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Introduction

Thomas Hobbes, at first glance, provides a coherent and easily identifiable concept of liberty. He seems to argue that agents are free to the extent that they are unimpeded in their actions by external obstacles. In fact, Hobbes's theory of liberty tends to be more complicated, vague, and is at times, contradictory. Studies by J. R. Pennock, A. Wernham, Ralph Ross, Brian Barry, J. W. N. Watkins, and a variety of others lead one to conclude that there is no single, easily identifiable "Hobbesian" theory of liberty.[1] My aim in this book is to reformulate Hobbes's ideas on liberty in terms of his wider discussion concerning the requirements for rational agency. I hope to demonstrate that Hobbes's theory of agency is just as concerned with "internal" as with "external" conditions of action, although he was not inclined to discuss the former in terms of liberty. Instead, one has to examine his more general discussions of reason and rationality, power and felicity, endeavor, worthiness, and personality to piece together a coherent argument concerning the internal requirements for action. Without ever explicitly saying so, Hobbes takes us beyond his limited definition of "negative" liberty to discuss a kind of conduct similar to notions of *autonomous rational action*.

In the terminology of Richard Flathman,[2] Hobbesian liberty does not extend much beyond the idea of basic movement. Flathman characterizes this kind of liberty as

freedom$_1$ by which he means: "Self-activated movement plus the possibility of impediments to the movement in question."[3] On Flathman's scale of types of freedom this category fails to incorporate the major requirements of agency. I argue that Hobbes's discussion goes considerably beyond this minimal view of liberty and is actually closer to Flathman's notion of freedom$_5$, in which action is "attempted by an agent in the pursuit of a plan or project self—critically chosen to satisfy, and in fact satisfying, certifiably worthy norms or principles."[4]

In other words, Hobbes extends the discussion from the question of external impediments on movement to an examination of the requirements for coherent and long-term rational action. My discussion examines Hobbes's arguments concerning many different aspects of civil society and human psychology, which when pieced together provide a fairly comprehensive theory of agency. Much of the confusion in the scholarly literature over Hobbes's ideas on action can be clarified by finding a distinction in *Leviathan* between movement, which is more concerned with "external" circumstances, and agency, which concerns "internal" conditions. I suggest that although Hobbes does use the terms *liberty* and *freedom* to refer to the lack of physical impediments to motion, he also has a broader discussion of action, agency, and autonomy and the requirements for rational conduct. The distinction between internal and external conditions of freedom draws on the work of Joel Feinberg[5] and I will use it to replace the more usual categories of "positive" and "negative" liberty.

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter Two: The Scope of Freedom

The aim of this chapter is to lay out the analytical framework I use to examine Hobbes's major ideas on liberty and action. Feinberg has made an interesting argument concerning the nature of freedom. Rather than drawing upon the usual division between negative and positive con-

cepts of freedom, he distinguishes instead between the categories of internal and external requirements for freedom. Freedom, for Feinberg, is largely about the exercise of control: constraints that limit internal and external control over actions also limit our freedom. A constraint is anything that prevents one from doing something and can be an internal condition such as psychosis or fear, or an external constraint such as a locked door. This approach allows me to draw out the intricacies of Hobbes's argument concerning the requirements for full agency in a manner that the positive/negative categories do not allow.

I wish to extend Feinberg's argument by placing constraints and conditions for action along a continuum; this will allow us to consider actions in terms of how much liberty they exhibit internally and externally. For example, when examining internal requirements for liberty and action we can evaluate Hobbes's discussion in relation to passions, habits, fear, and rationality. I will argue that Hobbes thought that the more an action exhibits rationality, then the more the agent demonstrates control over internal conditions and hence the more capable she become of living an autonomous life. I will also discuss some aspects of contemporary notions of liberty and autonomy. I will focus in particular on recent arguments by Flathman and Charles Taylor in order to clarify my subsequent discussion of Hobbes.[6]

Chapter Three: Hobbes and Negative Freedom

Chapter 3 is an analysis of what Hobbes has to say in *Leviathan* concerning liberty. The current scholarly consensus interprets Hobbes purely as a theorist of negative liberty. According to this view, Hobbes argues that liberty exists where external impediments do not restrict movement. It is understood that Hobbes does not make a link between rationality and freedom; one can be insane and free because the internal conditions of the agent are of no consequence to the question of whether the agent is free. This also allows Hobbes to argue that fear and liberty are compatible with one another.

The interpretation of Hobbes as a theorist of what I call "pure" negative liberty is supported by Hobbes's claim that when an impediment to motion is internal to a thing itself, it is not "a want of liberty but of the power to move."[7] Liberty is defined in terms of physical impediments to motion and we are free to the extent that we can move our limbs unimpeded by external barriers. We are unfree only to the extent that we are prevented by barred windows, locked doors, and so forth, from pursuing our passions and desires. Flathman characterizes this kind of liberty as freedom$_1$ by which he means "Self-activated movement plus the possibility of impediments to the movement in question."[8] This is not quite correct, because Hobbes does not even make the minimal demand that free movement has to be self-activated. A rock that has been pushed down a hill is free according to Hobbes's most basic definition of liberty even though the motion comes from an external source. On Flathman's scale of types of freedom this category fails to incorporate the major requirements of agency.

My discussion of Hobbes as a theorist of negative liberty will challenge the main body of literature on the topic. I argue that Hobbes's discussion goes considerably beyond this minimal view of liberty and that he in fact discusses freedom in a much richer way than has previously been identified. In opposition to the standard view of Hobbes as a theorist of "pure" negative freedom, I argue instead for what I term a more *extended* theory of freedom.

Chapter Four: The Internal Conditions of Freedom: Complex Instrumental Rationality and Autonomy

This chapter presents the first stage of the key theoretical argument in the book. The major aim is to show that Hobbes's argument advances beyond external requirements for liberty to a discussion of the necessary conditions for rational agency. I argue that Hobbes was interested primarily in promoting the development of rational individuals as a necessary condition for a peaceful society. Only with such rational persons as subjects can we live collectively and at the same time pursue our individual concep-

tions of the good life. Extended rationality is crucial in this interpretation of Hobbes's political theory because without persons capable of rationally ordering their preferences, the chances of political stability and the maintenance of a commonwealth over time are radically reduced.

I will present a theory of rationality that goes beyond the game-theoretical interpretations of Hobbes currently in vogue. This latter view presents Hobbesian rationality in terms of calculations that individuals would make in situations such as the "prisoner's dilemma." Under such conditions, the individual supposedly makes judgments based on maximizing short-term utility. I will demonstrate that Hobbes's view of rational calculation goes considerably beyond the maximization of immediate preferences.

I show that the sum total of Hobbes's ideas concerning reason, intellectual virtue, wit, dexterity of the mind, discretion, prudential design, the need to balance and guide desires and passions, wisdom, experience, the desire for power, deliberation, felicity, authorization, and worthiness, add up to a sophisticated concept of the self. The rational person Hobbes describes, who lives in a well-ordered society, bears little resemblance to the self-interested maximizer that most commentators find in the pages of *Leviathan*. I demonstrate in this chapter that Hobbes's theory of extended rationality, when pieced together, is very similar to modern theories of agency.

I will demonstrate that those who live by the dictates of the laws of nature do not fit the usual interpretation of Hobbesian individuals who are presented as being constantly swayed by a random procession of passions. As a supporting argument for the claims presented in this book, I will relate this discussion back to the general schema of the modern liberal understanding of autonomy discussed in chapter 2.

Chapter Five: The Internal Conditions of Freedom: Substantive Rationality and Autonomy

In this chapter, I develop the theory of volition discussed in chapter 4 and suggest that Hobbes has a substantive theory of rationality. By substantive rationality I mean

that a person ultimately has to be able to formulate and act upon a life-plan in relation to the laws of nature that apply to civil society. The laws of nature are a crucial aspect of my interpretation of Hobbes. Hobbes's idea of agency mandates that we live by norms or "laws" of conduct that we impose upon ourselves. The interpretation offered in this chapter and in chapter 4 suggests that Hobbes utilized the laws of nature to fulfill this requirement. I argue that these laws provide a universal code in the sense that everyone can agree that the laws of nature are good; they alone promote peace and well-being. The goal of peace (the reasonable) sets limits on the goods pursued (the rational). I argue that his theory of agency suggests that a person becomes fully free only when he or she lives by self-imposed rules. Reason allows us to discover certain universal principles that help us structure a civil society and our individual life-plans within that society. Once peace has been secured we are able to live felicitous lives, pursuing long-term goals in a manner that augments our lives as a whole.

Chapter Six: Voluntarism and Morality

It is usually argued that Hobbes only gives prudential, as opposed to moral reasons, for why people should keep promises, obey the sovereign, and cooperate with others. In this chapter I will suggest that a robust moral theory can be found in the pages of *Leviathan*. To make such an argument I begin by addressing the old question of whether Hobbes presents a theory of psychological egoism. This question is of some importance because it bears directly on the issue of whether Hobbes presents a theory of morality or one of prudential self-interest. I argue that Hobbes's theory of volition, presented in chapters 4 and 5, precludes him from supporting psychological egoism and also allows him to present a coherent moral theory that sits well with the theory of the self discussed throughout this book. This means that Hobbes was not a moral relativist; good and bad may often appear to mean different things to different people, but there is still a basic moral code that dictates how we pursue the good. This chapter concludes the attempt to

establish that Hobbes was concerned with something comparable to a modern ideal of agency. The next task is to consider how Hobbes thought society should be arranged in order to promote rational, autonomous beings. I turn, therefore, in chapter 7, to the external conditions of liberty and agency.

Chapter Seven: Freedom, Equality, and the Laws of Nature

Here I examine Hobbes's understanding of the external conditions necessary for liberty and action. I will discuss not only physical barriers as impediments to liberty, but will also consider Hobbes's views on the state of nature, economic conditions, property relationships, the power of the church, the power of the sovereign, civic education, free speech, and freedom of association.

It has usually been argued that Hobbes favored a form of government more conducive to tyranny than liberty. I argue instead that we can find a theory of liberal constraints embedded in Hobbes's discussion of the laws of nature. These constraints, which I argue are an embryonic form of a "harm principle," protect citizens from abuses by the sovereign and from fellow subjects of the commonwealth. In particular, natural law, when made into positive law by the sovereign, creates a prior condition of equality that is essential for each individual to act freely. In this chapter, I extend the analysis of the laws of nature and claim that natural law, because it is the guiding force of reason, also establishes the conditions most advantageous for freedom within a commonwealth. My intention is to demonstrate that Hobbes was concerned mainly with creating a society characterized by civil freedom.

Hobbes leaves us in no doubt as to the requirement for an absolute sovereign and many commentators have argued that because of this there is precious little freedom available for the members of the commonwealth that Hobbes prescribes. I will examine this requirement in terms of the need for peace and order and suggest that Hobbes was concerned with absolutism, not because of any authoritarian leanings on his part, but because he saw no other means of securing

a safe environment for agency. In other words, civility and agency depend upon absolutism. Hobbes's discussion of the state of nature is meant to support the need for an authoritative sovereign and describes the very opposite of what a civil society should look like. In place of arts, science, peace, prosperity, and civility we get instead, insecurity, fear, invasion, and death. It is necessary, therefore, that we rationally place limits on ourselves and live under a self-imposed authority that can curtail natural liberty through civil law; only then is agency available to all.

It is the capacity for rational agency that makes us capable of acting in accordance with the laws of nature; this is why education becomes such a vital concern in Hobbes's work. Parts 3 and 4 of *Leviathan* are devoted to promoting religious reeducation, without which we are likely to continue to fight and to place the commonwealth in danger. We have to be schooled in order to overcome such passions as partiality, pride, revenge, and vainglory. We also have to be capable of making contracts with each other, and Hobbes tells us repeatedly that without reason we cannot be the authors of our deeds and hence cannot be held responsible for our actions and promises. In sum, we have to acquire opinions that do not threaten the very existence of the commonwealth. We must be taught that the laws of nature that relate specifically to civil society dictate that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Hobbes was convinced that a commonwealth would fail without some form of tutelary sovereign, and so once again I argue that the aim of involving the sovereign in education and religion is not to tyrannize the subjects but to foster peace as a prior necessity of agency. I claim that the task of the sovereign is to be tolerant toward religious beliefs, the expression of ideas, and to groups and assemblies that do not threaten the survival of the state or the lives and interests of the subjects.

Chapter Eight: Hobbes's Dualism

In the conclusion I claim that the theory of rational action developed throughout the book does not sit well with other concepts in Hobbes's overall system of thought. In

particular, it causes problems for his theories of determinism and consent. There are, in fact, many discrepancies in Hobbes's descriptions of such topics as freedom, equality, and power. One could explain this away by suggesting that Hobbes is simply careless and inconsistent in his work. I suggest that there is another and better answer to the puzzle, namely that Hobbes deliberately presents his readers with two different descriptions of each of these issues. One description relates to life lived according to the right of nature in the state of nature, and the other relates to life lived by the laws of nature within a well-ordered commonwealth.