

HOBBS ON MORAL VIRTUE AND THE LAWS OF NATURE Donald Rutherford (UCSD)

1. Introduction

Thomas Hobbes's claim that, in the state of nature, the laws of nature "consist in" the moral virtues seems on the face of it an unlikely position for him to hold.¹ It certainly is not how the majority of commentators have understood Hobbes's doctrine of the laws of nature,² and the position itself may strike one as incongruous: how can a *law*, a rule that enjoins an agent to act in a specific manner on pain of wrongdoing, be equated with a *virtue*, a habituated character trait, whose possessor is disposed to perform rightly in any situation, without appeal to an explicit rule? On many accounts, a law-based morality and a virtue-based morality are treated as mutually exclusive alternatives, with the former construing right action as action in accordance with a determinate rule and the latter construing it in terms of the judgment of the virtuous agent whose standard of choice cannot be reduced to a determinate rule.³

Yet the distinction between a law-based morality and a virtue-based morality is far from absolute. For Aquinas, the domain of natural law is coextensive with the domain of moral virtue, and there is a close theoretical connection between the two. Natural law is law dictated to the will by reason, and indirectly by God, which provides the standard according to which morally right and wrong actions are judged. At the same time, a morally virtuous agent is one whose will, reflecting the sum of her motives, is structured by reason in such a way that she is habitually disposed to act as natural law requires without explicitly appealing to it as a rule.⁴ To a first approximation, the law formulation and the virtue formulation comprise two complementary aspects of natural law: one externalist and rooted in divine reason, the other internalist, reflecting the dispositions of a correctly ordered human will.⁵

¹ *Leviathan* 26, p. 185. Citations of *Leviathan* (hereafter: L) are by chapter and page number in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan. Revised Student Edition*, ed. Richard Tuck. See the Bibliography for abbreviations used in citing other works by Hobbes.

² The two leading approaches interpret the laws of nature either as principles of duty commanded by God or as principles of prudence—prescriptions for actions that are conducive to an individual's self-preservation. Although the dust has not yet settled on this debate, the preponderance of opinion has sided with the latter as more in keeping with the naturalistic tenor of Hobbes's philosophy. The most thorough defense of the first reading is that of Martinich 1992, who develops ideas advanced by Taylor 1938 and Warrender 1957. For defenses of the second reading, see Gauthier 1969; Watkins 1973; Hampton 1986; Kavka 1986; Darwall 1995.

³ See Schneewind 1990 on the changing relationship of these concepts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁴ On Aquinas's conception of natural law, see *Summa Theologicae*, IaIIae, q. 90, a. 1; q. 91, aa. 1-3; on the equivalence of natural law and moral virtue, see *ibid.*, q. 94, a. 1.

⁵ For a defense of this claim, emphasizing the continuity between Aquinas's position and that of the early Stoics, see Mitsis 2003.

The relevance of these ideas for the understanding of Hobbes's philosophy may seem remote at best. I will argue, however, that it is worth revisiting their relation to his doctrine of the laws of nature, and that, when suitably framed, the Virtue-Law Equivalence thesis (as I will call it) offers a promising basis for making sense of Hobbes's diverse claims about the laws of nature. That Hobbes affirms some version of this thesis is suggested by his statement in chapter 26 of *Leviathan* that "the Lawes of Nature, which consist in Equity, Justice, Gratitude, and other morall Vertues on these depending, in the condition of meer Nature... are not properly Lawes, but qualities that dispose men to peace, and to obedience" (L 26, p. 185).⁶ As Hobbes presents his position, insofar as they operate within the "condition of meer Nature," the laws of nature consist in moral virtues, or in certain qualities of character that dispose human beings to peace and obedience.

That the notions of virtue and vice play an important role in Hobbes's thought has not gone unremarked. Among others, David Boonin-Vail has argued that Hobbes should be read as a virtue theorist, who construes morality principally not in terms of the rightness or wrongness of action—actions that do or do not conform to the laws of nature—but in terms of the goodness or badness of character, that is, virtue and vice.⁷ Two general considerations drawn from the argument of *Leviathan* support Boonin-Vail's reading. First, assuming that the crucial condition for the formation of a commonwealth is the existence of mutual trust among the covenanting parties, this condition is best understood in terms of those individuals possessing certain enduring qualities of character. We are prone to trust others not just on the basis of how they have performed in the past, but on the basis of our judgment of how they *will* act in the future, that is, their dispositions to act. Second, agents will be more likely to act in ways that generate trust in others if they are not merely following rules on a case-by-case basis, but if they are habituated to certain forms of action—that is, dispositions to perform those actions become enduring parts of their characters. On both counts, what Hobbes needs to get a commonwealth off the ground are individuals who do not simply obey the laws of nature but have stable dispositions to act in ways expressed by those laws, that is, individuals who have, in the relevant sense, virtuous characters.⁸

Acknowledging this point, it remains true that Hobbes frames the bulk of the argument of *Leviathan* in terms of the "laws of nature," and so we require a fuller explanation of the relation for him between virtue-talk and law-talk. Here Boonin-Vail fails to deliver a satisfactory answer. He glosses "virtue or vice" as "the disposition to embrace or betray the law of nature" (1994: 146). Such an account appears to leave us with a free-standing structure of natural law that is conceptually prior to virtue and vice. The laws of nature enjoin action that is understood to promote self-preservation; and the virtuous person is that person who is disposed to obey those requirements. Going further, one might say that the virtuous person is that person who is appropriately responsive to the

⁶ For other texts affirming this relation, see L 15, p. 111; L 26, p. 197; DC 3.29-32.

⁷ Other authors supporting such a reading include Skinner 1991, 1996; Ewin 1991; Berkowitz 1999. Miner 2001 is a pointed critique of Berkowitz's account.

⁸ Boonin-Vail labels these the "argument from revealed disposition" and the "argument from habituation" (1994: 145-76).

normative demands of natural law, that is, who because of facts about his character consistently acts as the laws of nature require him to act.⁹

The problem with this account is that it enshrines the view that for Hobbes the laws of nature are in a strict sense *laws*: commands or prescriptions that obligate agents to act in accordance with them. Yet Hobbes explicitly denies that the laws of nature are “properly laws” in the state of nature.¹⁰ Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the main argument of Part 1 of *Leviathan* does not take as a premise the existence of principles that are practically necessary in the sense that failure to act in accordance with them is a violation of objective norms of morality or rationality. In the state of nature, the natural condition of mankind, there are only individuals determined to act by a variety of appetites and aversions, some of which promote further ends that they themselves desire (e.g. peace and self-preservation). Of course, not all agents do act in ways that promote these ends, and not all agents understand that such ways of acting are effective in promoting ends they desire. For this reason, Hobbes conceives of his work as having an important pedagogical dimension: he aims to instruct individuals in how to act so that they may satisfy desires basic to their natures.

Presented in these terms, the laws of nature look very much like principles of prudence. Lying behind this, though, is Hobbes’s revisionary account of the practical force of reason. Although the laws of nature are represented as having a prescriptive form (they “forbid,” “command” etc.), they do not engage appetite directly as commands of reason. This is because reason for Hobbes is limited to acts of “reckoning,” based on relations among signs arbitrarily linked to perceived or imagined objects of desire.¹¹ To the extent that the laws of nature have a practical force in the state of nature, this must be explained either in terms of the way in which the laws determine desire by representing the (theoretically) necessary relations between the ends of peace or self-preservation and certain forms of endeavor as means to those ends, or in terms of the laws themselves being stable dispositions to endeavor in ways that promote the ends of peace and self-preservation.¹² In the latter sense, the laws of nature can be taken, as Hobbes says, to consist in the moral virtues.

In fact, Hobbes ascribes a variety of identities to the laws of nature.¹³ It is not part of my argument to insist that he be read as a virtue theorist in ethics, as opposed to a natural law theorist, a contract theorist or any other kind of theorist. His position cannot be fitted neatly into any of these categories without sacrificing some of its detail. My claim, simply, is

⁹ According to Boonin-Vail, “Hobbes’s moral philosophy is best understood as culminating in a normative account of human virtue which identifies an objectively valid moral law, and which celebrates as just the person who is disposed to follow that law, and to take pleasure in it, without regard to the beneficial consequences of doing so” (1994: 124).

¹⁰ See also L 15, p. 111. This is a point that Boonin-Vail acknowledges in rejecting a divine-command account of natural law (1994: 102-3). Nevertheless, he upholds a reading of the laws of nature as supplying “moral standards in the state of nature” (71).

¹¹ “Out of all which we may define, (that is to say determine,) what that is, which is meant by this word *Reason*, when wee reckon it amongst the Faculties of the mind. For REASON, in this sense, is nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts” (L 5, p. 32).

¹² For a development of the first of these approaches, see Darwall 1995.

¹³ In a companion paper, “Hobbes and the Language of the Laws of Nature” (unpublished), I explore in detail the significance of the prescriptive language in which Hobbes expresses the laws of nature.

that on textual and philosophical grounds there is reason to see the concept of virtue as playing a key role in his conceptualization of the practical import of the laws of nature. Within the state of nature in particular, the laws of nature are realized as virtues: stable dispositions of endeavor, structured by knowledge of the necessary relations between such endeavor and the ends of peace and self-preservation. This does not account for everything Hobbes says about the laws of nature, but it constitutes an important part of his philosophy that has not received the attention it deserves.

2. Natural Law in the State of Nature

Hobbes assigns two principal functions to natural, or moral, law.¹⁴ The laws of nature are, first, “the Praecepts, by which men are guided to avoyd that condition [of war]” which is a consequence of the state of nature (L 31, p. 245). Taken in this sense, the laws of nature command men to seek peace and to endeavor to perform those actions that are necessary for peace.¹⁵ Second, the laws of nature place limits on the justice of a sovereign’s commands: “Subjects owe to Sovereigns, simple Obedience, in all things, wherein their obedience is not repugnant to the Lawes of God” (ibid.)—which is to say, the laws of nature. Exactly how far Hobbes extends the rights of subjects to disobey the sovereign is uncertain, but at the very least he recognizes the laws of nature as a standard against which the equity of a sovereign’s actions can be assessed.¹⁶

In both of these roles the laws of nature appear to function as normative principles that spell out how individuals in the state of nature, or sovereigns exercising their rule, ought to act.¹⁷ This ‘ought’ can be interpreted either morally or prudentially. If the laws of nature are considered as delivered in the word of God, then they are substantive moral principles that express how individuals in the state of nature and sovereigns in their commonwealths are obliged to act, on pain of divine punishment. Alternatively, the force of the laws can be taken to be merely prudential. With respect to individuals in the state of

¹⁴ On the equivalence of these expressions, see L 26, p. 197; DC 3.31. A third role Hobbes assigns to the laws of nature is as principles of international law: “Concerning the Offices of one Sovereign to another, which are comprehended in that Law, which is commonly called the *Law of Nations*, I need not say any thing in this place; because the Law of Nations, and the Law of Nature, is the same thing” (L 30, p. 244).

¹⁵ Formally, Hobbes defines a law of nature as “a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved” (L 14, p. 91). However, when he goes on to state particular laws of natures, he emphasizes the end of avoiding war or promoting peace. According to the “Fundamentall Law of Nature,” “it is a precept, or generall rule of Reason, *That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre*” (L 14, pp. 91-2). Hobbes represents the other eighteen laws of nature as following from the fundamental law, insofar as endeavors that violate these laws (e.g. those that express ingratitude, insociability or contempt) promote a condition of war and hence violate the fundamental law, “which commandeth men to *Seek Peace*” (see L 15, pp. 105-7).

¹⁶ On the sovereign’s subjection to the laws of nature, see L 28, p. 214 and L 30, pp. 231, 236. Hobbes rejects resistance to the sovereign’s rule even when it is known to violate the laws of nature (L 24, p. 172). He later cites punishment of the innocent as an example of a sovereign’s violation of the laws of nature (L 26, pp. 192-3; L 28, p. 219).

¹⁷ “And the same Law, that dictateth to men that have no Civil Government, what they ought to do, and what to avoyd in regard of one another, dictateth the same to Common-wealths, that is, to the Consciences of Sovereign Princes, and Sovereign Assemblies” (L 30, p. 244).

nature, the laws of nature articulate ways that they ought to act in order to realize the end of peace, and hence the preservation of their own lives. With respect to the sovereign, the laws of nature are instrumental for the preservation of the commonwealth: sovereigns who act contrary to the laws of nature jeopardize the security of the state, and their own place as sovereign, by inclining their subjects to rebellion.

Hobbes's central argument in *Leviathan*, leading up to his explanation of the institution of a commonwealth in chapter 17, does not presuppose an interpretation of the laws of nature as divine commands. Although Hobbes is open to individuals taking themselves to be obligated by the laws of nature because they are understood as expressions of the word of God,¹⁸ his account of the role the laws play in constraining the unsociable passions of individuals and guiding them toward the formation of a commonwealth does not require that the laws be understood in this way. Even if we credit Hobbes with the belief that God has dominion over all things, Hobbes does not assume that this belief can be imputed to all human beings or that the fact of God's omnipotence alone suffices to ground the normative force of the laws of nature.¹⁹

Accepting this point, it is nonetheless usual to suppose that Hobbes must recognize the laws of nature as normative in *some* sense. The laws are framed in prescriptive language, and it is hard not to think that the purpose of the laws is tied to the restrictions they impose on an agent's will. An agent who understands, and is motivationally responsive to, the laws of nature will know that there are certain actions that he ought, or ought not, to endeavor, and he will *thereby* feel himself bound, or obliged, to act as the laws prescribe. This is the standard way of conceiving of the operation of normative principles, whether those principles are categorical moral imperatives or hypothetical imperatives conditioned by a prior end, including one determined by an agent's own desires.

In the case of Hobbes's philosophy, this assumption must be carefully scrutinized. Outside of a commonwealth and apart from the sanction they receive as divine commands, there are no objectively valid normative principles—no laws that bind the will by virtue of their expressing objective requirements of morality or rationality. There are instances of the will being "bound" by determining causes; however, these are not instances of its being bound by normative principles. Rather, such instances of psychological determination are the *sources* of normative statements, including the laws of nature.²⁰

Support for this conclusion is offered by the important qualification Hobbes adds to his account of the laws of nature at the end of chapter 15:

These dictates of Reason, men use to call by the name of Lawes, but improperly: for they are but Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves; whereas Law, properly is the word of him, that by right hath command over others. But yet if we consider the same Theoremes, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then are they properly called Lawes. (p. 111)

¹⁸ As is evident from L 30, p. 233, and L 31, p. 245: "There wants onely, for the entire knowledge of Civill duty, to know what are those Lawes of God."

¹⁹ See, in particular, L 31, pp. 245-6.

²⁰ Cf. Darwall 1995; 2000.

As Hobbes explains his position, the laws of nature only function as “laws properly,” which convey an authoritative demand for action, if they are the command of a person whom one is obligated to obey.²¹ In a commonwealth this role is filled by the sovereign. In the condition of “meer Nature,” it can be filled only by God, on the condition that we consider the laws as “delivered in the word of God.” But Hobbes does not assume that all human beings take the laws to be commanded in this way, and so for such individuals the laws of nature are not properly laws outside of a commonwealth. Instead, they are no more than “Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves.” I read Hobbes as asserting here that the cognitive content of the laws of nature is limited to a theoretical claim about the relation between certain forms of endeavor, on the one hand, and the avoidance of war, on the other. Given the psychology of human beings, he believes, understanding such “conclusions” will have predictable effects on how individuals are disposed to act. However, it is misleading to construe this as a responsiveness to norms, for in the state of nature, apart from the will of God, there is nothing to give such norms an authority sufficient to command the wills of human beings.

Hobbes returns to this point in chapter 26 of *Leviathan*, insisting that philosophers’ attempts to formulate a moral law independent of civil law fail to identify practical requirements that agents are required to observe:

The Authority of writers, without the Authority of the Common-wealth, maketh not their opinions Law, be they never so true. That which I have written in this Treatise, concerning the Morall Vertues, and of their necessity, for the procuring, and maintaining peace, though it bee evident Truth, is not therefore presently Law; but because in all Common-wealths in the world, it is part of the Civill Law: For though it be naturally reasonable; yet it is by the Sovereigne Power that it is Law: Otherwise, it were a great errour, to call the Lawes of Nature unwritten Law; whereof wee see so many volumes published, and in them so many contradictions of one another, and of themselves. (L 26, p. 191)²²

No prescriptive statement, whether advanced in a commonwealth or in the state of nature, bears the force of law unless commanded by an acknowledged authority, either God or the sovereign.²³ Hobbes allows that propositions offered as moral laws may express contents that are *true*, but those propositions do not thereby qualify as laws in the strict sense. Significantly, he includes his own statements of the laws of nature in this category: they reflect truths about the means necessary for achieving and maintaining peace, but they are not properly laws unless sanctioned by sovereign power.²⁴

²¹ For Hobbes’s specification of the strict sense of law, see L 26, p. 183.

²² This paragraph expands significantly on the Latin text: “In an established commonwealth, the interpretation of the laws of nature does not depend on teachers and writings of moral philosophy, but on the authority of the commonwealth. The doctrines may indeed be true; but authority, not truth, makes law” (OL 3:202).

²³ See also L 26, p. 185.

²⁴ I take this to be consistent with Hobbes’s statement at the end of chapter 13: “And Reason suggesteth convenient Articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These Articles, are they, which otherwise are called the Lawes of Nature” (p. 90).

Noteworthy about this passage also is Hobbes's framing of the crucial premise of his argument as a claim about the "Morall Vertues" rather than natural law. This reflects a pattern observed throughout *Leviathan*. The "Lawes of Nature," Hobbes writes, "which consist in Equity, Justice, Gratitude, and other morall Vertues on these depending, in the condition of meer Nature (as I have said before in the end of the 15th Chapter,) are not properly Lawes, but qualities that dispose men to peace, and to obedience" (L 26, p. 185).²⁵ Hobbes's statement that the laws of nature consist in the moral virtues should be taken seriously. The reality grounding what he calls the "laws of nature" are certain stable dispositions to action, namely, those necessary for procuring and maintaining peace (L 26, p. 191). It is above all these dispositions, or "manners" (to use Hobbes's word) that must be present if human beings are to find their way out of the state of nature and into civil society. They will succeed in this attempt just in case enough of them are disposed to act in the ways required for the formation of a commonwealth, that is, enough of them possess what Hobbes calls "moral virtue."

The importance of this point is brought out by Hobbes's discussion of justice in chapter 15 of *Leviathan*. He begins with what appears an outright denial of the possibility of justice in the state of nature: "the nature of Justice, consisteth in keeping of valid Covenants: but the Validity of Covenants begins not but with the Constitution of a Civill Power, sufficient to compell men to keep them: And then it is also that Propriety begins" (L 15, p. 101).²⁶ In the state of nature, there is "no Propriety; all men having Right to all things" (*ibid.*). Propriety, or an exclusive right to property, exists only where there is a covenant, or mutual transferring of right, that establishes a distinction among owners; and this can occur only in a commonwealth where such claims are enforceable. Consequently, in the state of nature, there is no injustice, in the sense of a wrongful violation of propriety through failure to keep a valid covenant.

Hobbes presents this argument in introducing his third law of nature: "That men performe their Covenants made." He supports this law by appeal to the second law, "by which we are obliged to transferre to another, such Rights, as being retained, hinder the peace of Mankind" (L 15, p. 100). Since the second law obliges us to enter into covenants involving the mutual transfer of right, if those covenants are not to be "in vain," it is necessary that individuals keep their covenants. The import of this additional requirement, however, is far from clear. We have just seen Hobbes deny that there can be valid covenants in the state of nature, violations of which constitute acts of injustice. So, how can there be a law of nature, which is to say, a law existing in the state of nature, which requires individuals to "perform their covenants made"?

The question can be answered straightforwardly if we attend to the distinction Hobbes draws between the application of the words 'just' and 'unjust' to *actions* and to *men*. In denying the possibility of injustice in the state of nature, Hobbes is referring to unjust actions: "where no Covenant hath preceded, there hath no Right been transferred, and every man has right to every thing; and consequently, no action can be Unjust" (L 15, p.

²⁵ See also L 15, p. 111; L 17, p. 117; and L 26, p. 197: "*Naturall* are those which have been Lawes from all Eternity; and are called not onely *Naturall*, but also *Morall* Lawes; consisting in the Morall Vertues, as Justice, Equity, and all habits of the mind that conduce to Peace, and Charity; of which I have already spoken in the fourteenth and fifteenth Chapters."

²⁶ See also L 13, p. 90.

100). Nothing a person does in relation to another person, no limitation of her natural right to all things, can be considered wrong or sinful in the state of nature. Yet this is precisely the definition of unjust actions: “the Justice of Actions denominates men, not Just, but *Guiltlesse*: and the Injustice of the same... gives them the name of *Guilty*” (ibid., p. 104). Guilt, sin, or more generally wrongdoing, can exist only where an action contravenes a valid law, which can happen only if there is a rightful sovereign.

Hobbes contrasts this use of ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ with their use in relation to men. In this case, the terms refer not to a particular action or set of actions performed by an individual but to the general cast of his character: “When they are attributed to Men, they signifie Conformity, or Inconformity of Manners, to Reason.... This Justice of the Manners, is that which is meant, where Justice is called a Vertue; and Injustice a Vice” (L 15, pp. 103-4). In distinguishing the justice of manners and the justice of actions, Hobbes makes the familiar point that a just person does not lose the claim to be just, “by one, or a few unjust Actions, that proceed from sudden Passion, or mistake of Things, or Persons” (ibid., p. 104). Yet, if Hobbes means to define, as he seems to at one point, the just person as “he that taketh all the care he can, that his Actions may be all Just” (even if he occasionally errs), he arguably limits the existence of just men to the condition in which there can be just actions, i.e. a commonwealth. If a just manner can be possessed only by one who reliably performs just actions, then the former can exist only if the latter does.

In fact, Hobbes resists this inference. One can possess the virtue of justice independently of whether one can perform just and unjust actions. The “Injustice of Manners,” he writes, “is the disposition or aptitude to do Injurie; and is Injustice before it proceed to Act; and without supposing any individuall person injured” (L 15, p. 104). The just person is disposed to deliver what has been promised to another, even when this comes at some cost to himself. “That which gives to human Actions the relish of Justice, is a certain Nobleness or Gallantnesse of courage, (rarely found,) by which a man scorns to be beholding for the contentment of his life, to fraud, or breach of promise” (ibid.). In Hobbes’s view, a person is denominated “just,” and is said to possess the virtue of justice, on the basis of her responsiveness to other individuals within a social setting, whether or not that responsiveness eventuates in action. Given this, I submit, it is Hobbes’s position that the virtue of justice can exist in the state of nature and that it is not explicable as a habituated tendency to perform just actions. Just actions do not exist in the state of nature, but a just person can. The just are those who endeavor to keep promises, including those involving the delivery of goods, even when doing so entails some cost to themselves and independently of whether failing to do so counts as an instance of punishable wrongdoing.

This has important consequences for our understanding of Hobbes’s doctrine of the laws of nature. Notice, first, that after introducing his third law of nature, Hobbes proceeds to draw a distinction between the justice of manners and the justice of actions, allowing us to infer that if the third law plays a role in the state of nature it can only be as the *virtue* of justice, not as a law commanding the performance of just actions, of which there can be none. Hobbes’s argument in Part 1 of *Leviathan* clearly assumes that the laws of nature play a role in guiding individuals towards the conditions of peace and political union. This role can best be understood if we conceive of the laws of nature as present in individuals in the form of moral virtues.

A final piece of evidence that in the state of nature the laws of nature should be interpreted not as rules that enjoin the performance of action, but as virtues that reflect an

agent's disposition to act is found in Hobbes's famous statement that the laws of nature, "oblige *in foro interno*; that is to say, they bind to a desire they should take place: but *in foro externo*; that is, to the putting them in act, not always" (L 15, p. 110).²⁷ One point Hobbes is making in this passage is that what is required by the laws of nature is not action, but a willingness to act when others are suitably disposed. He illustrates this by describing the ways in which circumstances constrain when it is appropriate to act on the relevant desire, thus endorsing the capacity of the virtuous agent to decide where and how to manifest her virtue.²⁸ The examples Hobbes cites reinforce the identity of the laws as virtues; and he insists that meeting one's "obligation" to act as the laws require entails nothing more than being prone to endeavor in ways that promote the end of peace: "The same Lawes, because they oblige onely to a desire, and endeavour, I mean an unfeigned and constant endeavour, are easie to be observed. For in that they require nothing but endeavour; he that endeavoureth their performance, fulfilleth them" (ibid.).

All of this offers strong prima facie evidence on behalf of the Virtue-Law Equivalence thesis. Within the state of nature, the laws of nature exist as moral virtues, manifested in an agent's dispositions to act in ways that promote the end of peace. Virtue is *not* a disposition to act as commanded by a categorical rule or law, e.g. "keep covenant," for no such laws exist in the state of nature (barring appeal to divine command); and, moreover, meeting the requirements of a general rule on action is not how Hobbes defines the person who "obeys" natural law. Such a person is not a proficient rule-follower, but someone whose character disposes her to be *willing* to act in ways enunciated by the "laws of nature," and to do so when she perceives circumstances to warrant such action. Such are the attributes of the virtuous person.

In enumerating the virtues, Hobbes explicitly mentions justice, gratitude, mercy, modesty, and equity (L 15, p. 111). These describe the qualities of character exhibited by persons who observe, respectively, the third, fourth, sixth, tenth, and eleventh laws of nature. There is no reason to see this list as exhaustive, for Hobbes concludes the list with the words "& the rest of the Laws of Nature." This suggests that for many, if not all, of the laws of nature articulated in L 14-15, there is a corresponding quality of character associated with observance of the law which Hobbes conceives of as a virtue and a corresponding quality of character associated with violation of the law which he conceives of as a vice. In several cases, Hobbes's description of the law makes this obvious. Those who observe the fifth law of "compleasance," by striving to accommodate themselves to others, are said to be "sociable," while those who violate the law are "stubborn, insociable, froward, intractable" (ibid., p. 106). Those who violate the seventh law by causing hurt without reason exhibit "cruelty"; those who violate the eighth law by declaring hatred or contempt of another display "contumely"; and those who refuse to acknowledge others as their equals by nature are "proud" (ibid., p. 107).

Hobbes does not attempt to demonstrate a perfect correlation between the laws of nature and specific virtues and vices. In some cases, the laws state requirements on action

²⁷ The Latin text of *Leviathan* is explicit in affirming the identity: "The laws of nature oblige *in foro interno*, i.e., their transgression is not properly to be called a crime, but a vice. But they do not always oblige *in foro externo*" (OL 3:121).

²⁸ "For he that should be modest, and tractable, and performe all he promises, in such time, and place, where no man els should do so, should but make himselfe a prey to others, and procure his own certain ruine" (L 15, p. 110). See also DC 3.29.

that do not correspond to traditional categories of virtue (e.g. the fifteenth law: “That all men that mediate Peace, be allowed safe Conduct”). What unites the laws of nature, and serves as the basis of their derivation from the first, or fundamental, law is that they articulate conditions on endeavor associated with the avoidance of war. Some, such as the fifteenth law, refer to actions deemed necessary as means to the pursuit of peace. Others are more directly connected with behavioral dispositions that Hobbes believes must be broadly present in a population if peace is to be possible. These include the third law (“That men performe their Covenants made”), the fourth law (“That a man which receiveth Benefit from another of meer Grace, Endeavour that he which giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will”), and the fifth law (“That every man strive to accommodate himselfe to the rest”). In each of these cases, Hobbes identifies observance of the law, which is a necessary condition for peace, with possession of a particular moral virtue (i.e. justice, gratitude, sociability).

Acknowledging the evidence on behalf of the Virtue-Law Equivalence thesis, one might still question the nature of the explanatory relation between moral virtue and the laws of nature. Hobbes consistently links possession of the moral virtues to “observance” of the laws of nature. Does this not mean that the person of moral virtue is one who obeys the laws of nature, conceived as a set of prior normative demands on action? I reject this as an interpretation of Hobbes’s position. Setting aside an appeal to divine law, the laws of nature are given two identities in the state of nature: as items of theoretical knowledge and as moral virtues. Under the first of these descriptions, the laws of nature are putatively true assertions of causal relations between certain forms of endeavor and the desired end of peace, not expressions of requirements on action that are binding on any human being. Given this, it is a mistake to try to explain moral virtue in terms of obedience to the laws of nature. Rather, from a practical standpoint, virtue is primary in Hobbes’s scheme and the basis on which we can best interpret his claims about the laws of nature. This conclusion can be strengthened if we look more closely at Hobbes’s account of moral virtue and the cognitive requirements of virtue.

3. The Anatomy of Virtue

Hobbes’s fullest treatment of the topic of moral virtue is found in chapter 13 of *De Homine*.²⁹ He begins his discussion with the notion of an *ingenium*, understood as a disposition or tendency (*propensio*) to respond through appetite or aversion to some kind of thing (e.g. a certain object or a certain attitude perceived in others). Such psychological states must be relatively stable in order to be characterized as dispositions (and thus distinguished from particular appetites and aversions), but there is no requirement that they be immutable. Hobbes describes six ways in which dispositions can arise in a human being: from the constitution of the body; from experience; from habit; from goods of

²⁹ This is to be distinguished from his discussion of “*Vertues Intellectuall*” in L 8. The latter, he says, are praiseworthy abilities of the mind that “go commonly under the name of a *good wit*” (p. 50). Of these he distinguishes “natural wit,” consisting principally in “*Celerity of Imagining*” and “*steddy direction* to some approved end” (ibid.), and “acquired wit,” or reason, “which is grounded on the right use of Speech; and produceth the Sciences” (p. 53).

fortune; from one's opinion of oneself; from authorities—and if any of these causes should change, so may the dispositions that depend upon them (DH 13.1; OL 2:111).

Hobbes next introduces the idea of a *mos*, or manner: "Dispositions, when they are so strengthened by habit that they beget their actions with ease and with reason unresisting, are called *manners*" (DH 13.8; OL 2:116).³⁰ He does not say enough to know exactly how he means to distinguish dispositions and manners, but we may assume that manners are stable dispositions that owe their stability (in part) to the fact that they cohere with the overall structure of a person's character. Manners dispose a person to act with ease and with reason unresisting—a point that can be explained by there being no inconsistency between the action toward which the manner disposes the agent and his other ends, including that of self-preservation. If one were disposed to act in ways that were inconsistent with the pursuit of one's other ends, then presumably reason would resist such action and the disposition in question would not become habituated as a manner.

Finally, Hobbes defines virtue itself: "manners, if they be good, are called *virtues*, if evil, vices" (DH 13.8; OL 2:116). This definition, however, is subject to an immediate qualification that seems to undermine any attempt to arrive at a common standard of virtue: "Since, however, good and evil are not the same to all, it happens that the same manners are praised by some and condemned by others, that is, are called goods by some, evils by others, virtues by some, vices by others" (ibid.). Hobbes here reiterates a key thesis about the meaning of the terms 'good' and 'evil' that he defends in both *De Homine* and *Leviathan*. Attributions of good and evil are not cognitive judgments that are made true by accurately representing properties of objects in the world. Rather, we use the terms 'good' and 'evil' to signify our attitudes toward objects—in particular, that we have a desire or an aversion for them. Since desires and aversions vary widely across persons and times, Hobbes infers that there can be no "common Rule of Good and Evil" prior to the formation of a commonwealth (L 6, p. 39). "[S]ince different men desire and shun different things, it is necessary that there be many things that are *good* to some and *evil* to others, as that which is *good* to us is *evil* to our enemies" (DH 11.4; OL 2:96). Accordingly, it seems that there can be no common standard of virtue and vice; as Hobbes remarks, what is prodigality to one is magnanimity to another.³¹

Relying on this principle, Hobbes initially appears to defend a conventionalist account of virtue. Those who consider human beings as they are in themselves (*per se*) and as existing outside of civil society "can have no moral science because they lack any certain standard [*mensura certa*] against which virtue and vice can be judged and defined" (DH 13.8; OL 2:116). According to Hobbes, "a common standard [*communis mensura*] for virtue and vice is found only in civil life"; and, "for that reason, the standard cannot be other than

³⁰ This is broadly the topic of L 11, "Of the difference of MANNERS," though the account there is not developed with the same concern for definition that Hobbes exhibits in *De Homine*.

³¹ See L 4: "For though the nature of that we conceive, be the same; yet the diversity of our reception of it, in respect of different constitutions of body, and prejudices of opinion, gives everything a tincture of our different passions. And therefore in reasoning, a man must take heed of words; which besides the signification of what we imagine of their nature, have a signification also of the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker; such as are the names of Vertues, and Vices; For one man calleth *Wisdome*, what another calleth *feare*; and one *cruelty*, what another *justice*; one *prodigality*, what another *magnanimity*; and one *gravity*, what another *stupidity*, &c." (p. 31).

the laws of each and every commonwealth; for natural law, when the commonwealth is constituted, becomes part of civil law" (DH 13.9; OL 2:116-7).

From what Hobbes goes on to say, it is evident that he runs together two separate points here. What varies from commonwealth to commonwealth, and is determined by the civil laws of each, is the scope of the legal obligations of their citizens: what they are required to do on pain of punishment. However, in any commonwealth, there must be certain common expectations concerning the "manners" of its citizens. They must exhibit *justice*, in their disposition to obey the laws of the commonwealth (whatever they may be). And they must exhibit *charity*, which Hobbes conceives as an appropriate responsiveness to the well-being of one's fellow citizens.³² These two virtues exhaust the scope of "moral virtue," or "the virtues of citizens *as citizens* [*illae civium virtutes, ut civium*]" (DH 13.9; OL 2:117). In addition to these civic virtues, Hobbes acknowledges the other three cardinal virtues of courage, prudence and temperance. These, he claims, are to be distinguished from justice and charity because they are "useful not so much to the commonwealth as they are to those individual men who have them" (ibid.). Still, he goes on to allow that "just as the state is not preserved save by the courage, prudence, and temperance of good citizens, so it is not destroyed save by the courage, prudence, and temperance of its enemies" (ibid.)—from which we can conclude that even if the latter virtues bear on the private good of citizens, they must be present for a stable commonwealth to exist.³³

It emerges from this discussion that Hobbes's account of virtue is not a conventionalist one at all. The moral virtues (justice and charity, but also prudence, temperance and courage) are qualities of character, or manners, that must be present in individuals for civil society to exist. Summing up his position in *De Homine*, Hobbes writes:

So, condensing this whole doctrine of *manners* and *dispositions* into the fewest words, I say that good dispositions are those which are suitable for entering into civil society; and good manners (that is, moral virtues) are those whereby what was entered upon can be best preserved. (DH 13.9; OL 2:117-8)

We find some slippage between his terminology in this passage and the account developed in *Leviathan*. Here Hobbes identifies the moral virtues with those "good manners" (justice and charity) that are necessary for preserving a commonwealth once formed, and distinguishes these from the "good dispositions" that are "suitable for entering into civil society." Since manners are chiefly differentiated from dispositions by the fact that the former are "strengthened by habit," Hobbes's point may be that although a larger set of dispositions must be present for a commonwealth to be formed (dispositions which are

³² Hobbes's recognition of the virtue of charity is noteworthy. I take his point to be that, in addition to a willingness to obey the laws of the sovereign, the subjects of a stable commonwealth must demonstrate a minimal concern for the well-being of their fellow citizens, e.g., a willingness to come to their aid in times of crisis. In *De Homine*, he glosses the lack of charity as the condition of "a mind insensible to another's evil [i.e. the evils suffered by another]" (DH 13.9; OL 2:118).

³³ In *De Cive* (3.25), Hobbes includes temperance, prohibiting drunkenness and gluttony, as the twentieth law of nature. In *Leviathan*, he distinguishes this requirement from "the Lawes of Nature, dictating Peace, for a means of the conservation of men in multitudes; and which onely concern the doctrine of Civill Society" (L 15, p. 109).

subject to variation depending on the circumstances in which people find themselves), for a commonwealth to persist, only two permanent character traits must be present: justice, or a disposition to obey the laws of the sovereign, and charity, or a general regard for the well-being of one's fellow citizens.

This position is broadly consistent with the one Hobbes defends in *Leviathan*: the demands on the characters of individuals who are endeavoring to institute a commonwealth are more exacting than on those who already reside in a commonwealth. The former must exhibit dispositions of sociableness, gratitude, humility, etc. that will support conditions of trust in which a commonwealth can be instituted. Once it has been formed, the fundamental requirement is a willingness to obey the laws commanded by the sovereign. The difference between the two accounts is that in *Leviathan* Hobbes expands the scope of the moral virtues to include the dispositions required for entering into civil society, that is, dispositions that correlate with observance of the laws of nature. Henceforth I shall take this to be Hobbes's considered view: the moral virtues are those "good dispositions" or "good manners" which are necessary for the formation and preservation of a commonwealth.

By now it should be clear what point Hobbes intends to make in claiming that those who consider human beings as they are in themselves and as existing outside of civil society "can have no moral science because they lack any certain standard against which virtue and vice can be judged and defined" (DH 13.8; OL 2:116). The point is not that a standard of virtue cannot exist outside of civil society, as if thrown into the state of nature we cannot even conceive of what virtue is. The point, rather, is that virtue cannot be *defined* if we consider human beings as isolated individuals with no relation to civil society. Even this may be too strong a statement, if we are thinking of a broader set of virtues that includes prudence, temperance and courage. Hobbes's primary concern, however, is with the virtue of justice, which reflects a stable disposition to regulate one's actions in relation to those of others. Here his substantive thesis is that we cannot establish a common standard of justice, if we consider human beings merely as solitary, natural beings. "Justice, and Injustice are none of the Faculties neither of the Body, nor Mind.... They are Qualities, that relate to men in Society, not in Solitude" (L 13, p. 90). For agreement to be reached on the goodness of justice, it must be conceived in relation to a specific end, of which it is a necessary means. Justice and the other civic virtues are most basically the "manners" that allow human beings to live peacefully and securely in community with other human beings.³⁴ Absent this end, no "common measure" of moral virtue can be had. When the end is supplied, the goodness of justice and the other moral virtues follows from the goodness of the end.

4. The Science of Virtue and Vice

Thus far, I have argued for the identity in the state of nature of Hobbes's laws of nature and the moral virtues. Yet we have seen that Hobbes also defends an account of the laws of nature as "truths," namely, "Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence" of human beings in the state of nature. We must now consider

³⁴ Compare L 11, p. 69: "By MANNERS, I mean not here, Decency of behaviour... and such other points of the *Small Moralls*; But those qualities of man-kind, that concern their living together in Peace, and Unity."

how these two views can be brought together. In brief, my answer will be that, for Hobbes, the theorems in question are the basis of the stable patterns of endeavor that oblige *in foro interno*, i.e. the moral virtues. For this reason, such theorems also warrant being called “laws of nature,” in an extended sense that does not entail the obligation associated with “law properly.”

Hobbes makes his strongest claim for the cognitive significance of the laws of nature near the end of L 15, in the paragraph in which he equates the “science” of the laws of nature with “the true and onely Moral Philosophy” and the “science of Vertue and Vice” (pp. 110-11). On the face of it, the latter phrase is ambiguous. It might mean either “the science that has virtue and vice as its object” or “the science that belongs to, or is required by, virtue and vice.” The context suggests that the latter sense is the one Hobbes intends. Contrasting his position with “the writers of moral philosophy”—particularly, Aristotle—Hobbes argues that, “though they acknowledge the same Vertues and Vices,” they misconstrue “wherein consisted their Goodnesse” (p. 111). As Hobbes interprets his predecessors, they locate this goodness in the “mediocrity of passions,” and thereby fail to identify the true “cause” of virtue. The Latin text offers a slight variation on this: earlier authors “recognize no other virtues than the passions, albeit mediocre ones” (OL 3:122). Against these authors, Hobbes implies that the “cause” of virtue, or the basis of its goodness, is closely related to what the virtues are in fact praised for: their being “the meanes of peaceable, sociable, and comfortable living” (p. 111).³⁵

We can tease apart two ideas that Hobbes combines in this passage. First, as we have seen, Hobbes denies that a common standard of virtue and vice can be found independently of an assumption about the role virtue plays in the formation and maintenance of a commonwealth. The goodness of virtue consists in its being a means of “peaceable, sociable and comfortable living.” Second, Hobbes takes issue with the idea that an account of virtue can be given in terms of the degree of passion alone, neither too much nor too little. Though, for Hobbes, virtue is essentially a motivational state, a disposition or *ingenium*, virtues are more specifically *manners*: dispositions “so strengthened by habit that they beget their actions with ease and with reason unresisting” (DH 13.8). What we now find is that the manners Hobbes identifies with the moral virtues are distinguished not just by the fact that they are habituated patterns of motivation, but also by the fact that they presuppose theoretical knowledge, namely, that conveyed in the laws of nature, construed as “theorems or conclusions.” In brief, the science (or theoretical knowledge) of the laws of nature is the science of virtue and vice, because it is the knowledge that makes possible moral virtue in the sense defended by Hobbes.³⁶

To reinforce these points, we can distinguish the following two theses, both of which I ascribe to Hobbes:

³⁵ See also DC 3.31-32; B, pp. 164-5.

³⁶ It may be objected that someone can possess the stable patterns of motivation that Hobbes identifies with the moral virtues, while lacking the theoretical knowledge that I suggest is necessary for virtue. While such a scenario is conceivable—there are naturally just, grateful and equitable people—what would be missing in such cases is a standard according to which their “manners” could be established as praiseworthy, and hence virtues. Hobbes’s primary thesis, therefore, is about the definition of virtue rather than its psychological realization. At the same time, he believes that virtue is a sufficiently unnatural state for human beings, most dominantly motivated by self-interest, that knowledge of the sort described here is necessary to stabilize the relevant patterns of endeavor.

- (G) The moral virtues are good because they are necessary means to a peaceful and secure social existence.
- (K) For the moral virtues to exist, their possessor must have the theoretical knowledge conveyed in the laws of nature.

Hobbes speaks directly to the first of these theses at the end of L 15. He begins by reiterating the relativity of judgments of good and evil, and the consequences of this: “*Good*, and *Evill*, are names that signifie our Appetites, and Aversions; which in different tempers, customes, and doctrines of men, are different.... From whence arise Disputes, Controversies, and at last War” (pp. 110-11). The conclusion he draws from the relativity of value judgments is that in the state of nature there can be no common standard of good and evil. Nevertheless, immediately after saying this, Hobbes introduces just such a standard and links the moral virtues/laws of nature to it:

And therefore so long a man is in the condition of meer Nature, (which is a condition of War,) as private Appetite is the measure of Good, and Evill: and consequently all men agree on this, that Peace is Good, and therefore also the way, or means of Peace, which (as I have shewed before) are *Justice*, *Gratitude*, *Modesty*, *Equity*, *Mercy*, & the rest of the Laws of Nature, are good; that is to say, *Morall Vertues*; and their contrarie *Vices*, Evill. (p. 111)

Allowing private appetite to be the measure of good and evil, as it is in the state of nature, inevitably propels people into a condition of war, and a life that is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.” No one (or almost no one) wants to live in such a condition of “misery”: materially and intellectually impoverished, and beset by “continuall feare, and danger of violent death” (L 13, p. 89). Human beings’ resistance to being in this state engenders in them a desire for peace: “The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them” (L 13, p. 90). Hobbes does not need to assume that *every* human being will be motivated in this way; there will always be outliers—e.g., glory seekers who relish the condition of war. But he can be confident that the desire for peace will be widespread, and the more so, the more prolonged and desperate the state of war is. Since ‘good’ is the word English speakers use to signify the object of their desires, all men “consequently” agree on this: that peace is good.

Although Hobbes defends the thesis that ascriptions of good and evil are relative to agents’ desires and aversions, he locates a common standard of good in what he takes to be a universal (or near universal) desire for peace. Let us suppose, then, with Hobbes that peace is good, and that the moral virtues are the “way, or means of Peace,” i.e., stable dispositions that individuals must possess in order for a lasting peace to be possible. From these two premises, Hobbes infers (“therefore...”) that “all men” also agree that the way or means of peace are good. This is in effect thesis (G): the moral virtues are good because they are necessary means to peace. But how exactly does Hobbes support this conclusion? It is not, I suggest, by appealing to a principle of normative reasoning: “if X is good, and Y is a necessary for X, Y is good.” It cannot be this, because claims about the goodness of things

as such do not license claims about the goodness of other things. On Hobbes's account, judgments of good and evil are expressions of agents' desires and aversions. Hence, justice and the other moral virtues will only be denominated *good* on the condition that human beings desire to possess these virtues, that is, desire consistently to act justly, charitably, etc.

The thrust of Hobbes's claim cannot be that whoever desires peace will *ipso facto* desire to act virtuously, and hence will judge the way or means of peace good. Many individuals, surely, will satisfy the first condition without satisfying the second. Missing in such cases will be the knowledge that the moral virtues are necessary for peace: that is, that human beings are able to live peacefully and securely only if they act, from enduring dispositions, in the ways specified by the laws of nature. Yet for peace to be possible, it is not just necessary that people know *that* this is the case; they must also instantiate the character traits in question. That is, peace is only possible, if human beings actually *are* morally virtuous. As it turns out, these two claims are closely related for Hobbes. On his account, human beings are only properly virtuous to the extent that their virtue is grounded in knowledge that the actions to which their virtue disposes them are necessary for peace.

Drawing together these points, we may see Hobbes relying on the following assumptions, which lead to theses (G) and (K):

1. For all (or almost all) individuals peace is a good.
2. Moral virtue is necessary for peace.
3. For moral virtue to exist, its possessor must understand the necessary relation between the end of peace and the actions to which her virtue disposes her.
4. Knowledge of the necessary relation between the end of peace and virtuous action is conveyed in the laws of nature.
5. The virtuous individual consistently desires to act in ways necessary for peace, and judges those ways of acting good.

The conjunction of statements 3. and 4. implies thesis (K): For the moral virtues to exist, their possessor must have the theoretical knowledge expressed in the laws of nature. The path to (G) is slightly more involved. In L 15, Hobbes asserts that "all men agree on this, that Peace is Good, and therefore also the way, or means of Peace... that is to say, *Morall Vertues*" (p. 111). It is implausible that he means to advance this as a factual claim. Even if we grant the premise, the conclusion does not follow: in the state of nature, all men do not agree that the way or means of peace are good. What Hobbes can assert, however, is that all *virtuous* individuals agree on this. As a manifestation of their virtue, they desire virtuous acts for their own sake and call such actions *good*. What explains their doing so is that they understand the necessary relation between the action in question and the end of peace. Their understanding of this is the basis of their possessing the virtue in question, and the basis of their judging such actions good. Consequently, we can say that for such a person, virtuous actions are good, because they are necessary means to a peaceful and secure social existence (thesis G).

The meaning of the last 'because' is all important. We cannot take proper measure of Hobbes's position unless we see him as breaking with traditional accounts of practical

reason. His central claim, as I read it, is not that the goodness of virtue is normatively justified in relation to the ends of peace and security. It is rather that the person who understands the truth about the relationship between those ends and the patterns of motivation and action that are necessary to realize them will be *determined* to desire and act in the requisite ways, and will express those desires in judgments about the goodness of their objects. The 'because' is thus a causal one: understanding the relation between a desired end and the means necessary for it determines the agent to desire the means, and hence to judge it good.

This account is strongly supported by the psychology Hobbes develops in *Leviathan*. For Hobbes, reason (or more generally, thought) is subordinate to desire. Desire is primary and is served by thought, which discovers means to the satisfaction of desire: "For the Thoughts, are to the Desires, as Scouts, and Spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things Desired" (L 8, p. 53). Implicit in this statement is the assumption that the discovery of the "way" to a desired object is sufficient to generate a desire for the way, a desire determined by the connection represented in thought between cause and effect. Describing the way in which the "trayn" of our thoughts is regulated by desire, Hobbes writes:

From Desire, ariseth the Thought of some means we have seen produce the like of that which we ayme at; and from the thought of that, the thought of means to that mean; and so continually, till we come to some beginning within our own power. And because the End, by the greatnesse of the impression, comes often to mind, in case our thoughts begin to wander, they are quickly again reduced into the way: which observed by one of the seven wise men, made him give men this precept, which is now worne out, *Respice finem*; that is to say, in all your actions, look often upon what you would have, as the thing that directs thoughts in the way to attain it. (L 3, p. 21)

In the state of nature the ends of peace and security impress themselves upon us constantly. The mind by its nature is moved to hunt for causes of the desired effects. All manners of thought may be involved: remembrance of past experience, imagination, fantasy, established teachings, and, finally, science. One of Hobbes's main points in *Leviathan* is that when it comes to civil philosophy, human beings typically have a weak grasp of cause and effect relations. All men desire peace, but they do not keep that end clearly in view when analyzing moral notions. Rather than considering those notions in relation to the end (peace, or self-preservation), they allow themselves to be guided haphazardly by the unreliable lessons of custom:

Ignorance of the causes, and originall constitution of Right, Equity, Law, and Justice, disposeth a man to make Custome and Example the rule of his actions... like little children, that have no other rule of good and evill manners, but the correction they receive from their Parents, and Masters; save that children are constant to their rule, whereas men are not so; because grown strong, and stubborn, they appeale from custome to reason, and from reason to custome, as it serves their turn; receding from custome when their interest requires it, and setting themselves against reason, as oft as reason is

against them: Which is the cause, that the doctrine of Right and Wrong, is perpetually disputed. (L 11, pp. 73-4)

“Ignorance of the causes” is a general ill for Hobbes that manifests itself especially in politics and religion. Those who lack science are best off relying on natural prudence, the product of their own experience, in navigating the world (L 5, p. 36). The worst thing they can do is to seek guidance in the writings of theologians and philosophers: “in any businesse, whereof a man has not infallible Science to proceed by; to forsake his own natural judgement, and be guided by generall sentences read in Authors, and subject to many exceptions, is a signe of folly” (L 5, p. 37). The message of *Leviathan*, however, is that scientific knowledge *is* attainable in the domain of civil philosophy. Such science takes the form of a representation in thought of the necessary relation of causes and effects (L 5, pp. 35-6).

We have seen that Hobbes characterizes the laws of nature as examples of scientific knowledge. In formulating the laws of nature, he takes himself to be saying things that are *true* about the consequences of various manners—stable dispositions to action—in relation to the end of peace. This can be seen, for example, in the argument for the eleventh law of nature, that concerning equity:

[I]f a man be trusted to judge between man and man, it is a precept of the Law of Nature, that he deale Equally between them. For without that, the Controversies of men cannot be determined but by Warre. He therefore that is partiall in judgment, doth what in him lies, to deterre men from the use of Judges, and Arbitrators; and consequently, (against the fundamentall Lawe of Nature) is the cause of Warre. (L 15, p. 108)

While there is undoubtedly the suggestion of a prescription here—if trusted to act as a judge, act equitably, if you want to secure peace—Hobbes’s explanation of the “law” centers on a causal claim: inequity, or partiality, is the cause of war; equity is a necessary condition for peace.

This, I suggest, is the crux of Hobbes’s position, which is connected in two ways with his account of moral virtue. First, the knowledge conveyed in the laws of nature concerns causal relations between enduring dispositions, or manners, and the attainment of peace.³⁷ Universal statements about the causal relations between particular kinds of actions and outcomes related to peace would almost certainly turn out to be false. There is no necessity that any single instance of injustice should lead to war. But it is not implausible to think that the prevalence of injustice as a disposition among human beings would have this consequence.

Second, I have argued that causal knowledge of this sort is exactly what is required on Hobbes’s account to ground the moral virtues. The moral virtues are those stable dispositions, or manners, which are “ways or means to peace.” They represent the

³⁷ This is how Hobbes presents his view in L 26: “That which I have written in this Treatise, concerning the Morall Vertues, and of their necessity, for the procuring, and maintaining peace, though it bee evident Truth, is not therefore presently Law; but because in all Common-wealths in the world, it is part of the Civill Law” (p. 191).

dispositions characteristic of the person who is effective in furthering the end of peace in his relations with other human beings. Hobbes takes it for granted that all (or almost all) human beings desire peace. However, particularly in the state of nature, they have a limited understanding of how to achieve it. They may try a variety of strategies, offensive and defensive, that have little success in bringing an end to the condition of war. In the face of such failures, Hobbes argues, “Reason suggesteth convenient Articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These Articles, are they, which otherwise are called the Lawes of Nature” (L 13, p. 90). The laws of nature assert causal relations between certain dispositions and the end of peace. On acquiring such knowledge, the person who desires peace and seeks the means to it, is led ineluctably to those means. When he poses the question, “by what means peace?,” his knowledge of the laws of nature immediately supplies an answer. And as a consequence of this he is determined to desire the means, ultimately from a disposition that is “so strengthened by habit,” that it produces the appropriate action “with ease and with reason unresisting” (DH 13.8).

5. Conclusion: Making Virtuous Citizens

The project of Hobbes’s political philosophy is in many ways a traditional one. At a general level it replicates the goal Aristotle assigns to political science: “to make citizens to be of a certain character, namely, good and capable of noble acts.”³⁸ Of course, Hobbes challenges the principles of Aristotle’s science at many junctures. He denies that Aristotle has provided a defensible account of the nature of human beings, of the value of citizenship and of the virtue that is required in citizens. Furthermore, he believes that the treatment of these matters by philosophers and theologians who take their brief from Aristotle has corrupted his fellow citizens’ understanding of the basis of sovereignty and the duties of subjects, leading to the protracted conflict of the English civil war.³⁹

Faced with this situation, Hobbes argues for a new beginning in civil philosophy, parallel to that urged by Bacon, Galileo, Descartes and Hobbes himself in natural philosophy. Accordingly, his view is that virtuous citizens can be produced, but that this requires a complete overhaul of the principles of civil philosophy and their promulgation by teachers who can be trusted not to pervert their meaning. His own account of the laws of nature is intended to address this need, and it is Hobbes’s view that the truths, or “theorems,” expressed in the laws of nature, as articulated in chapters 14-15 of *Leviathan*, are the basis of moral virtues in citizens, or potential citizens, who embody those laws. Ideally, this knowledge by itself would be effective in creating individuals apt for life in civil society: subjects disposed to accept the commands of a sovereign and to live harmoniously with their fellow citizens.

Such a view evinces considerable optimism about the cognitive and motivational capacities of human beings—optimism that may seem at odds with the picture Hobbes paints of the state of nature and the residual shortsightedness and partiality of subjects in a commonwealth. Even granting the truth of what Hobbes says, for his project to be realized, individuals must be receptive to the teachings of reason: on being told that such-and-such form of endeavor favors their own long-term interest, they must be disposed to modify

³⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b31-32 (Ross translation, slightly revised).

³⁹ See L 30, pp. 236-7; B, pp. 158-9.

their endeavors accordingly. Hobbes offers an account of how this *can* happen. The question is: how likely is it to happen—and how likely did Hobbes himself believe it was to happen?

That Hobbes defends a parallel account of the authority of the laws of nature as divine commands suggests that he was not overly sanguine about the chances of success through appeal to his readers' powers of reason alone. In *Leviathan*, he emphasizes the importance of pairing reason with eloquence, manifested in a variety of rhetorical techniques, in order to persuade readers to accept the lessons of his work.⁴⁰ Finally, and most importantly, Hobbes stresses the role of the sovereign in commanding that the true doctrines of civil philosophy be taught in universities as the basis of a shared understanding of the duties of subjects.⁴¹

Hobbes's readiness to transfer to the sovereign responsibility for educating subjects in the truths of civil philosophy is consistent with the principles of his philosophy. With respect to the movement of individuals from the state of nature to civil society, Hobbes's own concern is chiefly scientific: to give an account of the temperaments individuals must possess, and the truths they must believe, in order to escape the condition of war. Here the primary significance of the laws of nature is not as normative principles that command action, but as moral virtues grounded in knowledge of the relations between certain forms of endeavor and the end of peace. Hobbes's aim is to convince his readers that this account is *true*: an accurate understanding of the basis of sovereignty and civic duty, drawn from a realistic account of human nature that posits as basic the desire for self-preservation.

Over and above this, there is the question of how to make people incorporate these lessons into their lives and to comport themselves as citizens of a commonwealth. Here it is critical that Hobbes's readers are not the denizens of a hypothetical state of nature but the citizens of a nation that presumes to be a commonwealth, albeit one whose rightful sovereign remains in question. Consistent with his principles, Hobbes does not in this context assume the responsibility of making virtuous citizens. That task falls to the sovereign, whose duty it is to preserve the state through the teaching of sound doctrine. Hobbes's task is limited to persuading a sovereign of the wisdom of his counsel, allowing the latter to turn theory into practice. About this aim Hobbes expresses some optimism, whether justified or not by the realities of his own situation:

But when I consider again... that neither *Plato*, nor any other Philosopher hitherto, hath put into order, and sufficiently, or probably proved all the Theoremes of Morall doctrine, that men may learn thereby, both how to govern, and how to obey; I recover some hope, that one time or other, this writing of mine, may fall into the hands of a Soveraign, who will consider it himselfe, (for it is short, and I think clear,) without the help of any interested, or envious Interpreter; and by the exercise of entire Soveraignty, in

⁴⁰ See, in particular, L, "A Review, and Conclusion," pp. 483-4. Skinner 1996 offers an extended defense of this reading, highlighting the difference between Hobbes's approach in *Leviathan* and in his earlier works.

⁴¹ L 30, pp. 232-3; L 31, p. 254.

protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice. (L 31, p. 254)⁴²

Hobbes again stresses the scientific basis of his undertaking. He is not propounding a system of unwritten moral law, but the “Science of Naturall Justice,” whose “Theoremes” he has “proved” (ibid.). Remaining doubtful that his work will persuade the ordinary run of readers, Hobbes takes comfort in the thought that in the end he needs to convince only one reader for his philosophical endeavors to succeed. Educate that one reader, who exercises sovereign power, and he can command the rest.⁴³

Bibliography

Works by Hobbes

The text of *Leviathan* is quoted with its original orthography from the edition of Richard Tuck. Translations from the Latin edition of *Leviathan* generally follow those given in *Leviathan, with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).

- [B] *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*, ed. Paul Seaward (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010).
- [DC] *De Cive*, in *On the Citizen*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- [DH] *De Homine*, in Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).
- [L] *Leviathan. Revised Student Edition*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- [OL] *Opera Philosophica quae latine scripsit Omnia*, ed. William Molesworth (London, 1839-45; reprint Aalen, 1961).

Other Works Cited

Berkowitz, Peter. 1999. *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁴² See also the Latin edition: “Nevertheless, I am not totally without hope that some day, when kings are undiminished in their rights, and learned men and citizens more attentive to their duties, this doctrine, made more tolerable by custom, will be commonly received for the public good” (OL 3:264).

⁴³ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Washington and the UCSD History of Philosophy Roundtable. I thank my audiences, especially Michael Rosenthal, Sam Rickless, Clinton Tolley and Eric Watkins, for their questions and comments.

- Boonin-Vail, David. 1994. *Thomas Hobbes and the Science of Moral Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Darwall, Stephen. 1995. *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , 2000. "Normativity and Projection in Hobbes's *Leviathan*." *Philosophical Review* 109: 313-47.
- Ewin, R. E. 1991. *Virtue and Right: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Gauthier, David. 1969. *The Logic of Leviathan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hampton, Jean. 1986. *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kavka, Gregory S. 1986. *Hobbesian Moral and Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Martinich, A. P. 1992. *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Minar, Robert C. 2001. "Is Hobbes a Theorist of the Virtues?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 41: 269-84.
- Mitsis, Phillip. 2003. "The Stoics and Aquinas on Virtue and Natural Law." *The Studia Philonica Annual* 15: 35-53.
- Schneewind, J. B. 1990. "The Misfortunes of Virtue." *Ethics* 101: 43-63. Reprinted in Schneewind, *Essays on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Skinner, Quentin. 1991. "Thomas Hobbes: Rhetoric and the Construction of Morality." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 76: 1-61.
- , 1996. *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, A. E. 1938. "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes." *Philosophy* 13: 402-424.
- Warrender, Howard. 1957. *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Watkins, J. W. N. 1973. *Hobbes's System of Ideas*. London: Hutchinson. 2nd ed.