

## THE NATURAL ENEMY OF LEVIATHAN

In Chapter IX of Thomas Hobbes' work of analytical philosophy *Leviathan*, the author sets an elaborate chart before readers that documents the disciplines of knowledge. In this chart, there are two major divisions of the "knowledge of consequences, called Philosophy"—Natural and Political Philosophy (Leviathan 69). Curiously, political consequences are only those that fall under the purveyance of the institution of a commonwealth or of a man as a subject of the former. Only farther down the chart can one observe the "Natural" consequences of man such as speech, ethics, poetry, and logic. The section of the chart proceeding from Natural Consequences to the activities of man is directly in line with Hobbes' prior discussion of the laws of nature, which happens before the germination of the commonwealth. However, Hobbes' chart is not as readily intelligible as one might expect.

The strange aspect of the chart is the placement of Civil Philosophy as a category not resulting from the speech of man. The arenas of Ethics, the Science of Just and Unjust, Rhetoric, Poetry, and Logic are contained under the qualities of man, but the creation of a state with sovereign and subject is noticeably absent. The place for Civil Philosophy is directly secondary to Philosophy as a main idea on Hobbes' diagram, but consequences relating to sovereign and subject have a parallel existence on the page—should not the rights of the subject proceed in part from the rights of the sovereign? Also, for Hobbes, how can there be political consequences that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the actions of man and are only subordinate to Philosophy itself? This isolation of the political/civil architecture is clearly a means of allowing the civil arena expanded independence, and at what that power aims is nothing less than total domination of the human realm and the annihilation of anything deemed a threat to the sustainability of the commonwealth. Directing efforts at a thorough understanding of Chapter IX seems fundamental to understanding what is in conflict with the Leviathan created by man and what instigates the flux between Natural and Civil states.

### **The Duty and Right of Subjects**

In the state of nature, the rights of man are unlimited. In a civil state, the rights of man are unlimited only insofar as those things which escape legislature are unlimited, as "right consisteth in liberty to do or forbear" (103). In both situations, there exists an unalienable right to one's own person and to the preservation of one's own life, the basest unit of the social contract theory: "the right of nature is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto" (103). In order to best affect this preservation and to feed appetitive impulses of both the will and deliberative faculties, man enters into

social situations in which he covenants and contracts. In doing this, rights are given up, especially in the case of an absolute sovereign to whom rights are deferred and of whom protection is expected. This releasing of rights to the sovereign is the basis for the parallel categories of citizen and sovereign in Hobbes' chapter IX—the citizen relinquishes rights willingly, and though the sovereign is to be absolute, the right he has proceeds from the people. The relationship could be understood as an infinite regress, as the rights of the people also proceed from the laws of the sovereign, save for the fact that Hobbes makes it clear that the people exist before a civil society can be introduced, especially one replete with a positive law and judicial power.

In this coming together, men make a contract with one another to support a ruler, whether spoken or unspoken, and give up such rights as they have naturally according to their ability to do so: “that a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself” (104). From this arises the duty of a subject to respect his contract with other subjects and, tangentially, the absolute ruler. A subject's simple duty is to abide by this agreement, but his duty toward the sovereign is most complicated as he is to give absolute obedience. This is submission to only one body or person without acknowledgement of conflict of understanding or belief and this single-mindedness is not easily won by subject or ruler.

### **Political Causes Independent of the Speech of Man**

The answer to the second question in regards to Hobbes' philosophy chart is understandable in the terms he uses of a constructed or “artificial body” fashioned by the art of man (19). As such, Civil Philosophy must not be included under the ultimate heading of Natural Philosophy. The objection to that view is that Civil Philosophy is our understanding of the state human beings in society have created. It would seem to follow that the Leviathan would fall under the heading of “men in special” (71). The reason for this not being the case is that the commonwealth arises neither from men's passions nor from men's speech, but a combination thereof that takes the form of covenant and contract. Once created, Leviathan becomes something outside the strict dominion of man, for while a kingdom of man can be destroyed or fall into general disarray because of faction and warfare, it can never be fully undone in the study of consequences.

At the point beyond which there can be no undoing of a state, at which Civil Philosophy becomes History, the voluntary actions of men and the consequences thereof have become fact in much the same way that the facts of Natural History are unquestionable. The actions of men in speech and the science of just and unjust are dependent on a sovereign and a state to have any meaning, for speech alone will not

decree anything to be unethical or unjust without some authority to punish or reward: “to this war of every man against every man, this also in consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law, where no law, no injustice. Force, and fraud, are in war the cardinal virtues” (101). In this way, Civil Philosophy is encompassing of the actions of men arising from speech and of the actions of subjects regarding contract but it is also independent of these, for it is what gives men power to articulate their will and pursue their desires. The object of Civil Philosophy, the commonwealth, is not so self-sovereign when during its life, for it occupies a forever tenuous position as long as men are human and prone to the natural extremes of hope and fear.

### **Division of the Leviathan, Natural and Civil**

#### Natural

Hobbes makes it clear that Leviathan is both a social construction and a force that, once created, is ungovernable by the simple speech and will of men. A natural division of Leviathan can only be affected by a destruction or massive alteration of the circumstances of the cause of its existence, man, or by such disunity among the human beings that constitute it that it can no longer be properly called a single indivisible force. In this first case, Hobbes does not have much to say, save that it appears inevitable and is not worth dwelling on as such, for “when all the world is overcharged with inhabitants, then the last remedy of all is war; which provideth for every man, by victory, or death” (Leviathan 255). In the latter case of the dissolution of Leviathan, it would need to be a nearly perfect division of man from man to truly affect the death by alteration of this artificial man. The only thing that seems to have the power to do this is the one trait all humans share but experience individually: the fear of death and the unknown. This fear allows, indeed welcomes, the idea of religion into men’s hearts: “in these four things, opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotions towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of religion” (90). Thus it is human mortality and by extension religion, that become, respectively, both the Natural and Civil opponents of Leviathan.

#### Civil

The problem of religion’s threat to the state is not, for Hobbes, so much about individual belief but about the assertion of a moral sovereignty by the clergy. More specifically, for Hobbes this is a problem of the Catholic Church, a force more dominant and powerful than any in Civil History, though having less than pure Christian beginnings, for as Hobbes asserts, “if a man consider the original of this great ecclesiastical dominion, he will easily perceive, that the Papacy, is no other than the ghost of the

deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof: for so did the Papacy start up on a sudden out of the ruins of that heathen power” (500). However, when much of a populace finds the Church satisfactorily filling the void of a stated morality appealing to more humanistic ideals than the secular sovereign, they turn their faces toward this rival power, more insidious than the civil power could likely ever become.

When this takes place and individual man as a subject of a country finds himself in conflict with one or the other principles of his secular sovereign and religious authority, Hobbes sees this as a divisive force that plays on the nature of man in a disingenuous and politically harmful way, for when man’s fear of death is eased by the temptations of religion, he is removed from what makes him most human in the secular Leviathan: “they are two kingdoms, and every subject is subject to two masters. For seeing the ghostly power challengeth the right to declare what is sin, it challengeth by consequence to declare what is law; and again, the civil power challenging to declare what is law, every subject must obey two masters, who both will have their commands be observed as law; which is impossible” (242). Where there is disobedience in the individual, the sovereign finds it prudent to correct it, but if there is a competing force that is not so easily corrected, what may the sovereign do but war against it? If the sovereign puts into the subject the fear of disobedience to the sovereign’s will, that would seem to be an effective curtailing of any impulse to become a part of a religious Leviathan. There is a twofold stumbling block, however: for a civil Leviathan is constructed by man, a religious Leviathan carries the weight of a construction by God and promulgated by men’s observance of the supernatural. As such, it can promise things as otherworldly as eternal life in heaven.

It is not difficult to see that the civil sovereign has no item of fear in his menagerie that can counter the hope and fear, however false, provided by the Church’s vision of the afterlife. In Hobbes view, religion is also a hindrance to human ethical values, for man cannot be held accountable for his sins, as the Church argues, for his own judgment of good and evil is lacking. Further, his right to it has been partially removed by a judicial authority established by the commonwealth: “another doctrine repugnant to civil society, is that whatsoever a man does against his conscience, is sin; and it dependeth on the presumption of making himself judge of good and evil. For a man's conscience and his judgment are the same thing, and as the judgment, so also the conscience may be erroneous” (239). If the sovereign of a civil Leviathan is to keep his artificial man alive and whole, religion must fall under his domain only, in order to prevent the fear of men from tempting them into the waiting arms of a religious Leviathan that promises to prey on the most basic and primal, rather than organically evolved, ideas and intuitions of governed man.

Source

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Collier Books ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Library, 1962. Print.