

Hobbes-Forschungen

Mit Beiträgen von

Mario A. Cattaneo · Janine Chanteur · Ion Contiades
Winfried Dallmayr · Winfried Förster · Julien Freund
W. H. Greenleaf · Martin Kriele · Reinhart Klemens
Maurer · K. R. Minogue · S. I. Mintz · Raymond Polin
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Michel Villey · Howard Warrender · F. O. Wolf

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Reinhart Koselleck und Roman Schnur



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Vorwort

Im Herbst 1967 fand ein internationales Hobbes-Kolloquium statt, zu dem das Institut für Politische Wissenschaft der Ruhr-Universität Bochum eingeladen hatte. Die eingesandten Vorlagen werden auf gemeinsamen Wunsch hin veröffentlicht.

Hobbes' philosophischer Entwurf hat prognostischen Gehalt. Er nimmt am Beginn unserer Neuzeit reale Entwicklungen der modernen Gesellschaft vorweg und provoziert damit Fragen, deren überraschende Aktualität immer neue Antworten herausfordert. Die Hintergründigkeit und Zukünftigkeit seiner Philosophie bietet eine breite Skala von Aspekten, die methodisch und thematisch unter sehr verschiedenen Gesichtswinkeln aufgezeigt werden können, wie auch immer sie auf die rationale Einheit seines Systems zurückverweisen. Dementsprechend sind auf dem Kolloquium verschiedene Wege verfolgt worden: historisch-philologische, rechtshistorische Methoden und natürlich systematische Zugriffe im Rahmen einer philosophischen oder einer geschichtlichen Theorie.

Die Vorlagen gruppieren sich — trotz zwangsläufiger Überlappungen — um die vorgeschlagenen Themen: Fragen der Interpretation, der Herkunfts- und Wirkungsgeschichte sowie der Sprachkritik (Prof. J. W. N. Watkins wird seinen Beitrag als Antrittsvorlesung an der London School of Economics erscheinen lassen); Fragen der politischen Theorie und der politischen Theorie, insbesondere zum Verhältnis von Individuum und Staat; schließlich Fragen nach der Beziehung von Recht und Politik. Einige der kritischen Diskussionsbeiträge sind in die gedruckte Fassung eingegangen. Der Charakter des Kolloquiums bleibt also erhalten. Insofern unterscheidet sich der vorliegende Band von der Aufsatzsammlung, die H. C. Brown als „Hobbes Studies“ (Oxford 1965) ediert hat, und an die hier in mancher Hinsicht angeknüpft wird. Im Anhang wird außerdem versucht, einen möglichst vollständigen Überblick über die Hobbes-Rezeption im deutschen Sprachraum zu geben.

Die Vielfältigkeit und Gemeinsamkeit der mit Hobbes gestellten Probleme sowie der Anspruch der von ihm angebotenen Lösung verlagerten die Auseinandersetzung um seine Philosophie von vornherein auf eine internationale Ebene. Auch die heutige Rezeption beruht

nicht nur auf der Aneignung entlang der begrifflichen Übersetzung im Laufe der Zeit. Sie bleibt ebenso verwiesen auf die jeweils gleichzeitige Brechung in den verschiedenen Sprach- und Geschichtsräumen, in denen wir heute zusammenleben.

Wir danken vor allem der Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, deren finanzielle Hilfen uns erlaubten, die ausländischen Gäste einzuladen. Ebenso sei unser Dank an die Landesfinanzschule von Nordrhein-Westfalen ausgesprochen, die uns Schloß Nordkirchen/Westf. für das Treffen zur Verfügung stellte.

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Reinhard Koselleck

Roman Schnur

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Hobbes: The Problem of Interpretation

By W. H. Greenleaf, Swansea

The late J. L. Austin, observing that work of original merit tends to produce a flow of interpretative studies which, in their turn, are themselves elaborately glossed, described this process as The Law of Diminishing Fleas. What follows begins indeed simply with comment on the commentaries which have been written about Hobbes, but I want to use this parasitical survey to raise some issues of methodological interest¹. First of all, then, I describe what I take to be the main lines of interpretation of Hobbes's theories which have emerged and the relationship between them; and, after this, I discuss some of the problems raised for intellectual history by this diverse exegesis.

I.

There seem to be three main types of interpretation of Hobbes's ideas. I call them the 'traditional case', the 'natural-law case', and the 'individualist case'. Of course, these are (in a way) artificial categorisations and each encompasses a range of internal variation. But none is a mere abstraction and their distinctive characters can be discerned in the actual history of Hobbes scholarship². And in describing these points of view, my object is not to explain each in detail but simply to outline their main and contrasting features.

The *traditional case*, or orthodox interpretation of Hobbes, is that he is a materialist imbued with the ideas of the 'new' natural science and that he methodically applies its themes and procedures (the laws governing bodies in motion and their deductive elaboration) to the elucidation of a civil and ethical theory cast in the same mould. Thus, on this view, Hobbes's notion of obligation is founded on his egoistic psychology which itself rests on the naturalistic presuppositions. Duty is a matter of prudence, the rational pursuit of self-interest, the motion of appetite

¹ In any event, Hobbes is a most apposite case to exemplify Austin's Law: See *Swift's 'On Poetry: A Rhapsody'*, ll. 319 ff.

² For purposes of this discussion I draw specifically, and somewhat narrowly, on the literature in English. It would be most interesting and useful to learn whether a similar pattern of interpretation occurs in the commentaries on Hobbes by scholars writing in other languages.

and aversion. Of course, this is hardly a genuinely moral theory at all; it is a descriptive rather than a normative account of human behaviour³.

Now, this is certainly something like the interpretation put upon Hobbes's thought by a good many of his contemporaries. Most of them believed that such naturalism and materialism necessarily involved a demeaning view of mankind, condoned cynical and selfish behaviour, and led directly to atheism, determinism, ethical relativism and a host of other evils all of which were destructive of the very foundation of Christian society⁴. At the same time, it is now clear that there was a substantial body of opinion which found a good part or all of Hobbes's ideas wholly congenial and did so precisely because of their uncompromising naturalistic character⁵. Cowley lauded Hobbes as the 'great Columbus of the golden lands of new philosophies' and, in particular, many continental *savants* and *philosophes* acknowledged their debt to him. This company includes figures such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Diderot and d'Holbach; while Bayle openly recognized Hobbes as 'the greatest genius of the seventeenth century'. In this country, the utilitarians found his writings a major and most authoritative source of ideas, not least because of the vigour with which his naturalistic manner was applied to the elimination of philosophical nonsense. It was not an accident that Grote and Molesworth initiated a scheme for the publication of Hobbes's complete works: the project was an indication and acknowledgment of their school's indebtedness⁶. And, in a positivist dominated age, it would be natural for Hobbes to be regarded as one of the earliest and greatest forerunners of the scientific attitude to things in general, as a thinker who provided a magnificent expression of the naturalist doctrine. For Marx and his followers, Hobbes is a pioneer materialist and mechanist (as well as one who expounds the principles of bourgeois society).

The traditional Hobbes has, then, never been without influence. Yet it is an interesting feature of the modern literature that it would have

³ The argument that obedience to the Leviathan is a duty because his commands have been authorized by individuals through the covenant suffers from the difficulty that the moral obligation thus attached to observance of the covenant is itself unexplained in ethical terms.

⁴ J. Bowle, *Hobbes and His Critics* (London 1951) and S. I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge 1962) describe in detail this contemporary reaction to Hobbes's writings, the former dealing largely with the political, the latter with the metaphysical and moral, aspects of criticism.

⁵ Mr. Quentin Skinner has done much recently, and with a wealth of learned reference, to establish this wider perspective. See his "History and Ideology in The English Revolution", *Historical Journal*, VIII (1965), pp. 151—178 esp. pp. 170—1; "The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought", *ibid.*, IX (1966), pp. 286—317; "Thomas Hobbes and his Disciples in France and England", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, VIII (1966), pp. 153—167.

⁶ G. Grote, *Minor Works* (ed. Bain; London 1873), pp. 59—72, esp. p. 67.

been difficult (until fairly recently) to find a clear and complete acceptance of this view outside the text-books or similarly brief analyses. However, it is obvious enough that some of the general historians of philosophy and political thought do expound the traditional picture of Hobbes in their synopses. Two instances must suffice. Höffding says that Hobbes 'instituted the best thought-out attempt of modern times to make our knowledge of natural science the foundation of all our knowledge of existence. The system which he constructed is the most profound materialistic system' of the modern world and effected a break with 'Scholasticism similar to that instituted by Copernicus in astronomy, Galilei in physics, and Harvey in physiology'. Thus he put the study of ethics and politics on a 'naturalistic basis'. Again, Sabine suggests that Hobbes's formal conceptions of man, ethics and politics are intended to be part of 'an all-inclusive system of philosophy formed upon scientific principles'; so that political philosophy is treated 'as part of a mechanistic body of scientific knowledge' and elaborated by the application of the general principles of mathematical thinking⁸. And there are numerous other short or very short studies which to a great degree express the same point of view⁹.

Furthermore, this traditional interpretation has of late been asserted in two full-length works on Hobbes. Possibly these books constitute a deliberate reaction against the various criticisms of the traditional view which, as we shall see, have become more frequent in recent years. The first of these works is R. S. Peters's *Hobbes*¹⁰, the other is M. M. Goldsmith's *Hobbes's Science of Politics*¹¹ which is the most recent work on the subject to appear in this country. Professor Peters holds that Hob-

⁷ H. Höffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy* (tr. Meyer; London 1900, repr. 1924), I, 264.

⁸ G. H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (London 1949), ch. XXIII.

⁹ e. g. W. J. H. *Campion*, *Outlines of Lectures on Political Science Being Mainly a Review of the Political Theories of Hobbes* (Oxford 1894), pp. 11—12; W. A. *Dunning*, *A History of Political Theories from Luther to Montesquieu* (New York 1905, repr. 1961), pp. 264—5; J. *Dewey*, "The Motivation of Hobbes's Political Philosophy" in *Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York 1918), I, 88—115 esp. pp. 103, 107; A. G. A. *Balz*, *Idea and Essence in the Philosophies of Hobbes and Spinoza* (New York 1918), pp. 4—5, 7; B. *Willey*, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (1934, repr. London 1962), p. 91; G. N. *Clark*, *The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford 1947), p. 221; G. P. *Gooch*, "Hobbes and the Absolute State" (1939) repr. in *Studies in Diplomacy and Statecraft* (London 1942), esp. pp. 343, 344, 362, 370; P. *Zagorin*, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (London 1954), ch. XIII esp. p. 167; C. *Hill*, "Thomas Hobbes and the Revolution in Political Thought" in *Puritanism and Revolution* (London 1958), ch. 9; K. *Minogue*, "Thomas Hobbes and the Philosophy of Absolutism" in D. Thomson (ed.), *Political Ideas* (London 1966), p. 49; Q. *Skinner*, "The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought", loc. cit. pp. 313—7.

¹⁰ Harmondsworth, 1956.

¹¹ New York and London, 1966.