essence quite equal in their abilities. Something that Hobbes remarks is especially true for physical strength, as any person can be overcome by a small group of people in a physical brawl. It is "from this equality of ability" that arises the "equality of hope in the attaining of our ends" (Hobbes, p.83, 1998). Since there is no government yet to introduce the notion of *justice* to specify who has a right to what, Hobbes (p.83, 1998) believes that every man has a right to everything "[a]nd therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies".

Abizadeh (p. 301, 2011, original emphasis) is quick to point out, however, that this cannot be the sole argument for the war of all against all as "it may be true that *if* people had conflicting desires, *then* they might resort to violence to settle their differences; but *whether* they do have conflicting desires depends on what kind of desires they typically have." He therefore points to the fact that a better ground for this argument is not found in self-interest in general but in the fear of death, which he believes Hobbes recognises as inherent to humans. This fear is formalised in Hobbes's *right of nature*, which, bluntly stated, says that humans' primary concern is to stay alive (Herbert, 1994). The competition argument states that because some goods necessary for survival are relatively scarce, it is the fear of death in particular that ultimately leads humans to compete for the necessary power and material resources to survive.

Secondly, the *diffidence argument* for war emphasises an important aspect of Hobbes's account of human nature: human fragility. For Abizadeh (2011) this fragility is two-fold. Firstly, humans are fragile existentially because they are mortal and easily killed by their fellow humans due to the earlier mentioned human equality. Secondly, they are epistemologically fragile, meaning they cannot judge with certainty whether a particular person is a threat to our life or not. So even if only a small group of people is actually a threat, one can never exclude the possibility that a certain individual is not. The consequence for Hobbes is that the offence is sometimes the

best defence. Abizadeh (2011) calls this *the desire to strike first* and concludes from this the arrival of conflict and thus the state of nature. In Hobbes's (p.83, 1998) own words:

> [F]rom this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himself, so reasonable, as anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him: and this is no more than his own conservation requireth, and is generally allowed. **Also because there be some, that taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than their security requires; if others, that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds, should not by invasion increase their power, they would not be able, long time, by standing only on their defence, to subsist.** [emphasis added] And by consequence, such augmentation of dominion over men, being necessary to a man's conservation, it ought to be allowed him.

Thirdly, the *glory argument* for war comes down to the idea that humans possess an inherent evil desire to aggressively subjugate others (Abizadeh, 2011). This argument is most famously represented by Strauss (1963), who explains that Hobbes makes the fundamental observation that humans desire to be admired, as being seen as powerful by others increases one's own chances for survival, or as Hobbes (p.58, 1998) states it: "Reputation of power, is power". This is, however, what Strauss (p. 10, 1963) calls "rational striving to power" and this is embodied by the man (in the quote above) who is "at ease within modest bounds". On the other hand, irrational striving is reflected by the other man. This is the Hobbesian man who takes pleasure in the contemplation of his own power. It is this irrational desire to be recognised as superior by others which the glory argument identifies as the primary reason for war.

To summarise, the picture of the Hobbesian man that can be painted based on the work of (Abizadeh, 2011), (Strauss,1963) and textual references is this: the Hobbesian man seems to have an inherent and deeply rooted fear of death, as characterised by his right of nature. This fear drives him to compete and amass resources and power to assure his safety in an uncertain world. Uncertain, as he is aware of his potential dying and his safety is not assured by his peers. Worse, everyone is his potential enemy, making him existentially and epistemologically fragile. However, at last, he is also a proud person, who not only seems to desire that which is sufficient but also seems to want to go beyond his bounds and desires to be admired, if not through the means of violence.

Part 3 – Heidegger and authenticity

Existentialism, as a philosophical tradition can be defined as: "the philosophical theory which holds that a further set of categories [other than basic categories such moral theory, physics, biology, psychology, and the other sciences], governed by the norm of *authenticity*, is necessary to grasp human existence" (Crowell, 2020). In his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, Heidegger positioned several existentialist notions that would later present themselves to be monumental for the existentialist tradition. In the following section a brief sketch of the most relevant notions for the discussion at hand is presented. However, Heidegger is notoriously ambiguous, and many readings of Heidegger exist, so for more possible interpretations see the overviews provided by Crowell (2020) and Wheeler (2020). In this essay elaborate use will be made of the interpretations offered by Reynolds (2014) and Tillich (2000).

Central to Heidegger's work is the importance of *Being*. Being, capitalised, as it signifies the ultimate question of what allows things to exist at all, this question is also called *the problem of Being* (Reynolds, 2014). Being, is different from *beings* (uncapitalised), since Being as a thing has no presence in the world, whilst beings do. *Dasein* (being-there) is Heidegger's term for the distinctive kind of ontological entity that human beings represent, and it is inherently connected to the problem of Being as it is the only being that can raise the question of its own being (Reynolds, 2014). Another essential aspect of Dasein is what Heidegger calls *moods*. Moods are a sort of mental states that go beyond the individual and have public and social significance (Reynolds, 2014). Because of this social aspect they are sometimes translated as *attunements* (Heidegger, 2010). Moods have an ontological importance as moods can disclose essential aspects of Being, as they can show us a glimpse of our *thrownness,* our being given over to a situation, a 'there', with the profound realisation that this 'there' could have been otherwise. We are 'there' without reason or explanation and our past cannot be changed, yet we are 'there' now and only now (Reynolds, 2014).

This social aspect of moods is important, as it is related to the ontological connectiveness humans have to other beings, which Heidegger calls *Mitsein*. Mitsein embodies the idea that the self as an isolated subject does not exist, fundamentally we are inseparable from the world, this is what Heidegger means with the idea that we ontologically connected. *The they* ('das Man' in German) is a concept that refers to those ways in which we are average and anonymous; the ways in which we are indistinguishable from the crowd; the ways in which to a deeper level we *are* the crowd (Reynolds, 2014). It is the forming by the they into a *they-self* that makes Dasein inauthentic. As Heidegger (p.125, 2010) puts it: "Initially, 'I' 'am' not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they. In terms of the they, and as the they, I am initially 'given' to 'myself.' Initially, Dasein is the they and for the most part it remains so". To a certain extent we can never be completely authentic but that shouldn't distract us from the point that this forming leads for Dasein to a state of *Fallenness:* "the [tacit] tendency for individuality and distinctiveness to get lost or reabsorbed into the anonymity of ordinary life, and the way in which Dasein inevitably flees its finitude and covers over its thrownness" (Reynolds, p. 36, 2014).

The inauthentic life in itself does not get decisively judged by Heidegger, as in way all of us are *fallen*. We can, however, not start to live a meaningful life if we do not confront the state of *fallenness* and it is only through *authenticity* that we can start this confrontation. Reynolds (2014) formulates three key points that can be used to characterise Heidegger's notion of *authenticity*: firstly, it involves a sense of 'mineness' without losing the recognition of the earlier mentioned wholeness, because it is an assumption and acceptance of the inherent finitude of Dasein. Secondly, authenticity is based in possibility, whereas inauthenticity is mainly based in actuality. Thirdly, authentic existence is aware of the meaning of existence. Synthesising claim 2 and 3, Reynolds (p.37, 2010) concludes: "[Heidegger's] various discussions of authenticity suggest that our lives are meaningful on account of that which might be (in the future), or even what might have been (in the past), more than on account of that which currently is".

Part 4 – Fear, anxiety, and death

With this background in mind, we can start discussing one of the most important moods for Heidegger: *anxiety*. The mood of anxiety is important because of its individualising nature that provides the first step towards authenticity (Reynolds, 2014). The distinction made by existentialist between the concepts of *fear* and *anxiety* is that *fear* is always directed towards an object whilst *anxiety* is not (Crowell, 2020). In *fear* one experiences something as a threat, whilst

in *anxiety* one also experiences a threat, but there is nothing (i.e., no object) that is perceived as threatening (Rumelili, 2020). Heidegger (p.131 and p. 174, 1996) puts it in the following way: "That in the face of which we fear […] is in every case something which we encounter within-the-world […] It shows itself within a context of involvements" whereas "that in the face of which one has anxiety is not an entity within-the-world. Thus it is essentially incapable of having an involvement". For Heidegger it is precisely nothingness itself that is threatening in anxiety (Rumelili, 2020).

The quintessential and relevant example of this distinction is that of *the fear of dying*. Tillich (pp. 37-38, 2000, original emphasis) untangles the two components of Heidegger's fear of dying: "it is *fear* [insofar] its object is the anticipated event of being killed by sickness or an accident and thereby suffering agony and the loss of everything" and "it is *anxiety* [insofar] its object is the absolutely unknown 'after death,' the nonbeing which remains nonbeing even if it is filled with images of our present experience". For Heidegger, humans often try to resolve their anxiety by turning it into fear, clinging to objects that they hope to overcome, only to find that there is another object to overcome once successful. In the case of death, this leads on a hyper focus of the actual event of dying. The idea of dying scares us and thus we try to push it away, focussing on prolonging our life or noting that it will 'not happen today' (Rumelili, 2020). Ultimately, all such attempts end in vain, as the fundamental anxiety of a finite being confronting the threat of nonbeing, cannot be eradicated, as Heidegger points out: it is inherent to existence (i.e., Dasein) itself (Tillich, 2000).To apprehend one's own death through fear, is to treat it as an empirical *actuality,* rather than as one's "ownmost *possibility*", making oneself unauthentic as this is the conduct of the they-self (Reynolds, 2010, p.42)*.*

Anxiety, however, discloses to us that our societal roles will never provide us with a complete account of our identities or with a deeply meaningful life, as Reynolds (p. 39, 2010) summaries:

> [I]n the experience of anxiety the familiar world loses its normal significance; all of our habitual and everyday ways of relating to the world drop away and sink into insignificance. Forced to confront our own thrownness and finitude, anxiety individualizes us because we no longer feel at home in the world of the ready-to-hand, of das Man, and the many. Rather, Dasein is forced out of its "they-self " to consider itself and its role. By thus individualizing us, anxiety reveals my possibilities precisely as mine.

To apprehend one's own death authentically, is to experience anxiety but also into a profound realisation of our many and varied possibilities (Reynolds, 2010). We are no longer one of the many, the they, and as such no longer feel home in day-to-day life, destroying our idea of possessing an unchanging and stable identity that is grounded in societal norms or expectations, however, it also sets us free to engage with life in a way that we deem truly meaningful.

Part 5 – Anxiety and the Hobbesian man

With the picture of the Hobbesian man from part 2 in mind, the existentialist themes of fear and anxiety can clearly be seen in the work Hobbes, with the fear of death as epitome. However, the Hobbesian man, through a deep preoccupation with the fear of his own death, seems to want to leave little space for realising the more fundamental role death plays in his being. In an Heideggerian reading of Hobbes, the excessive collection of resources and power, the deep desire to strike first as a means to pre-emptively protect oneself, and perhaps even the aggressive desire to dominate for pleasure could all be seen as desperate attempts by the

Hobbesian man to project his fear of death on any other object than the predestined nothingness that lies ahead of him. As such, the Hobbesian man can be considered unauthentic.

Hobbes's (p. 114, 1998, original emphasis) clearly formulates his means of escape from the fear and anxiety present in the state of nature, every man is to say every other man: "*I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man* [i.e., the commonwealth]*, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner*". From the Heideggerian perspective this could be seen, however, as the ultimate projection of the Hobbesian man's anxiety onto an object of fear and as such the ultimate denial of creating meaning in one's own life. Instead of facing one's fear of death head-on, one internalises the idea that one needs the help of an outer society, the they, to provide oneself with the existential safety to live. Therefore, embracing unauthenticity rather than embracing one's ownmost possibility.

However, a middle ground between Hobbes's complete relinquishment of the right to govern oneself and pure authenticity can perhaps be imagined. As mentioned before, a complete escape of the they is not possible, and as such some restrictions on human freedom might also be seen as meaningful. One can imagine a state where one gives up some of the most extravagant rights one has in the state of nature (e.g., the right to kill) with the introduction of a punishment to uphold these relinquishments but is further left to one's own devices. In this light, the Heideggerian reading provided in this essay serves as a critique of the conclusion of despotism Hobbes arrives at.

To conclude, this essay explored the reasons for war as given by Hobbes in his *Leviathan*. Subsequently, Heidegger's philosophy was briefly outlined, focussing on the difference between fear and anxiety, with fear being directed towards an object and anxiety being directed towards nothingness itself. It was argued that humans often try to resolve their anxiety by turning it into fear, but ultimately these attempts are in vain as the fundamental anxiety of a finite being confronting the threat of nonbeing cannot be eradicated. To authentically apprehend one's own death is to experience anxiety, which leads to a profound realisation of one's possibilities. This essay concludes by discussing the relevance of these themes in Hobbes' work on the Hobbesian man, noting that the Hobbesian man's escape into despotism can be seen as a fear driven attempt to not face the existential consequences of his own death.

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