

In Pursuit of Happiness: Hobbes's New Science of Ethics

Donald Rutherford
University of California, San Diego

I. AGAINST THE ANCIENTS

A common complaint of philosophers at the beginning of the seventeenth century was that philosophy had failed to make the progress of which it was capable, because it had set out on essentially the wrong track. For most, this wrong track was represented by the theories of Aristotle, particularly as they were elaborated in the universities and theological schools of the period. Almost all of the best-known philosophers and scientists of the seventeenth century saw Aristotle's philosophy as a significant impediment to the progress of knowledge, and believed that progress could only begin once the edifice of Aristotle's system had been razed and philosophy could rebuild on new foundations.

Thomas Hobbes held this conviction as passionately as any early modern thinker. Along with Galileo and Descartes, Hobbes believed that the principles of Aristotle's natural philosophy—his hylomorphism and doctrine of four causes—should be swept aside in favor of an understanding of nature as consisting solely of matter in motion, both fully describable in mathematical terms. Dismissing the followers of Aristotle in one broad sweep, Hobbes writes:

The natural philosophy of those schools was rather a dream than science, and set forth in senseless and insignificant language, which cannot be avoided by those who will teach philosophy without having first attained great knowledge in geometry. For

nature worketh by motion, the ways and degrees whereof cannot be known without the knowledge of the proportions and properties of lines and figures. (L 46, 11)¹

By 1651, the year in which *Leviathan* was published, denunciation of the natural philosophy of the ancients had become commonplace. Few, though, were prepared to draw the same conclusion in the realm of moral philosophy. Although the ethical doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics drew important support from their respective metaphysical theories, an attack on the latter did not necessarily translate into an attack on the former. For Hobbes, however, this move was irresistible:

[T]here is nothing so absurd that the old philosophers (as *Cicero* saith, who was one of them) have not some of them maintained. And I believe that scarce anything can be more absurdly said in natural philosophy than that which now is called *Aristotle's Metaphysics*; nor more repugnant to government than much of that he hath said in his *Politics*; nor more ignorantly than a great part of his *Ethics*. (L 46, 11)

In the realm of moral and political philosophy, Hobbes advanced far more radical conclusions than most of his contemporaries could accept. The potent blend of materialism, empiricism, and nominalism that forms the basis of Hobbes's thought led him not only to reject the ethical doctrines of the ancients but to question the very possibility of moral philosophy as traditionally conceived. If the goal of moral philosophy is to arrive at knowledge of the *summum bonum* or objective principles of duty, Hobbes argued, such an inquiry is bound to fail. Outside of legislated rules, there is no common standard by which to assess the goodness of ends or the rightness of action.² As he famously remarks in *Leviathan*, "these words of good, evil, and contemptible are ever used with relation to the person that useth them, there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves" (L 6, 7). For Hobbes, the lack of a "common rule of good and evil" founded on "the nature of the objects themselves" undermines the project of moral philosophy as traditionally conceived, and renders moral disagreement an inevitable fact about the natural condition of human beings.

For all of this, however, Hobbes does not profess a complete skepticism about the prospects of moral philosophy. In chapter 15 of *Leviathan*, he characterizes moral philosophy as "nothing else but the science of what is *good* and *evil* in the conversation and society of mankind" (L 15, 40), suggesting that there is at least some body of knowledge that answers to that title. In the same passage, Hobbes identifies this knowledge with the "laws of nature," which he calls "the true and only moral philosophy" and the "science of virtue and vice" (L 15, 40). Some have seen this as an attempt to preserve a place within his philosophy for substantive moral principles. Yet Hobbes himself

offers a decidedly deflationary account of the laws of nature. As “dictates of reason,” they are not properly speaking laws at all, but “conclusions, or theorems concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defense” of oneself (L 15, 41). On what has become the standard reading of his position, the laws of nature (e.g., laws that command us to seek peace and to keep covenant) are principles of instrumental rationality, which express causally necessary conditions for satisfying the most basic human desire: that for self-preservation. Beyond this, reason has no practical role to play in regulating action.³

Hobbes’s moral philosophy can be viewed as an extension of his efforts to elaborate a mechanistic theory of nature, and a conception of human beings as a part of nature. Within this framework, Hobbes defends three main claims about the scope and significance of normative concepts:

(1) Norms proper, or “common standards” of good and evil, acquire obligatory force only within a commonwealth, as laws commanded and enforced by a sovereign power.

(2) The laws of nature, which Hobbes identifies with the “true moral philosophy,” are principles of instrumental rationality, on the basis of which agents are persuaded to enter a commonwealth, giving up their natural right to act as they choose, as a means to satisfying their desire for self-preservation.

(3) Ethics, which Hobbes characterizes as the “science of passions,” is not properly speaking a normative discipline but a branch of psychology, combined with a subjectivist metaethics that interprets ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as names for the objects of desires and aversions.

In its broad outlines, I believe, this interpretation of Hobbes’s moral philosophy is correct. My goal in what follows, therefore, is less to criticize it than to refine it, by paying careful attention to Hobbes’s own understanding of science, particularly the science of ethics. There is no question but that Hobbes aims to rewrite moral and political philosophy in a way that builds upon a scientific understanding of nature, and that in doing so he is led to reject many of the assumptions of traditional moral philosophy. Nevertheless, it is easy to overestimate the extent to which Hobbes’s understanding of science is ours, and his conception of ethics radically at odds with that of the ancients. This is especially so with respect to the notion of happiness (or “felicity”), a central concept of both ancient ethics and of Hobbes’s ethics. A basic point, too seldom recognized, is that Hobbes wrote his books with the intention of improving people’s lives. As much as the works of any ancient philosopher, they aim to contribute to the satisfaction of the common human desire for happiness. Hobbes makes this point explicitly in the dedicatory letter to *De Cive*: “If the moral Philosophers had done their job with equal success [to that of the Geometers], I do not know what greater contribution human industry could have made to human happiness.”⁴

Happiness is something that all human beings seek. In this, Hobbes admits, the ancients were correct. Where the ancients went wrong was in misunderstanding the nature of happiness and in failing to put it on a scientific footing. These, I contend, are central concerns of *Leviathan* that help us to understand the larger purpose of the work. After laying out Hobbes's view of science, and his treatment of the concept of felicity within the science of ethics, I shall return to make a tentative proposal about the significance of the latter notion for the main political argument of *Leviathan*.

II. "TRUE PHILOSOPHY" OR SCIENCE

Hobbes recognizes no significant distinction between science and philosophy, identifying both with inferential knowledge obtained through the methodical use of reason. In general, he writes, knowledge is of two kinds: "knowledge of fact" and "knowledge of the consequence of one affirmation to another." The latter of these is called "science," and "this is the knowledge required in a philosopher, that is to say, of him that pretends to reasoning" (L 9, 1). Hobbes makes it clear that in his view philosophers have often fallen short of this standard, producing what he describes as "vain philosophy"—the collected wisdom of the ancients and medievals. For this reason, he believes, it is essential to begin from a precise conception of the knowledge philosophy is able to attain. This Hobbes defines more fully as follows:

By PHILOSOPHY is understood the knowledge acquired by reasoning from the manner of the generation of anything to the properties, or from the properties to some possible way of generation of the same, to the end to be able to produce, as far as matter and human force permit, such effects as human life requireth. (L 46, 1)⁵

As Hobbes understands it, philosophy is distinguished by (1) its subject matter, (2) its method, and (3) its goal. With respect to the first of these, Hobbes limits philosophy to inferential knowledge of the relation of cause and effect, and more particularly, knowledge of generative causes and their consequences. Echoing Bacon's position, Hobbes maintains that such knowledge is always at least implicitly practical: causal knowledge is knowledge of how to generate, or produce, a particular kind of effect; or knowledge of the consequences of the generation of some cause.⁶ This requirement meshes neatly with a second requirement Hobbes imposes on the subject matter of philosophy. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the definition quoted above, Hobbes insists that all science, or inferential knowledge, is knowledge of bodies (L 9, 1L). Thus, philosophy, for Hobbes, can be nothing other than reasoning that explains the generation of particular kinds of bodies, or reasoning from the generation of particular kinds of bodies to their necessary effects.⁷

As knowledge based on reasoning, philosophy is distinguished from experience, prudence, and history, all of which are limited to knowledge of fact. As such, philosophy also is the exclusive possession of human beings. Although “brute beasts” (as well as human beings) may appear to reason from experience, this is, strictly speaking, but “a memory of successions of events in times past, wherein the omission of every little circumstance altering the effect frustrateth the expectation of the most prudent” (L 46, 2). Missing in expectations of prudence is the universality that attends the conclusions of reason. When we reason correctly, as only human beings can, we arrive at “general, eternal, and immutable truth” (ibid.), or certain conclusions about the necessary relations of cause and effect.

Such claims are in keeping with traditional conceptions of scientific knowledge (*scientia*), but they may seem strange coming from the pen of an arch-nominalist and materialist such as Hobbes. Hobbes alleviates this puzzlement by arguing that the universality and certainty of scientific truths is based on the fact that such truths are definitional or derived from definitions. Indeed, Hobbes insists that all sound reasoning is nothing but the drawing out of the contents of the definitions of general terms: “REASON . . . is nothing but *reckoning* (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts” (L 5, 2).

Hobbes allows that in a general sense one can “reason” in a way that is independent of the use of language. However, since Hobbes rejects the existence of abstract or universal ideas—all ideas are particular images of things (L 3, 12)—such reasoning amounts merely to expectations of prudence, which we share with “brute beasts” (L 5, 5). Reason can aspire to scientific knowledge—knowledge that is universal and necessary—only on the basis of definitions of general terms. This conclusion fixes the parameters of Hobbes’s conception of the method of science, which he takes to be that of Euclidean geometry, the paradigm of demonstrative knowledge. Where philosophers have failed in their efforts to arrive at knowledge, it is because of their “want of method, in that they begin not their ratiocination from definitions, that is, from settled significations of their words” (L 5, 8; cf. L 5, 7; DCo 6, 13–15). The problem, as Hobbes sees it, is not simply that philosophers have been imprecise in their use of language, or that they have neglected to fix the meanings of their terms. They have flouted the strictures on definition in a more significant way by relying on terms that are, strictly speaking, “nonsense” and “without meaning” (L 5, 5). Their conclusions, therefore, are not simply errors of reasoning, but “absurdities” or “senseless speech” (ibid.).

Hobbes catalogs these absurdities according to the ways in which they violate the principle that all genuine knowledge is knowledge of bodies, and that all meaningful language consists of terms that refer to bodies, to properties of bodies, or to other parts of speech (L 4, 15–18; L 5, 9–15). It follows,

for Hobbes, that the main requirement of method in philosophy, or science, is the construction of definitions that can support reasoning about the generation of different kinds of bodies and the effects that follow from them. It is worth emphasizing that this is a completely general requirement that demarcates philosophy from history and religion, and one that Hobbes adheres to throughout his writings: the primary work of philosophy is the devising of adequate definitions and the inferring of necessary consequences from them. As Hobbes concludes in chapter 5 of *Leviathan*, “the light of the human mind is perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed and purged from ambiguity. . . . And on the contrary, metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*, and reasoning upon them is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention and sedition, or contempt” (L 5, 20).⁸

The final words of this passage highlight the political repercussions that Hobbes sees as hanging on the proper employment of method. There is, however, a broader point to be made about the practical import of philosophy, whose end in general, according to Hobbes, is “the benefit of mankind” (L 5, 20). Hobbes dismisses the idea of knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Demonstrative knowledge is valuable only for the practical benefits it brings us. “The *end* or *scope* of philosophy,” he writes in *De Corpore*, “is, that we may make use to our benefit of effects formerly seen; or that, by application of bodies to one another, we may produce the like effects of those we conceive in our mind, as far forth as matter, strength, and industry, will permit, for the commodity of human life. . . . The end of knowledge is power [*scientia propter potentiam*]” (DCo 1, 6). This Baconian insight applies in an obvious way to geometry and optics, which contribute directly to the improvement of the material conditions of human life. The fundamental inspiration of Hobbes’s moral philosophy is that these same advantages await us in the social-political realm, if we pursue the same method of science. In this realm, he writes, “the utility of moral and civil philosophy is to be estimated, not so much by the commodities we have by knowing these sciences, as by the calamities we receive from not knowing them. . . . The cause, therefore, of civil war, is that men know not the causes neither of war nor peace” (DCo 1, 7).

What we are missing, therefore, in philosophy is causal knowledge of human beings, both as individuals and as citizens bound to one another in political union—a knowledge which, were we to have it, would be valuable because of the benefits it would bring to human life. As Hobbes envisions this project, it must be carried out within the constraints of a framework defined by the foundational tenets of materialism, empiricism, and nominalism. These endow his position with a modern, naturalistic flavor. At the same time, it is important to recognize the extent to which Hobbes relies, consciously or unconsciously, on patterns of thought borrowed from the

ancients. This is evident in his conception of method, in which geometry furnishes the paradigm of scientific knowledge, and in his presentation of the benefits of philosophy, in which he aligns his project with the ancients' pursuit of a wisdom sufficient for happiness:

Do not, reader, expect here that I shall heap abuse on philosophy or philosophers. What should you expect? I distinguish between philosophers and non-philosophers, and between true philosophy, the wisest guide of human life, the peculiar distinction of human nature, and that painted chattering whore which has for so long now been regarded as philosophy. For philosophy (i.e., the study of wisdom), as far as it extends is wisdom, i.e., *the knowledge acquired by right reasoning of effects from their conceived causes or generations, and again, of the generations which are possible from known effects*, a knowledge which Scripture does not prohibit, and no man refuses. (L 46, 1L; emphasis in the original)⁹

Thus Hobbes can agree with the ancients, "*felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.*"¹⁰ While identifying philosophy with scientific knowledge, he equates the same knowledge with the wisdom sought by the ancients—sought but not discovered because of the "absurdities" that infect their "vain philosophy."

III. THE SCIENCE OF ETHICS

The subject matter of all philosophy is the generation and properties of bodies (DCo 1, 8). Within this domain, however, Hobbes establishes a division between two branches of philosophy, based on a difference in the kinds of bodies they investigate:

The principal parts of philosophy are two. For two chief kinds of bodies, and very different from one another, offer themselves to such as search after their generation and properties; one whereof being the work of nature, is called a *natural body*, the other is called a *commonwealth*, and is made by the wills and agreement of men. And from these spring the two parts of philosophy, called *natural* and *civil*. (DCo 1, 9)

Natural philosophy is the science of the generation and properties of natural bodies. Civil philosophy is the science of the generation and properties of the complex, artificial body Hobbes calls "commonwealth." Hobbes's description of the commonwealth as an artificial body is critical to his case for the employment of the geometrical method in civil philosophy. Just like a clock or a mill, a commonwealth is to be understood in terms of its generation from simpler elements ("the wills and agreement of men") and the consequences that can be deduced from the way in which these are combined.

Hobbes's definition of civil philosophy already makes appeal to the actions of human beings, and so we must ask where they fit into his division of the sciences. In the first place, human beings are natural bodies and, accordingly, many of their functions fall within the purview of natural philosophy. However, human beings must, in some way, also bridge the gap between natural and civil philosophy, since their wills are implicated causally in the generation of a commonwealth. In the Introduction to *Leviathan*, Hobbes recognizes the complex positioning of human beings in his scheme, by saying that he will consider human beings both as the *matter* from which a commonwealth is formed, and as the *artificers* of a commonwealth.¹¹ We see here signs of a basic methodological tension that Hobbes faces. As "artificers" of a commonwealth, we might think that human beings should be seen as standing outside the scheme of the sciences altogether. If we want to study an artificial body such as a clock, it is not necessary also to study the clockmaker. Given, though, that the artificers of a commonwealth are both the matter from which it is formed and the generative causes, through their willing, of its coming into existence, one cannot understand the notion of commonwealth without first understanding the relevant properties of human beings.

This point is acknowledged by Hobbes in *De Corpore*, where he proposes a further division of civil philosophy into ethics and politics:

But seeing that, for the knowledge of the properties of a commonwealth, it is necessary first to know the dispositions, affections, and manners of men, civil philosophy is again commonly divided into two parts, whereof one, which treats of men's dispositions and manners, is called *ethics*; and the other, which takes cognizance of their civil duties, is called *politics*, or simply *civil philosophy*. (DCo 1, 9)

Knowledge of the properties of a commonwealth presupposes knowledge of the "dispositions, affections, and manners" of the individuals who, through their "wills and agreement," generate it. Beyond this, however, we are given little sense of how these two sciences fit together. Hobbes's description of politics as the science of "civil duties" coincides with his treatment of the topic in *Leviathan*, though in other respects the two works differ in their classification of the sciences. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes identifies civil philosophy with knowledge of "consequences from the accidents of *politic* bodies," which are further specified as "consequences from the *institution* of COMMONWEALTHS, to the *rights*, and *duties* of the *body politic*, or *sovereign*," and "consequences from the same, to the *duty* and *right* of the *subjects*" (L 9). Omitted from this account of civil philosophy is any mention of the generative causes of commonwealth, i.e., "the wills and agreement of men." In *Leviathan*, these causes resurface within the domain of natural philosophy as "consequences in *speech* from *contracting*," which Hobbes identifies as "the *Science* of JUST and UNJUST," and "consequences from the *passions* of men," identified as

“ETHICS.” This classification is at odds with that of *De Corpore*, where ethics is included as part of civil philosophy in the broad sense.

Where Hobbes draws the line between natural and civil philosophy is less important than whether he accounts adequately for the knowledge that is presupposed by his explanation of the generation of a commonwealth. It is here that the sciences of “ethics” and “moral philosophy” play a critical role in pushing forward the argument of *Leviathan*. Taking our cue from Hobbes’s description of human beings as both the “matter” and “artificers” of a commonwealth, we can distinguish two contributions that these sciences make to the argument. (1) One cannot know how the generative causes of commonwealth operate unless one knows what those causes are operating *on* (the “matter”). This means having causal knowledge of the “dispositions, affections, and manners of men,” i.e., what Hobbes calls the science of ethics. (2) The fundamental task of *Leviathan* is to convince human beings to *become* artificers of a commonwealth. For this it is necessary to persuade them that they will live better as a consequence. And this requires (a) defining what it means to live a better life as a human being, and (b) giving “counsel” about how to regulate one’s actions so as to achieve such a life.

The subject matter of (1) is human psychology, in particular, basic human motivations and dispositions for action. For Hobbes this knowledge falls under the rubric of ethics, the “science of passions.” Such knowledge is critical to carrying out the task of (2), since Hobbes’s argument on behalf of generating a commonwealth turns on our having knowledge of those dispositions that incline human beings to “war” and “peace.” The knowledge included under (2b) corresponds to what Hobbes distinguishes as “moral philosophy,” or “the science of the laws of nature” (L 15, 40): the “dictates of 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, 3). These are the dictates which, when they guide the actions of human beings, can be identified as the generative causes of a commonwealth—especially the first and second laws which command a willingness to seek peace and to covenant.

What, though, can we say of (2a)? I have characterized the fundamental task of *Leviathan* as the mounting of an argument designed to convince human beings that they will lead a better life if they agree to restrict their natural liberty and act so as to generate a commonwealth, becoming through that act artificers of a commonwealth. For this argument to be persuasive, it is incumbent upon Hobbes to have an informative answer to the question of what it means to have a life better than any life one can hope to enjoy in the absence of a commonwealth. Thus, it is necessary to *define* the idea of a life that is as well-off as a human life can hope to be—to define, in other words, the idea of a *happy* life.

There are two *prima facie* reasons for being skeptical of this claim. The first is that, as Hobbes's argument is usually presented, the move to commonwealth is chiefly motivated by the fear of death, or the desire for self-preservation—motives that are explicitly referred to in his general statement of the laws of nature. Thus, it can be objected that in developing his argument Hobbes has no need for a definition of a happy life, or a life that is as well-off as a human life can hope to be. All the argument presupposes is that in a commonwealth one will be better off in the sense of being better able to preserve one's life than if one remains in the state of nature. In *Leviathan*, however, Hobbes clearly goes beyond this in assessing the motives that incline human beings to leave the state of nature and to seek refuge in a commonwealth. Chapter 13 of *Leviathan*, entitled "On the Natural Condition of Mankind, As Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery," ends with the statement that "the passions that incline men to peace are fear of death, desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living, and a hope by their industry to obtain them" (L 13, 14). Assuming that by "commodious living" Hobbes means the same thing as "felicity" as it appears in the chapter's title, we may conclude that recognition of a common human desire for happiness forms part of Hobbes's argument for the generation of a commonwealth.

This conclusion, however, faces a second challenge. In pitting his own position against that of the ancients, Hobbes is unfailingly critical of the ancients' idea of happiness as the *summum bonum*, or highest good.¹² So how could the central argument of *Leviathan* hinge on our motivation to achieve a happy life, as against simply the desire for self-preservation? The answer is easily given. What Hobbes objects to in the ancients' account is not the notion of happiness itself, but the "absurdities" engendered by the ancients in their attempts to define it. The remedy for this problem, therefore, is not to reject completely the idea of happiness, but to give a proper definition of it, as Hobbes in fact does.

The notion of happiness, or felicity, falls within the purview of Hobbes's science of ethics, or knowledge of the "dispositions, affections, and manners of men." If there is reason to think, as I have claimed, that this notion plays a more important role in the argument of *Leviathan* than is generally recognized, then there is reason also to reconsider the status of ethics in Hobbes's scheme of the sciences. If our fundamental desire is to be happy, or to enjoy a life of felicity, then the knowledge of how to reason coherently about felicity will be among the most valuable items of knowledge we can have.

IV. FELICITY

The concept of felicity is introduced by Hobbes in chapter 6 of *Leviathan*, entitled "Of the Interiour Beginnings of Voluntary Motions, Commonly

Called the PASSIONS, and the Speeches by Which They are Expressed.” This chapter culminates in Hobbes’s account of felicity as a “succession” of passions (L 6, 13). Hence it offers a definition that expresses a generative cause—one that explains felicity in terms of its production from simpler elements: passions.

Passions, according to Hobbes, are “the interiour beginnings of voluntary motions.” Thus, they too are defined causally, in terms of their contribution to larger motions, and not affectively, in terms of the feelings associated with them. Voluntary, or “animal,” motions (as opposed to vital motions) are *directed* motions, which depend upon “a precedent thought of *whither, which way, and what.*” Accordingly, Hobbes writes, “it is evident that the imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion.” From representations of the imagination proceed passions, the “small beginnings of motion,” or “endeavor,” that lead to voluntary motions (L 6, 1).

Of these “small beginnings of motion,” Hobbes distinguishes two basic types, corresponding to the primary passions of appetite and aversion:

This endeavour, when it is toward something which causes it, is called APPETITE or DESIRE, the latter being the general name. . . . And when the endeavour is fromward something, it is generally called AVERSION. These words, *appetite* and *aversion*, we have from the *Latins*, and they both signify the motions, one of approaching, the other retiring. (L 6, 2)

Appetite and aversion are distinguished solely by the direction of motion, toward or away from an object; and Hobbes maintains that all other passions can be explained in terms of these two, whose names are “for diverse considerations diversified” (L 6, 13). Thus, the starting point for Hobbes’s ethics is a theory that is consistent with his materialism: passions are nothing more than motions of matter.

On Hobbes’s account, felicity itself is a complex passion:

Continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering, is that men call FELICITY; I mean the felicity of this life. For there is no such thing as perpetual tranquility of mind while we live here; because life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense. What kind of felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour Him, a man shall no sooner know than enjoy, being joys that are now as incomprehensible as the word of school-men *beatifical vision* is unintelligible. (L 6, 58)¹³

As already noted, Hobbes aspires to give what is, by his standards, a proper causal definition, i.e., a definition that explains felicity in terms of its generation from simpler elements: a succession of desires or aversions. What distinguishes the condition of felicity is that an individual is not simply in a succession of states of desire or aversion, but in addition those desires and

aversions successfully attain or avoid their intended objects.¹⁴ This is what Hobbes means by “continual success” or “prospering.”

Hobbes contrasts this definition with accounts of felicity given by traditional versions of eudaimonism. He rejects as “incomprehensible” positions such as Aquinas’s which make the standard of felicity supernatural happiness, or blessedness, attained through the beatifical vision of God. Against such accounts, Hobbes insists that we are able to reason philosophically (or scientifically) only about the “natural condition” of human beings (L 13), or as he puts it in the title to chapter 13 of the Latin edition of *Leviathan*, “Of the condition of mankind, as concerning their felicity in the present life.” Hobbes’s dismissal of an understanding of felicity as “perpetual tranquility of mind” can be seen as directed at the same target, but it has broader implications. Both Stoics and Epicureans associate happiness, or *eudaimonia*, with the attainment in this life of a psychological state of “undisturbedness” (*ataraxia*), or tranquillity. For the Stoics such a state is one in which we have eliminated passions such as desire, pleasure, sadness, and fear; for the Epicureans, the state is one in which we have eliminated all groundless or unnecessary passions, leaving only those that are unavoidable but easily satisfied. Hobbes’s response to both ancient schools (but especially the Stoics) is that such a state is impossible to attain, for “life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear.”

This response leaves untouched the position of Aristotle, who in contrast to the Stoics upholds the importance of the passions. Hobbes’s definition of felicity is nonetheless intended as a direct challenge to Aristotle’s account of happiness as “an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.”¹⁵ Hobbes focuses his criticism on Aristotle’s notion of virtue as an objective standard of right action that forms the basis of a determinate conception of human well-being. According to Aristotle, virtue is an excellence of character that disposes an agent to choose the mean between extremes of excess and deficiency. Aristotle presents such choices as paradigmatic of rational action; however, he denies that it is possible to specify the standard of correct choice independently of the individual judgments of the person of practical wisdom.¹⁶ Picking up on this point, Hobbes rebukes Aristotle for relying on what is in effect an arbitrary standard. In the state of nature, the moral judgments of any one individual carry no greater authority than those of any other: “manners, if they be good, are called *virtues*, if evil, *vices*. 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 good by some, evil by others, virtues by some, vices by others” (DH 13, 8). Absent civil laws that legislate right and wrong, there is no “certain standard against which virtue and vice can be judged and defined” (*ibid.*). Consequently, there is no ideal of virtue sufficient to support a uniform conception of human happiness. In

place of such an account, Hobbes proposes a definition that fixes the form of felicity as a “continual prospering” and avoids any restrictions on the content of an individual’s happiness. Provided that a person’s actions are consistent with the continual satisfaction of desire, she can be said to enjoy felicity.¹⁷

If this were all Hobbes had to say about felicity, one would have to conclude that his point was primarily a negative one: felicity is not the goal that the ancients saw it as being; it is merely a succession of satisfied desires. However, Hobbes does have more to say about felicity in *Leviathan*. In chapter 11, he expands on his earlier definition as follows:

Felicity is the continual progress of the desire, from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is that the object of man’s desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions and inclinations of all men tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life, and differ only in the way; which ariseth partly from the diversity of passions in divers men, and partly from the difference of the knowledge or opinion each one has of the causes which produce the effect desired. (L 11, 1)

The first sentence of this passage repeats the definition of ‘felicity’ from chapter 6: felicity is the “continual progress” or “continual success” of desire. The next two sentences, however, amend this account in an important way. Hobbes recognizes that human beings do not only desire the enjoyment of particular objects at particular times; they also desire to “assure forever the way of [their] future desire” and to assure “a contented life.” By this, I suggest, Hobbes means that human beings desire felicity itself, or the continual progress of desire, and whatever is necessary to ensure their felicity. Significantly, Hobbes allows that there is no uniform content to the condition of felicity, since it will depend upon “the diversity of passions in divers men,” and that some people are better at achieving felicity than others, because of the “difference of the knowledge or opinion each one has of the causes which produce the effect desired.” Still, it remains the case that the desire for felicity, or a contented life, is a constant across human beings.

It is, of course, possible for human beings to live solely for the moment, “placing felicity in the acquisition of the gross pleasures and the things that most immediately conduce thereto” (L 8, 25). If this were how most people lived, then Hobbes would be wrong to claim that they desire *felicity* in the sense in which he defines it.¹⁸ Such people would desire a succession of particular objects, but they would not desire the “continual success” or “progress” of desire, i.e., desire to continue satisfying their desires without end. In fact, however, most people do desire this. We do not live only for the moment, but desire to be able to satisfy future desires, and desire to have the means to be

able to satisfy those desires. That is, we desire felicity and the means to it. Our felicity takes this form, according to Hobbes, because we possess “foresight”: the capacity to anticipate imaginatively the satisfaction of future desires and to reason causally from the satisfaction of one desire to that of another. It is in this that human felicity differs from that of animals:

[W]hereas there is no other felicity of beasts but the enjoying of their quotidian food, ease, and lusts, as having little or no foresight of the time to come, for want of observation and memory of the order, consequence, and dependence of the things they see, man observeth how one event hath been produced by another, and remembereth in them antecedence and consequence. . . . (L 12, 4)

To act rationally, for Hobbes, is to exercise foresight in assuring the long-term satisfaction of desire.¹⁹ Since felicity is the “continual progress” of desire, a rational agent can be characterized as one whose desires in general are subordinated to the desire for felicity. Hobbes’s ethics assumes that desires are ordered in a complex means-ends structure. In many cases the desire for an object *A* is a desire for *A* as a means to some other object *B*. Among our desires we can distinguish at least the following four kinds: (i) desires for particular objects and ends; (ii) desires for the means to those ends; (iii) the desire for felicity, or the continual progress of desire; (iv) desires for the means to felicity (e.g., peace). The desire for felicity serves as a limit for the dependency relations among desires. Objects of type-(i) and type-(ii) desires may be desired for their own sakes, but they are also desired as constituents of, or means to, felicity. Objects of type-(iv) desires likewise may be desired for their own sakes but are also desired as means to felicity. Felicity is distinguished from these lesser ends in that it is not sought for the sake of any more comprehensive end. The desire for felicity is the desire that one’s life as a whole should proceed in the best possible manner, or that one should enjoy “a contented life.” This means that whatever the object of one’s desires, those desires will continue to be satisfied without interruption. Seen in this light, felicity functions as the Hobbesian analogue of a final end: it is that for the sake of which other things are sought, which itself is not sought for the sake of anything else.²⁰

Within the constraints of Hobbes’s metaethics, felicity also serves as the analogue of a highest good. According to Hobbes, “The common name for all things that are desired, insofar as they are desired is *good*; and for all things we shun *evil*. . . . But, since different men desire and shun different things, there must needs be many things that are *good* to some and *evil* to others” (DH 11, 4). Type-(i) desires inevitably give rise to incommensurable judgments about good and evil. You desire chocolate; I abhor chocolate. For you chocolate is good, for me evil. Value commensurability enters Hobbes’s

scheme in two ways. First, there are “common goods” on which we agree because of a commonality of desires. Although nothing is *simply* good, “since whatsoever is good, is good for someone or other” (ibid.), there are goods that are the objects of (near) universal desires, such as health, life, peace, and felicity. Second, there are objects that we can agree to be goods relative to other goods. If I suppose, on the basis of your testimony, that *B* is good, and I know that *A* is a necessary means to *B*, then I can agree that *A* is good, relative to the initial supposition.²¹ Whether I am willing to discharge the supposition depends upon whether I myself judge *B* good, which I will do only if I desire *B*. If *B* is a common good, then we will naturally agree on the goodness of both *B* and *A*. As Hobbes writes, “all men agree on this, that peace is good; and therefore also the way or means of peace” (L 15, 40).

Common goods such as peace are desired for their own sakes, but they are also desired as means to a “contented life,” or felicity. If this is correct, and if felicity can be understood as the Hobbesian analogue of a final end, then there is reason also to see felicity as Hobbes’s answer to the ancients’ *summum bonum*: a good to which all other goods are subordinated. Despite Hobbes’s prominent criticisms of Aristotle, then, his ethics preserves a key element of Aristotle’s eudaimonism. While dismissing Aristotle’s claim for a single, determinate conception of happiness, Hobbes upholds the idea of felicity as our greatest good. Hobbes’s ambivalence on this point is expressed most clearly in a passage from *De Homine*:

The highest good [*summum bonum*], or as it is called, felicity and the final end, cannot be attained in the present life. For if the end be final, there would be nothing to long for, nothing to desire; whence it follows not only that nothing would itself be a good from that time on, but also that man would not even feel. For all sense is conjoined with some appetite or aversion; and not to feel is not to live.

Of goods, the greatest [*bonorum maximum*] is always progressing towards further ends with the least hindrance. Even the enjoyment of a desire, when we are enjoying it, is an appetite, namely the motion of the mind to enjoy by parts, the thing that it is enjoying. . . . (DH 11, 15; trans. modified)

To the extent that it threatens the persistence of desire, Hobbes rejects the notion of happiness as a final end and *summum bonum*. Nevertheless, at a critical point in *Leviathan*, Hobbes proposes his own definition of ‘felicity’ as a continual progress of desire, and in *De Homine*, he identifies this as our greatest good. Although Hobbes has important reasons for disagreeing with Aristotle’s treatment of happiness, his break with the eudaimonism of the ancients is neither as sharp nor as complete as he would have us believe.²²

V. FROM ETHICS TO POLITICS

Understanding felicity in this way has consequences for how we think about the main political argument of *Leviathan*. I cannot make the case for this in detail here, but I nonetheless want to sketch the main points and address a potential objection.

We may begin with Hobbes's definition of 'power': "The power of a man (to take it universally) is his present means to obtain some future apparent good" (L 10, 1). For Hobbes, power comes in a variety of forms. To simplify, we can distinguish two basic types: (1) possession of the means to satisfy some particular desire (I have the money I need to buy the car I want); (2) possession of the means necessary to satisfy desires in general and to assure the continual satisfaction of desire. Hobbes assumes that people desire both forms of power; however, they are deeply confused about the latter sort. Above all, they fail to understand what is necessary to achieve the conditions of peace and security under which they can successfully pursue the satisfaction of other desires.

This problem is addressed by Hobbes in a famous passage from chapter 11 of *Leviathan*:

I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. And from hence it is that kings, whose power is greatest, turn their endeavours to the assuring it at home by laws and abroad by wars; and when that is done, there succeedeth a new desire, in some of fame from new conquest, in others of ease, and sensual pleasure, in others of admiration or being flattered for excellence in some art or other ability of the mind. (L 11, 2)

Hobbes posits in human beings a ceaseless desire for power, which by definition is a desire for the means to some "future apparent good." He emphasizes, though, that the power we desire is not simply that which will allow us to satisfy more type-(i) desires, or desires for ever greater pleasure. The power we desire is the means to satisfy desires in general and to assure the continual satisfaction of desire: the king seeks the "power and means *to live well* which he hath present." Thus, Hobbes subordinates the desire for this kind of power to the pursuit of felicity. Assuring his power "at home by laws and abroad by wars," the king is able to enjoy felicity in whichever way he chooses—through a life of glory, pleasure, or reputation.

This is the position of a powerful sovereign, but it is not our position. A

king whose power is greatest can hope to establish peace in his kingdom and security with respect to his neighbors, and then go on to enjoy felicity in whichever way he chooses. However, this option is not open to the ordinary person. We cannot hope to amass enough power to ensure our own safety. Nevertheless, aside from this, the problem is the same: like the king, we desire power that will enable us to live well, or to pursue a “contented life.”

This power is what Hobbes promises in *Leviathan*, ultimately in the form of a commonwealth in which we are able to pursue a felicity of our own choosing at the price of obedience to laws commanded by a sovereign. It is important, however, to see how Hobbes lays the groundwork for such power. Recall the passage quoted earlier from *De Corpore*: “the *end* or *scope* of philosophy is, that we may make use to our benefit of effects formerly seen. . . . The end of knowledge is power” (DCo 1, 6). What Hobbes calls “civil philosophy” is a system of causal knowledge that is intended to guide action in such a way as to lead to the generation of a commonwealth in which peace and security are assured. This depends upon our heeding the laws of nature, which teach us how to live peaceably with our fellows, so that a commonwealth might be established. All of this knowledge offers power in Hobbes’s sense: the means to stabilizing our social situation so as to enable us to pursue felicity.

Hobbes’s science of ethics offers an even more basic form of power that is presupposed by his political argument. While it may be a fact that all human beings desire felicity, Hobbes believes that people have had very confused ideas about what felicity is and how it is to be pursued. Under the influence of religious teachings and traditional philosophy, they have formed unsupportable and irreconcilable conceptions of happiness, and these have both left them at odds with each other and prevented them from recognizing the force of Hobbes’s argument. To be convinced that they should become artificers of a commonwealth, people must understand the sense in which they would be better off as a consequence, and this requires that they begin with a coherent notion of felicity—one capable of mediating between incommensurable conceptions of the good. For this reason, Hobbes’s science of ethics is foundational for his science of politics: unless one begins with the proper understanding of felicity, one will not appreciate the full force of Hobbes’s argument for a certain political arrangement as a means to that end.

This is not how Hobbes is usually interpreted. In general, commentators have appealed to the desire for self-preservation as the principal motive for choosing to escape the state of nature and accept the yoke of a sovereign’s command. In particular cases this may be true: conditions in the state of nature may be so bad, the threat to their continued survival so great, that individuals will be ready to forsake their natural liberty and accept the sovereign’s authority for the sake of self-preservation alone. In chapter 13 of

Leviathan, however, Hobbes offers a more subtle analysis of why the natural condition of mankind is one of “misery.” The state of nature is objectionable not only because it is a condition of war, in which “the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known” (L 13, 8). The misery of that state, “wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them,” stems also from the fact that in it their chances of felicity are minimal. There, Hobbes writes,

there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. (L 13, 9)

In the state of nature, there is not merely the danger that one’s life will be short, but also that, if one survives, one’s existence will be solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish. Consequently, it is not simply the threat to one’s life that marks the state of nature as a condition of misery. Even if one should possess the means to defend one’s life, while lacking the ability to satisfy other desires, the state of nature still would be an unacceptable condition.

The value of a commonwealth, in Hobbes’s view, is that it increases one’s chances both of physical survival and of felicity. It is with this expectation that individuals are willing to accept significant restrictions on their natural liberty:

The final cause, end, or design of men (who naturally love liberty and dominion over others) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves in which we see them live in commonwealths is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby. . . . (L 17, 1)

In choosing to leave the state of nature and accept a sovereign’s authority, the future subjects of a commonwealth may be motivated most immediately by the desire for self-preservation, or fear of death. However, physical survival is also sought for the sake of a further end: felicity, or a “more contented life.” In covenanting to form a commonwealth, the parties erect a common power, “as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly” (L 17, 13). Thus, it is ultimately on the basis of their expectation of felicity that such individuals justify their decision to accept a diminished liberty as subjects of a commonwealth.²³

This expectation is strengthened by Hobbes’s doctrine that it is the duty

of the sovereign to ensure that the citizens of a commonwealth have the means to pursue felicity insofar as they can:

The office of the sovereign (be it a monarch or an assembly) consisteth in the end for which he was entrusted with the sovereign power, namely, the procuration of *the safety of the people*, to which he is obliged by the law of nature. . . . But by safety here is not meant a bare preservation, but also all other contentments of life, which every man by lawful industry, without danger or hurt to the commonwealth, shall acquire to himself. (L 30, 1)

Although a sovereign has no legal obligations to the citizens of a commonwealth, he has a duty, imposed by the laws of nature, to procure the safety of his subjects.²⁴ A striking feature of Hobbes's position is how broadly he interprets the notion of "safety."²⁵ In *De Cive*, he writes:

By *safety* one should understand not mere survival in any condition, but a happy life so far as that is possible. For men willingly entered commonwealths *which they had formed by design* in order to be able to live as pleasantly as the human condition allows. Those who have taken it upon themselves to exercise power in this kind of commonwealth, would be acting contrary to the law of nature (because in contravention of the trust of those who put the sovereign power in their hands) if they did not do whatever can be done by laws to ensure that the citizens are abundantly provided with all the good things necessary not just for life but for the enjoyment of life. (DC 13, 4)

Hobbes does not believe that those who hold sovereign power have a duty to guarantee the felicity of their subjects. That would be an unrealizable goal, and one inconsistent with the maintenance of a stable commonwealth. The sovereign's duty is limited to facilitating the pursuit of felicity by creating a social order in which subjects can harvest the fruits of their labor, free of the risks associated with the state of nature.²⁶ That this is the sovereign's duty is a consequence derived within Hobbes's science of civil philosophy (L 9). Hence, those who have acquired this knowledge (readers of *Leviathan*) can support their decision to enter a commonwealth with the belief that by doing so they will increase their chances of felicity, or of living "as pleasantly as the human condition allows."

It might still be argued that this reading gives insufficient weight to the connection Hobbes establishes between the desire for self-preservation, the laws of nature, and the decision to leave the state of nature through the institution of a commonwealth. As it is usually interpreted, the decision to form a commonwealth rests on the first two laws of nature, which counsel one to seek peace wherever possible, and to lay down one's right to all things "as far forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary," provided that others are willing to do likewise (L 14, 5). Here, as elsewhere in the text, Hobbes ascribes the normativity of the laws of nature—the reason why one

should act in accordance with them—to the fact that they prescribe necessary means to self-preservation.²⁷ Accordingly, if the decision to leave the state of nature is a consequence of following the laws of nature, and the latter are followed because they are necessary means to self-preservation, then the latter desire and not, as I have urged, the desire for felicity should be seen as most fundamental.

Yet Hobbes does not rest his argument on the desire for self-preservation alone. He consistently claims that the laws of nature are justified as means to promoting peace and avoiding war.²⁸ It is true that peace itself may be sought for the sake of self-preservation,²⁹ but this is not the *only* reason for seeking peace. The state of nature, as a condition of war, is one in which misery, rather than felicity, prevails. Consequently, the laws of nature command our respect equally as means to improving our chances of felicity. To act rationally, for Hobbes, is to exercise foresight in assuring the long-term satisfaction of desire. If asked to justify the imperative to seek peace, therefore, one is warranted in claiming that one does so not just for the sake of living but for the sake of achieving felicity.

But if this is so, why does Hobbes not frame his position in this way? Why does his general statement of the laws of nature appeal to self-preservation as an ultimate end rather than felicity? The most plausible explanation is that Hobbes wants to make it as difficult as possible for agents not to see the force of the laws of nature. This means grounding them in an end about which there can be no disagreement. While the appeal to other goods, including felicity, might engender controversy that could only be resolved if one were prepared to accept the conclusions of Hobbes's ethics, self-preservation offers a neutral end about which there is likely to be little or no dissension. If the laws of nature are justified as necessary means to self-preservation, then all should see those laws as binding on them.

By "self-preservation," however, Hobbes himself often seems to understand something more than mere physical survival. As he defines it, a law of nature is "a precept or general 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, 3; emphasis added). The final clause of this definition leaves considerable latitude for individual judgments about what is deemed an adequate quality of life.³⁰ This is bolstered by Hobbes's claim that among the rights that an agent cannot be understood to transfer is "the motive and end for which this renouncing and transferring of right is introduced," namely, "the security of a man's person, in his life and in the means of so preserving life as not to be weary of it" (L 14, 8). Reiterating later the rights that are retained as "necessary, for man's life," Hobbes includes the "right to govern their own bodies, [right to] enjoy air, water, motion, ways to go from place to place, and all things else without which a man cannot live, or not live well"

(L 15, 22).³¹ Again, Hobbes's view seems to be that the laws of nature dictate that one act in ways that do not merely preserve one's life but preserve it in a condition that allows for a reasonable expectation of felicity.

The desire for physical survival is plausibly understood as our biologically most basic desire, and the desire that human beings are least likely to give up.³² Even if one has forsaken one's prospects for a contented life, one still may strive for the preservation of life itself, and under this condition one should see the laws of nature as effective means to that end. Yet this does not entail that self-preservation is our greatest good even by Hobbesian standards. Self-preservation is a necessary condition for felicity; hence one ought to desire it at least as strongly as one desires felicity. However, if self-preservation is sought for the sake of felicity, and not vice versa, then the latter is a better candidate for our final end, or greatest good. In extreme cases, Hobbes allows, the preservation of life may not even be an end for us; we may prefer death to a life of great pain:

though death is the most basic of all evils (especially when accompanied by torture), the pains of life can be so great that, unless their quick end is foreseen, they may lead men to number death among the goods. (DH 11, 6; trans. modified)

On the view advanced here this is easily explained. Since life is not sought for its sake alone but also for the sake of felicity, where the latter is not possible, the desire for the former may also be extinguished. This is consistent with the claim that the mere preservation of life is not our final end: we also desire life as a means to living well.

The political argument of *Leviathan*, I contend, relies upon this assumption. What distinguishes human beings from other animals is that we are not content with simple existence, or the quotidian satisfaction of desire, but desire also felicity: the assurance of a "continual progress" of desire that we project into the future. It is for this reason that the state of nature is identified with a condition of misery, and that simple animal societies cannot serve as models for human society. "[T]hough among certain animals there are seeming polities," Hobbes writes, "these are not of sufficiently great moment for living well; hence they merit not our consideration" (DH 10, 3). Thus, the argument for political sovereignty cannot rest solely on the promise of perpetuating biological life; in addition, it must give us hope of living *well*, as defined by Hobbes's account of felicity.

VI. CONCLUSION

I have argued for two main claims. First, despite his sharp criticisms of ancient eudaimonism, Hobbes preserves an important place in his ethics for the

notion of happiness, or felicity. His case for doing so hinges on the claim that, in contrast to the ancients, he has provided a definition of 'felicity' that meets the strict standards of science: a definition that explains its generation as a "continual progress of desire," where desires themselves are but "endeavors," or "the small beginnings of motion." Second, although felicity cannot be characterized as a *summum bonum* in the ancients' sense, it nonetheless functions in Hobbes's system as the analogue of a final end: that for the sake of which other things are sought, which itself is not sought for the sake of anything else. This is evidenced in the fact that Hobbes defines the value of knowledge in general, and the knowledge of civil philosophy in particular, in terms of its contribution to happiness. I have suggested that the desire for felicity should thus be seen as playing a more important role in the political argument of *Leviathan* than is generally recognized. Although the necessity of the laws of nature is explained by Hobbes in terms of their contribution to self-preservation, it is ultimately the desire of human beings to live *well* (or "commodiously"), and not simply to *live*, that motivates them to accede to the constraint of sovereign authority.

NOTES

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, the 2002 Margaret Dauler Wilson Conference, Johns Hopkins University, the University of California, San Diego, and the UCSD History of Philosophy Roundtable. I thank my audiences on each of these occasions for their many helpful comments and suggestions. Thanks are also owed to Dale Dorsey for research assistance.

1. I use the following abbreviations in citing Hobbes's works: L = *Leviathan, with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1994; cited by chapter and paragraph; 'L' after the paragraph number indicates the Latin edition). DC = *De Cive*, as translated in *On the Citizen*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). DCo = *De Corpore*, as translated in volume 1 of *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839–45). DH = *De Homine*, as translated in *Man and Citizen*, trans. Charles T. Wood, T. S. K. Scott, and Bernard Gert; ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1991). EL = *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
2. See L 29, 6; L 46, 23L; DC 6, 9; DH 13, 8–9.
3. For recent defenses of this reading against its rivals, see David Gauthier, "Hobbes: The Laws of Nature," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82:3–4 (2001): 258–84; and Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch. 3. For a review of the literature through 1990, see Edwin Curley, "Reflections on Hobbes: Recent Work on His Moral and Political Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 15 (1990): 169–250.
4. DC, *Epistle dedicatory* [6].
5. See also L 5, 17; DCo 1, 1.
6. Cf. Bacon, *Novum Organum*, II.1–4.

7. This restriction depends upon prior philosophical commitments (Hobbes's materialism and his views about the conditions for the meaningful use of language). My concern here is less with Hobbes's defense of these commitments than with the conclusions he draws from them.
8. Cf. DH 13, 8.
9. Cf. EL 27, 13: "Now that science in particular from which proceed the true and evident conclusions of what is right and wrong, and what is good and hurtful to the being and well-being of mankind, the Latins call *sapientia*, and we by the general name of wisdom. For generally, not he that hath skill in geometry, or any other science speculative, but only he that understandeth what conduceth to the good and government of the people, is called a wise man. Now that no author of sedition can be wise in this acceptance of the word, is sufficiently proved, in that it hath been already demonstrated, that no pretence of sedition can be right or just; and therefore the authors of sedition must be ignorant of the right of state, that is to say, unwise."
10. Virgil, *Georgics*, II, 499.
11. See also L 29, 1.
12. "[T]he felicity of this life consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *Summum Bonum* (greatest good) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose desires are at an end, than he whose senses and imaginations are at a stand" (L 11, 1). Cf. EL 7, 6; DH 11, 15.
13. Cf. EL 7, 7: "Seeing all delight is appetite, and appetite presupposeth a farther end, there can be no contentment but in proceeding. . . . FELICITY, therefore (by which we mean continual delight), consisteth not in having prospered, but in prospering."
14. In contrast, e.g., to deliberation (L 6, 49ff).
15. *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7 (1098a12–20).
16. *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6 (1107a1).
17. For Hobbes, moral virtues, by which he means the laws of nature, place general constraints on the attainment of felicity, since they dispose agents to act in ways that promote the satisfaction of desire (including covenanting to form a commonwealth). Hobbes further assumes that these virtues are goods on which agreement can be reached (L 15, 40). However, he contends that prior to the institution of a commonwealth, in which the laws of nature acquire the authority of civil laws mandated by a sovereign, there can be substantial disagreement about what the virtues entail by way of action: "divers men differ . . . of what is conformable or disagreeable to reason in the actions of common life" (ibid.; cf. L 26, 8). Consequently, even if it is true that felicity can be attained only if desire is regulated by reason (in the guise of the laws of nature), there is no guarantee that the same conclusions will be reached about the best way to regulate one's desires.
18. Or he would have to say that, however much they desired felicity, the satisfaction of desires inconsistent with the attainment of felicity prevailed. My thanks to Sam Rickless for this point.
19. "And because in deliberation the appetites and aversions are raised by foresight of the good and evil consequences and sequels of the actions whereof we deliberate, the good and evil effect thereof dependeth on the foresight of a long chain of consequences, of which very seldom any man is able to see to the end. . . . [H]e who hath by experience or reason the greatest and surest prospect of consequences deliberates best himself, and is able, when he will, to give the best counsel unto others" (L 5, 57). For Hobbes, this "best counsel" consists of the teachings of natural and civil philosophy.
20. Hobbes dismisses the idea of a final end at DH 11, 15 and EL 7, 6, but this is because he understands by it an end that would terminate desire. Obviously, this does not follow if felicity (in Hobbes's sense) is the final end. Aristotle maintains that happiness is an end that is "final without any qualification," because no one chooses happiness for the sake of subordinate goods such as honor, pleasure, intelligence, or virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics*,

- I.7 [1097b1–5]). Hobbes, it might be objected, cannot support such a strong claim, for it is not incoherent to suppose that someone might desire felicity for the sake of its components, e.g., wealth or pleasure. The plausibility of this objection turns on how one thinks of felicity. If it is equated simply with the “continual progress” of desire, then the objection has merit. If, however, felicity is identified with the idea of a “contented life,” as Hobbes also suggests, then it would seem to bear the weight of a final end. Although the getting of pleasure or honor may form the basis of a contented life, it is implausible to think of the latter as being sought for the sake of the former. To this extent felicity in effect serves as a normative end, defining the proper goal for a human life (one that is not limited to the “felicity of beasts”). I am grateful to Sean Greenberg for stressing this point.
21. This is presupposed by Hobbes’s discussion of counsel in L 25.
 22. It has been argued that Aristotle’s own position in the opening chapters of *Nicomachean Ethics* (leading up to the account of the final end in I.7) relies on a desire-satisfaction conception of the good. If so, then the connection with Hobbes’s view is even closer. See Gerasimos Santas, “Desire and Perfection in Aristotle’s Theory of the Good,” *Apeiron* 22:2 (1989): 75–99; and Georgios Anagnostopoulos, “Ancient Perfectionism and Its Modern Critics,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16:1 (1999): 197–232.
 23. Hobbes emphasizes this point in giving priority to the long-term satisfaction of desire over immediate gratification. Those who question the demands a sovereign imposes on them in defense of the commonwealth fail to recognize the latter as the best guarantee of their felicity: “For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses (that is their passions and self-love), through which every little payment appeareth a great grievance, but are destitute of those prospective glasses (namely moral and civil science), to see afar off the miseries that hang over them, and cannot without such payments be avoided” (L 18, 20).
 24. “And since governments are formed for the sake of peace, and peace is sought for safety, if the incumbent in power used it otherwise than for the people’s safety, he would be acting against the principles of peace, that is, against natural law” (DC 13, 2).
 25. Cf. Tom Sorell, “Hobbes and the Morality beyond Justice,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82:3–4 (2001): 227–42. Sorell notes the problem of reconciling this extended concept of safety with “the central Hobbesian claim that the sovereign has unlimited and exclusive power to determine what belongs to whom” (238).
 26. “Sovereigns can do no more for the citizens’ happiness [*felicitas*] than to enable them to enjoy the possessions their industry has won them, safe from foreign and civil war” (DC 13, 6).
 27. Cf. L 14, 3; 15, 36; 15, 41.
 28. At L 13, 14, the laws of nature are described as “convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement.” The second law enjoins the laying down of right “as far-forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary” (L 14, 5). Hobbes characterizes this and the remaining laws as consequences of the first “fundamental law of nature, by which men are commanded to endeavour peace” (*ibid.*). In *De Cive*, Hobbes appeals to both self-preservation and peace as the foundations of the laws of nature: “The first law of nature (the foundation) is: *to seek peace when it can be had; when it cannot, to look for aid in war.* . . . It is the first law, because the rest are derived from it; they are instructions on the means of securing either peace or self-defence. . . . Anyone, therefore, who does not give up the *right to all things* is acting contrary to the ways of peace, that is, contrary to the *law of nature*” (DC 2, 2–3). Cf. DC 3, 1, 19, 21, 26, 27, 29.
 29. Hobbes refers, for example, to “the laws of nature dictating peace for a means of the conservation of men in multitudes” (L 15, 34).
 30. The Latin text is even clearer on this point: it is forbidden by natural law to omit that which “seems to him to tend toward his own loss” (L 14, 3L).
 31. In his note to this passage, Curley writes, “It is not mere survival, but living well, which is the end of entry into civil society.”

32. “[T]he most basic good [*bonorum primum*] for each is his own preservation. For nature is so arranged that all desire good for themselves. Insofar as it is within their capacities, it is necessary to desire life, health, and further, insofar as it can be done, security of future time” (DH 11, 6; trans. modified). Cf. DC 1, 7; 3, 9.