

Interpretation

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page

1	Leo Strauss	Preface to <i>Hobbes politische Wissenschaft</i>
5	Michael Platt	Falstaff in the Valley of the Shadow of Death
30	John F. Wilson	Reason and Obligation in <i>Leviathan</i>
58	Michael P. Zuckert	An Introduction to Locke's First Treatise
75	Abraham Rotstein	Lordship and Bondage in Luther and Marx
103	Thomas J. Scorza	Tragedy in the State of Nature: Melville's <i>Typee</i>



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REASON AND OBLIGATION IN *LEVIATHAN*

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Students of Hobbes's political philosophy of late have been concerned, even preoccupied, with the question of his doctrine or theory of obligation. They have been less concerned with his understanding of reason, and practically unconcerned with the logical relationship between reason and obligation. In this essay, confined for the most part to the study of *Leviathan*, I will argue, first, that in Hobbes's thought obligation depends upon reason, and therefore that what he means by obligation is unintelligible without a thorough consideration of what he holds reason to be; second, that he puts forth not a single notion of reason, and thus of obligation, but rather three notions of each; third, that these notions are not consistent and, given Hobbes's philosophical base, cannot be made consistent; and fourth, that one who follows Hobbes's arguments closely is forced to conclude that he solves the problem of obligation in a non-philosophical and quite surprising way that is of some practical interest. Although the explicit discussion is limited to an analysis of reason and obligation, it will perhaps shed some light on the character of *Leviathan* as a whole.

I

Motion

Logically, Hobbes begins with motion. The first fact about the world is that it is made up of things in motion. In defining liberty, he says:

Liberty, or freedom, signifieth, properly, the absence of opposition; by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion; and may be applied no less to irrational, and inanimate creatures, than to rational. For whatsoever is so tied, or environed, as it cannot move but within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some external body, we say it hath not liberty to go further. And so of all living creatures, whilst they are imprisoned, or restrained, with walls, or chains; and of the water whilst it is kept in by banks, or vessels, that otherwise would spread itself into a larger space, we used to say, they are not at liberty, to move in such manner, as without those external impediments they would. But when the impediment of motion is in the constitution of the thing itself, we use not to say, it wants the liberty; but the power to move; as when a stone lieth still, or a man is fastened to his bed by sickness. (XXI. 136-37)¹

There are two great divisions of things here, first into the inanimate

and the animate, and then, through the division of the latter, into the irrational and the rational. Each kind of thing named has, in principle, both power and liberty. Power is the absence of internal impediments to motion; liberty is the absence of external impediments to motion. Both power and liberty are conditions of motion. The absence of liberty negates power; the presence of liberty allows power to translate itself into motion. Liberty is thus the condition of effective power; that is, power actualized in motion. Power and liberty differ in this: power inheres in the thing itself; liberty does not inhere in the thing but rather defines an environmental condition in which power is unconstrained and is actualized as motion. In short, power is the positive condition of motion; liberty is the negative condition of motion.

Liberty may be predicted only of bodies. Hobbes argues, “. . . when the words free, and liberty, are applied to any thing but bodies, they are abused; for that which is not subject to motion, is not subject to impediment” (XXI, 137). The reasoning is this: only bodies are subject to motion: but only that which is subject to motion is subject to impediment: therefore only bodies are subject to impediment. Since only that which is subject to impediment may be in a condition in which impediments are absent, only bodies can properly be said to be free, or at liberty. “Liberty” in the strict sense means “the condition of a body, and only a body, in which that body is unopposed, that is, in which there is no external impediment to the motion of that body.”

Two questions must be given further consideration. First, does body necessarily imply power? and, second, does power necessarily imply motion? Although Hobbes does not define either body or power in general, the opening passages of Chapter XXI suggest, first, that every body *qua* body possesses power and, second, that power if and when unimpeded is translated into or produces motion. Apparently, the normal condition of bodies which by definition possess power is in motion, that is, at liberty. This presentation of the scheme of things suggests that the natural condition of men set forth in Chapter XIII is a special case of the natural condition of things generally. All things are bodies, possess power, and are naturally at liberty and in motion. Hobbes’s remarks in Chapter II are not completely unequivocal but suggest substantially the same thesis:

That when a thing lies still, unless somewhat else stir it, it will lie still for ever, is a truth that no man doubts of. But that when a thing is in motion, it will eternally be in motion, unless somewhat else stay it, though the reason be the same, namely, that nothing can change itself, is not so easily assented to. For men measure, not only other men, but all other things, by themselves; and because they find themselves subject after motion to pain, and lassitude, think

everything else grows weary of motion, and seeks repose of its own accord; little considering, whether it be not some other motion, wherein that desire of rest they find in themselves, consisteth.

When a body is once in motion, it moveth, unless something else hinder it, eternally; and whatsoever hindereth it, cannot in an instant, but in time, and by degrees, quite extinguish it. (II, 8–9)

Hobbes presents a theory of inertia and in the same breath questions it. The theory and common sense say that things at rest remain at rest; but is it not possible that common sense is deceived, and that rest is merely another kind of motion? Hobbes's argument, here as in Chapter XXI, tends toward an affirmation of the normality if not the ubiquity of motion. Probably underlying the tendency of the argument is the premise that body necessarily implies power; and the further premise that power implies motion, not necessarily but normally given the prevalence of liberty. Liberty appears to be the natural condition of bodies, and, with power, is one of the two preconditions of motion.

The world of bodies is a simple one. If the bodies have power—as they probably do—and, in addition, are at liberty, then they are in motion. If a body is externally impeded, then its motion changes or ends. Whether the world of men, either naturally or within a commonwealth, is in principle any more complex is what we must now examine.

Men

Chapter XIV is the transition from the natural world of men to the world of men within the commonwealth. It begins with Hobbes's definition of the right of nature:

The right of nature, which writers commonly call *jus naturale*, is the liberty each hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own judgment, and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto. (XIV, 84)

Generally, the power of any body is that which allows it to be in motion. Whether power is defined as “the absence of internal impediments to motion” or as “the positive condition of motion,” the consequence of unimpeded power is motion. In Chapter X, Hobbes defines “the power of a man” as “his present means to obtain some future good” (X, 56). These means are the faculties of body or of mind. Whether they are rational or irrational, men are animate beings who have minds. The passage defining

the right of nature allows that a man has liberty to use judgment and reason, faculties which Hobbes ranks highest among the natural "virtues intellectual," to preserve his own nature. "To preserve his own nature" or "to obtain some future good" means more or less exactly to stay in motion:

. the 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. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter. (XI, 63)

Happiness is the maintenance of motion. There are two kinds of motion specific to animals: the first, vital motion, "begun in generation, and continued without interruption through their whole life; such as are the *course of the blood, the pulse . . .*"; the second, "*animal motion, otherwise called voluntary motion; as to go, to speak, to move any of our limbs, in such manner as is first fancied in our minds*" (VI, 31). Happiness, at least for animals generally and, so far, for men is the maintenance of both these kinds of motion. Explicitly, it is, first, the maintenance of life simply; and, second, the continual attaining of and subsequent progress, i.e., replacement or change, in the things "first fancied in our minds."

Because the will figures in Hobbes's definition of the right of nature, the relationship between desire, voluntary motion, and happiness must be discussed further. Imagination is "decaying sense" (II, 9); or, "the relics of . . . motion, remaining after sense" (VI, 31); or, that which is fancied in our minds; or, pictures in our minds that have been placed there by previous seeing. Imagination "is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion"; Hobbes calls these first "small beginnings of motion" endeavour (VI, 31). Voluntary motion begins with a picture in our mind of some thing. The picture, otherwise named imagination or endeavour, is itself motion. Apparently this means that an endeavour is both the "moving picture" in our mind and the first small beginnings of motion toward the thing represented by the moving picture.² If the endeavour is toward that which causes it, it is called appetite or desire; if away, aversion. Thus, the beginning of voluntary motion is movement toward or movement away from some thing pictured in our mind. Hobbes calls the succession of pictures of things desired or feared, deliberation; and goes on to define the will as the last appetite or aversion in deliberating. The will, like everything else considered so far, is motion. It differs from the various motions that precede it only in that it is decisive motion. It brings deliberation to an end. The thing deliberated about "is either done, or thought impossible" (VI, 37).

The thing pictured is pursued or avoided decisively. Pictures in the mind are succeeded either by movement toward or away, or by new pictures.

Happiness is the repetition of imagination, endeavor, deliberation, will, and attainment. It is logically possible that an animate being imagine only its own continued existence, and attain that represented by this image repeatedly by the appropriate voluntary motion. In this case, happiness is the sequence of voluntary motion which serves again and again to maintain vital motion. On the other hand, happiness may be the repetition of this cycle with respect to successively different objects of desire over and above the maintenance of life. In either case, happiness is defined primarily by the continuing repetition of the cycle, and secondarily—that is, on an interim basis—by the attaining of a given object of desire.

In considering the passage of the right of nature thus far, nothing has been found to distinguish men from other animals. All animals have both vital and voluntary motion; possess minds; and, logically at least, are capable of happiness. Before discussing the passage as a whole, the last of its elements, judgment and reason, must be considered. To do so brings us to the greatest of the questions that Hobbes's thinking raises. Granted that men are not naturally political animals, are they naturally rational animals? Does their possession of or participation in reason distinguish them from beasts? Does it provide them with knowledge of a specific end which is different from the ends of beasts? Are there laws or rules or norms accessible to human reason that define that end and point out the means to its attainment? Are men as bound by knowledge of these laws? We find implicit here the question of obligation, so interesting to students of Hobbes; and learn at once that the question of obligation depends upon the logically prior question of the status of reason. Because the question of the status of reason is decisive, we must be most careful in considering Hobbes's understanding of reason, and of judgment.

Minds

Hobbes distinguishes between thought and reason or, in his words, between "mental discourse" and "discourse in words." Mental discourse, or "train of thoughts," is the "succession of one thought to another" (II, 13). Mental discourse is motion in the mind, beginning in sense, and continuing thereafter:

All fancies are motions within us, relics of those made in the sense: and those motions that immediately succeeded one another in the sense, continue also together after sense: insomuch as the former coming again to take place, and be predominant, the latter followeth, by coherence of the matter moved, in such manner, as water upon a plane table is drawn which way any one part of it is guided by the finger. But because in sense, to one and the same thing perceived,

sometimes one thing, sometimes another succeedeth, it comes to pass in time, that in the imagining of any thing, there is no certainty what we shall imagine next; only this is certain, it shall be something that succeeded the same before, at one time or another. (III, 14)

The succession of one image by another is thought. Thought begins in sense. Images are formed by motion, and are succeeded by other images formed by different motion. The succession of images is retained, although the strength of their motion diminishes with time. Remembering is recalling to mind the succession of images; foreseeing is a kind of remembering where one tries to anticipate a consequent image or images when a given image is again introduced into the mind by sense. But a given image is not always followed by the same sequence of images. Thus attempted foresight, or prudence, is always uncertain: “. . . such conjecture, through the difficulty of observing all circumstances, be very fallacious . . . ; the *future* being but a fiction of the mind, applying the sequels of actions past, to the actions that are present; which with most certainty is done by him that has most experience, but not with certainty enough.” (III, 16) Again, each thing here is but motion. Memory and foresight are kinds of thought: thought is the succession of images: images are motions in the mind induced by the motion of external bodies.

Trains of thought differ. Some are unguided, some regulated. Those that are regulated are given coherence and order by what Hobbes calls a passionate thought. A passionate thought is an image that rules the mind. It represents some thing that we desire greatly; that is, some thing that has made a deep and lasting impression: “. . . the impression made by such things as we desire, or fear, is strong, and permanent, or, if it cease for a time, of quick return:”. (III, 14). The passionate thought is the beginning of regulated thinking. The strong image sets in motion the train of thought that calls up the various means to the thing represented by the passionate thought, and, “by the greatness of the impression,” returns thought to the way if it begins to wander. When the complete sequence of means has been discovered, the passionate thought and regulated thinking have done their work; and thought is succeeded by voluntary action intended to secure the thing represented by the passionate thought. Regulated thought, like all thought, is images, of means and, especially, of a greatly desired end. Thus, it is no more certain than any other thought: but it is more persistent or constant.

Those who are comparatively good at thinking are said to possess natural wit:

. I mean, that wit, which is gotten by use only and experience; without method, culture, or instruction. This natural wit, consisteth principally in two

things; *celerity of imagining*, that is, swift succession of one thought to another, and *steady direction* to some approved end. On the contrary a slow imagination, maketh that defect, or fault of the mind, which is commonly called Dullness, *stupidity*, and sometimes by other names that signify slowness of motion, or difficulty to be moved. (VIII, 43).

Apparently the fundamental difference here, between natural wit and natural dullness, is a difference in quickness. "And this difference of quickness, is caused by a difference of men's passions; that love and dislike, some one thing, some another: and therefore some men's thoughts run one way, some another" (VIII, 43). Some animate beings, in this case men, are naturally inclined toward some objects, others toward other objects. The motion of or imparted by some of these objects is fast; that of others is slow. Fast motion in the object causes correspondingly fast motion in the mind of the one attracted, and slow motion slow. Thus, a mind described as being naturally witty is a mind attracted to objects that are quick; a mind described as naturally dull is a mind attracted toward objects that are slow.³ Hobbes does not explicate the relationship between celerity of imagining and steady direction, but it may be this. Steady direction results from the domination of thinking by a passionate thought. A passionate thought, we know, is a thought that produces a strong and permanent impression. Perhaps it is the case that only fast motion imparts to the mind a strong and permanent impression. If it is, this explains the relationship between celerity and steady direction.

Good judgment is the ability to see the difference in a succession of thoughts. ". . . [T]hey that observe their differences, and dissimilitudes; which is called *distinguishing*, and *discerning*, and *judging* between thing and thing; in case, such discerning be not easy, are said to have a *good judgment*" (VIII, 43). Hobbes's discussion of good judgment is difficult. In one sense, good judgment is a purely theoretical virtue. A succession of images is present in the mind: good judgment is the ability to see differences in these images which would go unnoticed by most individuals who had the same images induced in their minds. But good judgment appears to be very close, on the one hand, to that "steady direction to some approved end" which is part of natural wit as such; and, on the other, to prudence. In both steady direction and prudence, what is required is the ability to connect the differences observed to exist between images to one's own ends or designs. Hobbes calls good judgment with respect to "times, persons, and places" discretion. Literally, discretion is discrimination; but to the extent to which discretion is related to steady direction and prudence it is not merely the ability to discriminate between times, places, and persons, but this ability when it is subordinated to the attainment of one's own ends or

designs, or to the conception of an end or design based upon the distinctions perceived in a given situation. It is the ability to see the relationship between images presently given and images that are means to some image that is an interim end, and to see the relationship quickly. There is a harmony here between good fancy and good judgment, that is, between the ability to see similarities—in this case, similarities between present images and possible images—and to see differences: and also an apparent relationship between quickness and steadiness. Generally, Hobbes tends to associate closely natural wit, good judgment, discretion, and prudence; and to identify each of these natural intellectual virtues with the steady, successful pursuit of one's own passionate thoughts. He tends to place in the forefront of observation the inarticulate question—inarticulate because in images rather than in words—"How may this situation benefit me?"

Good judgment, then, is the ability to see and make use of differences, and is probably the greater part of natural wit. Natural wit, in turn, is a kind of thought, namely that which is quick and steady. Thought is motion in the mind, and is not specific to human beings. Neither do human beings have any kind of motion that is unique to their minds: ". . . besides sense, and thoughts, and the train of thoughts, the mind of man has no other motion; though by the help of speech, and method, the same faculties may be improved to such a height, as to distinguish men from all other living creatures" (IV, 17). Thus, it is precisely *not* thought or natural wit or good judgment that distinguishes man from all other living creatures. That is, it is not the fact or the operation or the comparative natural excellence of mind that distinguishes man. Man may be a rational animal—Hobbes argues that he is—but he is not rational because he possesses a mind different in principle from the minds of other living creatures.

Reason

Of the various qualities or faculties mentioned in defining the right of nature—liberty, power, will, judgment, and reason—only reason remains to be discussed. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes derives his understanding of reason from the Latin *ratio*, calculation. Reason is calculation, and explicitly addition and subtraction. Generally, it is the addition and subtraction of "whatsoever can enter into or be considered into an account, and be added one to another and leave a remainder" (IV, 22); or, again, of "all manner of things that can be added together, and taken one out of another" (V, 25). In its most usual sense, reason "is adding and subtracting, of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the *marking* and *signifying* of our own thoughts; I say *marking* them when we reckon by ourselves, and *signifying*, when we demonstrate or approve our reckonings to other men" (V, 25–26).

The relationship between thought and reason must be considered. To understand this, we must understand the more general relationship implicit here, that between external things, thoughts (or images in the mind, or conceptions), and names or words. In speaking of "Inconstant names," Hobbes says,

The names of such things, as affect us, that is, which please and displease us, because all men be not alike affected with the same thing, nor the same man at all times, are in the common discourses of men of *inconstant* signification. For seeing all names are imposed to signify our conceptions, and all our affections are but conceptions, when we conceive the same things differently, we can hardly avoid different naming of them. 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. (IV, 24)

Hobbes argues that words are not grounded in the external world. In common discourse, words are used to signify thoughts. Thoughts are motions in the mind; that is, images of external things induced by the motion of those things. Images vary with different constitutions of body and prejudices of opinion. A given external thing does not induce the same motion in two different minds. Names represent images, not things. Since the images vary, the names applied to the images vary as well. Thus, in "common" discourse there is no certain relationship between things, conceptions, and words. The supposition of different constitutions of body and prejudices of opinion severs names and things, and causes names to be linked with imagination rather than with external things.

Given Hobbes's argument, to the extent to which words are based in thought or imagination they must vary more or less widely as images vary in different minds. This variation logically destroys the possibility of common discourse, grounded in experience, about the natural or external world, because in effect it destroys the common external world. In other words, it destroys the possibility of an empirical natural science. In Chapter XXXI, Hobbes substantially concedes this: ". . . [I]n this natural kingdom of God, there is no other way to know anything, but by natural reason, that is, from the principles of natural science; which are so far from teaching us anything of God's nature, as they cannot teach us our own nature, nor the nature of the smallest creature living" (XXXI, 239).

This situation makes it impossible to ground reason in thought. If reason is made to depend upon thought, then the names and other symbols

employed in reasoning will vary more or less widely from thinker to thinker, and from time to time, and make reasoning practically impossible. Here we are speaking of reason strictly, or what Hobbes calls "acquired wit." Natural wit, or natural reason, is grounded in motion; is in principle inarticulate; and is variable and thus uncertain. Names stand between natural wit and acquired wit, between the common discourse of ordinary men and reason proper. Hobbes speaks of names being "imposed," but argues that there is nothing in the external world upon which to impose other than proper names: ". . . some (names) are common to many things, man, horse, tree; every of which, though but one name, is nevertheless the name of divers particular things; in respect of all which together, it is called an universal; there being nothing in the world universal but names; for the things named are every one of them individual and singular" (IV, 19). This argument is consistent with his understanding of thought: each thought is a particular thought, and names in this sense mark thoughts. The "language" implied here is one of names only, based upon individual things imagined in individual minds.

Hobbes's understanding of thought extends motion as far as the words used in ordinary language. To provide a discourse free of motion, and thus certain, it is necessary to sever words from dependence upon sense; and to identify reason, truth and science not with names derived from things but with the construction of definitions.⁴ Hobbes says, "The use and end of reason, is not the finding of the sum and truth of one, or a few consequences, remote from the first definitions, and settled significations of names, but to begin at these, and proceed from one consequence to another" (V, 26); and, again, "reason is not, as sense and memory, born with us; nor gotten by experience only, as prudence is; but attained by industry; first in apt imposing of names; and secondly by getting a good and orderly method in proceeding from the elements, which are names, to assertions made by connexion of one of them to another; and so to syllogisms. . . ." (V, 29). Hobbes is unconcerned in fact with imposing names, since science employs words "of general signification" and, as we have seen, there is nothing general in the world that corresponds to general words. But he is very concerned with definitions. Reasoning begins with definitions, science depends upon definitions: ". . . the light of human minds is perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity" (V, 30). But snuffing and purging ambiguity from definitions is no simple task, especially given the "want of a right reason constituted by nature" (V, 26). Hobbes gives various suggestions, explicit and otherwise, on how to define. We can inspect minutely our own motions, in the belief that they are the same in others; we can examine the definitions of former authors, correct their

negligent usage, or substitute our own; we can set up an arbiter or judge if there is disagreement, and let his reason serve as the reason of all; we can conduct exercises in etymology, to recover the original meaning of a word; we can reflect upon whether a term is self-evident.

The multiplicity of these devices—psychological, traditional, political, philological, and logical—indicates a situation where reason is denied to have either a natural or supernatural ground, and is understood to be purely human. Reason is human in a quite narrow sense: it is arbitrary. It begins with definitions formulated by human beings, and proceeds to deduce conclusions from those definitions. The definitions themselves are not genuinely open to question, because there is no independent—that is, non-human—standard by which to judge them. Two things follow from this. First, human reason is not now considered a species of reason, but rather the whole of reason. Second, reason and reasoning is transformed from being fundamentally philosophical to being fundamentally political: arbitration replaces inquiry.

There is a further implication, full of practical significance. Most human beings do not reason to any great extent or in any meaningful way:

And the most part of men, though they have the use of reasoning a little way, as in numbering to some degree; yet it serves them to little use in common life; in which they govern themselves, some better, some worse, according to their differences of experience, quickness of memory, and inclinations to several ends; but specially according to good or evil fortune, and the errors of one another. For as for *science*, or certain rules of their actions, they are so far from it, that they know not what it is. (V, 29)

Hobbes's highly restrictive definition of reason denies that name to the thought of most men, including their judgment and prudence. There is a reason for this, that reaches to the core of Hobbes's basic argument. Whether or not conceived of in terms of images, judgment and prudence are uncertain when measured against the standard of deductive reasoning. Hobbes aims at certainty, and thus must deny the name reason to forms of thought that do not conform to the model of deductive reason. But, in so doing, he gives rise to paradox and irony. The paradox: reason, understood as purely human, is so defined as to deny the name rational, and thus human, to almost all men. The irony: the standard of rationality, and thus humanity, is a rigid, abstract definition of reason which understands reason to be ungrounded and thus philosophically indefensible.

The elements of the right of nature may now be gathered together. Two of them, will and judgment, are motion, as is life itself. Power is the positive condition of motion; liberty is the negative condition of motion. The

term "reason" is difficult to interpret. Natural wit, or quick and steady thinking, of which judgment is a portion, is motion. Acquired wit, or reason proper, is calculation from settled definitions which produces certain conclusions. Natural wit and acquired wit are not species of the genus "reason." They have nothing in common. One is motion, the other calculation from fixed definitions wholly incongruous and unintelligible in a world of motion. Acquired wit does not begin in and develop from natural wit; neither does it oppose natural wit. Natural wit is silent; but acquired wit is not so much speech as the manipulation of symbols, among them names, which results in science. On each side, the relationship between speech and reason is broken. In principle, neither natural wit nor acquired wit has any need of speech. On either hand, Hobbes presents silent worlds: the one, the silent world of motion; the other, the silent world of science.

To which, natural wit or acquired wit, does Hobbes refer when he speaks of reason at the outset of C. XIV?; or, at the conclusion of C. XIII, when he says that certain "passions . . . incline men to peace. . . . And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace . . . (XIII, 84)? Strictly speaking, he must be referring to acquired wit: nothing else is reason. But this supposition, demanded by Hobbes's definition of reason, is textually incongruous and logically impossible. In C. XIII, Hobbes speaks of the "natural condition of mankind"—not the "State of Nature"—where there is "no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no society." In this condition, men are equal. Hobbes grounds this natural equality in part upon equality in prudence, which "is but experience; which equal time, equally bestows on all men"; and sets aside "the arts grounded upon words, and especially that skill of proceeding upon general and infallible rules, called science; which very few have, and but in few things" (XIII, 80). If very few men are capable of science under the best of conditions, how likely is it that any will be capable of it under the worst? The answer must be, it is extremely unlikely, if not absolutely impossible, that any man outside organized society possesses acquired wit.⁵ But it is not only improbable but logically impossible that men naturally—or in their natural condition—possess acquired wit. Some men—like some other animate beings—naturally possess natural wit.⁶ By definition, no man naturally possesses acquired wit. A certain ambiguity is introduced by Hobbes's substitution of the term "the natural condition of mankind" for the "State of Nature." But the basic argument is clear enough: men do not naturally possess acquired wit, that is, reason and science.

What, then, does "reason" mean in the definition of the right of nature? The logic of the argument of *Leviathan* through C. XIII demands that reason be identified with (some degree of) natural wit. This reduces

the right of nature to unimpeded motion, since, naturally, judgment and reason are not other than motion. As such, Hobbes's definition of the right of nature is no more than a statement of this presumed fact: all bodies are naturally or, more probably, normally at liberty, that is, in motion. But the tendency of the argument in C. XIV and XV demands at least that reason not be equated with natural wit. This permits Hobbes to speak of reason "dictating" laws of nature—that is, "general rules of reason," or, again, "immutable and eternal" rules—to human beings. Natural wit, the quick and steady succession of individual images, is incapable of generality and certainty.

The argument here casts doubt, however, on the assumption that Hobbes, if he is not speaking of natural wit, must be speaking of acquired wit. The term "dictate," and the figure of reason dictating to human beings (or some part of them), is noteworthy. It suggests the voice of reason, independent of human beings, counseling them to right or at least expedient action. Hobbes prepares the way for this suggestion, although hardly with great or even requisite care, by appearing, at the end of C. XIII, to divide the natural faculties of men into passion and reason. This apparent division is, of course, unfounded. To the extent to which his argument permits him to speak of natural reason at all, Hobbes must equate reason and passion, since both are motion. But the division, while logically unsound, is indispensable. It breaks up Hobbes's scientific argument, which reduces human beings to matter in motion and makes the right of nature a law of behavior applicable to all bodies. Further, it replaces the precise terms "natural wit" and "acquired wit" with the less precise term "reason." Reason in this less exact sense may be thought of as specifically human, possessed by or participated in by all or most men; and the right of nature may be considered uniquely human or at least different with respect to different species. In short, the suggestion that passion and reason are different in kind *and* that both are among the natural faculties of men allows Hobbes to present an apparently traditional natural law argument apparently based upon traditional assumptions.

It is not enough to say that Hobbes is ambivalent in his understanding of what reason is. The situation is not that simple. It is more accurate to say that, in *Leviathan*, there is a dominant notion of reason and two subordinate notions. The dominant notion is that reason is *ratio*, calculation from fixed definitions. As such, reason is human and conventional. Words mean what human beings, individually or collectively, want them to mean. Viewed in this light, *Leviathan* is a book of definitions that its author hopes and intends will be put into practice. The first, scientific, subordinate notion is that reason is natural. In this understanding, reason is thought and, when it is quick and steady, natural wit. Its basis is matter in motion, manifested

as images induced into minds by external objects. The second subordinate notion is that reason is supernatural and unconventional, that is, independent both of particularistic motion and human imposition or agreement. Reason in this sense appears as the voice in the soul which speaks in terms of general precepts and counsels right or prudent action. This reason probably should be called divine, but also may be thought of as moral.

II

Obligation

These considerations bear upon the question of obligation. What reason is determines how those who are reasonable or rational may be obliged. To sketch the picture in a preliminary way: if reason is images in the mind, then obligation must be caused by or due to these images; if reason is conventional and based upon agreement among men, so too must obligation be due to agreement; if reason is a divine voice in the soul, obligation must be due to divine things as they are made known to men. In each case, the kind of obligation follows the form of reason. There can be no kind of obligation for which there is not both a source of the obligation and a way in which human beings apprehend—that is, know—that which issues forth from the source. But, in order to see this clearly, and to understand in detail the relationship between kinds of obligation and forms of reason, we must begin by considering what Hobbes means when he uses the word “obligation.”

Hobbes defines obligation in contradistinction to liberty. As we have seen, liberty is “the absence of opposition; by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion.” Hobbes does not appear to mean that the absence of external impediments to motion is a species of liberty, while liberty generally is the absence of external impediments. Rather, the term liberty when used “properly” means the absence of external impediments *to motion*. There are two reasons for this. First, Hobbes’s fundamental philosophical view is of a world of bodies normally in motion. Second, he is defining the word “opposition” etymologically. The Latin root is *oppono*, which means to place against. Strictly, placing against can be done only with physical or material things; any other use of the word “opposition” is less than completely strict.

If liberty is the absence of external impediments to motion, it follows that obligation is the presence of external impediments to motion. Hobbes does not say this; that is, he does not draw out fully the definition of obligation in contradistinction to the fully drawn-out definition of liberty. This has two consequences. First, the strictly physical or material nature of liberty is more apparent than the strictly physical or material nature of

obligation. Second, the contradistinction between liberty and obligation is not completely apparent in English. It is much more apparent when the Latin roots of the words are considered. The root of liberty is *liber*, from the verb *libero*, to set free; the root of obligation is *obligatus*, derived from the verb *ligo*, to tie up. The contrast between *libero* and *ligo* is apparent, as is the contrast between being set free and being tied up. This is not to say that Hobbes's logic follows exactly the logic of the Latin roots: it does not. For Hobbes, apparently the normal condition is being free, the abnormal condition being bound; but to be set free presupposes having been tied up. But, this aside, there are two general points implicit here. First, in treating liberty and obligation Hobbes creates a framework of definitions at a high level of abstraction. This conforms to the model of reason that presents reason as human and begins with settled definitions. Whether Hobbes consistently maintains these definitions remains to be seen, but it is of interest that this is the notion of reason implicit. Second, Hobbes's method of attaining exact definitions free from ambiguity is etymological. Reason is human: words are ungrounded except in other words, but their meaning is not merely arbitrary or immediately political; rather, deference is paid to roots, a method which makes clearer and more simple words which have become burdened with ambiguity as they have changed over time and with use.

This provides the framework of Hobbes's understanding of obligation, and discloses the form of reason and method of definition implicit in it. If, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes is perfectly consistent or unambiguous, obligation must mean the presence of external impediments to motion. The protracted scholarly debate about Hobbes's understanding of obligation implies that he is neither perfectly consistent or perfectly unambiguous. But there is another implication that must be discussed before considering in detail what Hobbes means by obligation. It bears upon the question of the forms of reason. The act of defining obligation is a form of reason. It is reason proper or acquired wit, which begins with unambiguous definitions and proceeds deductively to science. But the definition of obligation also implies a form of reason, one wholly inconsistent with the form of reason inherent in the act of defining itself. Liberty and obligation as defined by Hobbes are relevant to a world of bodies in motion, which reduces to a world of motion simply, and to only that world. In this world, the only possible form of reason is natural wit or, to be less precise so that all minds may be included, natural reason. This reason is motion in the mind, present in each individual mind as images. At most, some sounds—names—are attached to individual passing images by individuals. In such a world, and given such an understanding of reason, reason proper, or acquired wit, and science are impossible.

This distinction, between the form of reason implied by defining and that implied by a given definition, is perhaps fine, but it is basic to Hobbes's argument in *Leviathan*. In the "Author's Introduction," and again in C. XXIX, Hobbes distinguishes between men as matter and men as makers, or artificers. Speaking of the causes of the dissolution of a commonwealth, he says:

. . . when they came to be dissolved, not by external violence, but intestine disorder, the fault is not in men, as they are the *matter*; but as they are the makers, and orderers of them. For men, as they become at last weary of irregular jostling, and hewing one another, and desire with all their hearts, to conform themselves into one firm and lasting edifice: so for want, both of the art of making fit laws, to square their actions by, and also of humility, and patience, to suffer the rude and cumbersome points of their present greatness to be taken off, they cannot without the help of a very able architect, be compiled into other than a crazy building, such as hardly lasting out their own time, must assuredly fall upon the heads of their posterity. (XXIX, 210)

The distinction between men as makers and men as matter parallels that between the acquired wit that leads to science and natural wit or, more generally, natural reason. More than this: Hobbes's distinctions allow us and in fact almost compel us to understand that men considered as matter possess natural reason and only natural reason, while only men who are makers possess acquired wit or reason proper. The architect has a fundamentally different form of reason than those who are to live in the house, and he uses that reason to build the house. The house is built of words, words as defined by the maker who is one of the few if not the only one who possesses the arts grounded upon words. What place have the artless? They are matter. They live in the house built of words; but can they understand the words, much less define them in the first place? How can they? They think in images, images which are ever-shifting. If they build, they build crazily, not upon the settled signification of words but upon ever-shifting images. But, can one build upon motion? The political as well as the scientific significance of the doctrine that the thought of almost all men is nothing but motion comes to light: nothing can be built upon it. Men may be removed from their natural condition, into Leviathan; but, if they possess only natural reason, they will not build Leviathan.

The natural condition of men, as of all things, is at liberty. Liberty is the absence of external impediments to motion. If men are to be removed from their natural condition, external impediments to motion must be presented. That is, men must be obliged in the strict general sense of that term as used by Hobbes. In what Warrender calls "a notable passage from the *Leviathan*," Hobbes says:⁷

A law of nature, *lex naturalis*, 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. For though they that speak of this subject, use to confound *jus*, and *lex*, *right* and *law*: yet they ought to be distinguished; because right, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear: whereas law, determineth, and bindeth to one of them: so that law, and right, differ as much, as obligation, and liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent. (XIV, 84)

Careful attention is necessary here, especially to Hobbes's language and its implications. At first glance, one of the things the passage seems to say is that a law of nature obliges. A man is forbidden by the law of nature to do that which is destructive of his life. We may think, to be forbidden is to be bound, or to have an external impediment placed in our way. But, if this is true, it is only metaphorically true. At most, a word is only metaphorically an external impediment to motion. Literally, a word is not a physical impediment to motion. It is only an impediment given the assumption of a different form of reason than that ascribed to men either as makers or as matter. To be forbidden presumes that we hear and understand the voice that forbids us. The reason implied here is the same as that reason that dictates to us. It is divine or moral reason, known to men as the voice in the soul.

This is not to deny that the passage may be interpreted to say that a law of nature obliges. It may be so interpreted; but if it is the disproportion between the form of reason implied and the strict definition of obligation goes unnoticed. Hobbes's discussion of the laws of nature implies a form of reason which is neither human nor natural. Human knowledge of the laws of nature rests upon two assumptions: first, that the laws of nature emanate from an extra-human, supernatural source; second, that human beings are capable of apprehending the voice that issues forth from that source. Hobbes's definition of obligation is the flat rejection of this understanding of things. External impediments to motion imply a world of bodies normally in motion, "obliged"—that is, bound—only when they meet with a physical or material obstacle that stops their motion. Strictly speaking, we are confused if we say that laws of nature oblige. The confusion arises because, in this passage, law appears to be either equivalent to obligation or a species of obligation, probably the species peculiar to human beings. But the laws of nature strictly understood as the voice of supernatural reason in the soul cannot oblige the beings or entities to which Hobbes's strict definition of obligation can apply. Although these beings may have minds, they do not have the kinds of minds that hear voices, or at least not

supernatural voices. Their minds see images. If they are to be obliged, they must be obliged not by laws of nature—a precept or general rule—but by images which impede motion. But even this statement is not strictly accurate, because a dominant image, or passionate thought in the mind by definition is not an external impediment to motion. If the beings that make up Hobbes's world of motion are to be obliged, they must be physically bound by some obstacle external to them. Taking Hobbes's argument on its own terms and following it exactly, the only obligation is physical obligation.

It may be objected, what of Hobbes's statement that "right consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear: whereas law, determineth, and bindeth to one of them: so that law, and right, differ as much, as obligation, and liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent"? Does not this mean that law is either equivalent to obligation or a species of it, most probably the latter?; and that right is either equivalent to liberty or a species of it, again most probably the latter? Then, are we not provided by Hobbes with a basis for saying that law and right are the species of obligation and liberty peculiar to human beings?; thus arguing, with Warrender, that there is such a thing as "moral obligation, which controls voluntary actions, as when men are bound by natural law to seek peace or keep covenants. . . ." Again, this interpretation is possible, and plausible given this single statement, but there are decisive objections to it.

First, as we have seen at length, there is no basis for it in Hobbes's general argument. Men and their minds have not been distinguished from other beings and their minds so that there is a ground for asserting that there is a kind of obligation that applies only to human beings.

Second, Hobbes's language concerning right in the statement is a subtle but decisive change from his definition of the right of nature in the passage that almost immediately precedes it. Right, says Hobbes, "consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear." The implication is that right is specifically human, since it consists of freedom of choice. Presumably among the things that may be chosen are life and death, or at least the means that probably result in one or the other. But there is no such freedom of choice implied in the definition of the right of nature, which explicitly mentions men. The right of nature is the liberty to preserve ourselves. It is not the liberty not to preserve ourselves. Not only is no freedom of choice implied; no choice at all is implied, except the choice of means to preserve ourselves. If the right of nature consisted of genuine choice, "to do, or to forbear," then human beings could choose to live or to die. But, if human beings could choose to live or to die, and thus had to weigh practically the relative goodness of life and death, none of the laws of nature stated by Hobbes

would be intelligible. The laws of nature as stated are derivatives from a more fundamental law of nature, which is unstated. That law is "Preserve yourself!" which means, "Preserve your life, which is motion." This fundamental law of nature has significance beyond the fact that it underlies the laws of nature which Hobbes does state, including the "first, and fundamental law of nature." "Preserve yourself!" is the foundation of what Hobbes terms the laws of nature because it is certain, or at least so Hobbes thinks. In that sense, the fundamental though unstated law of nature is what we have come to think of as a scientific law. In principle, it is true everywhere and always. All things governed by the law obey it automatically, without reflection or choice.

Given this interpretation, Hobbes's statement that law and right differ as much as obligation and liberty is misleading, at least as far as the law of nature and the right of nature are concerned. In their strict signification, obligation and liberty genuinely differ. To be obliged is to be restrained from moving; to be at liberty is to be unrestrained. In its basic statement, the law of nature says "Preserve yourself!" The right of nature is defined, broadly, as a condition of unrestrained motion. If it has a specifically human definition, probably that definition is, the unrestrained exercise of the means to self-preservation. Far from the law of nature and the right of nature being basically different, the right of nature is the condition for acting upon the law of nature. True, in principle they differ categorically: one is a condition, the other a command, and as such imply fundamentally different worlds. But, practically, they are perfectly complementary, especially if the fundamental law of nature is thought of not as a command from an external source but as an impulse toward the maintenance of life.⁹ The right of nature defines the condition that makes it possible to act without restraint upon that impulse. Even if the law of nature is thought of as a command, to argue that it is a species of obligation is inconsistent with one of Hobbes's most fundamental theses. To command a human being—or any other being that can hear commands—to preserve himself is not, given Hobbes's understanding of human beings and things generally, to bind or restrain him in any way. Rather, it is completely superfluous, since that is what these beings attempt to do in any case. It is precisely the certainty of the fundamental law of nature that prevents it from presenting a possible moral dilemma, and thus binding, or restricting a natural or normal tendency.¹⁰

A further comment on these relationships is necessary. Given the understanding that a law of nature is a rule followed unreflectively—that is, automatically—by all bodies in motion, the distinction between obligation and liberty disappears. All bodies behave as the law of nature says

they must behave. Normally, they move; they are bound to move; they cannot do other than move. In this understanding of a law of nature, the word "bound" means, "compelled, in the normal scheme of things." Again the command "Preserve yourself!" is superfluous. What you are—a part of a world in motion, a world undifferentiated in principle—necessitates that you obey implicitly and thus are bound by the law of nature, which is hardly more than the law of motion. Here, reason is natural reason. It binds the mind to the image of life, which is the image of unrestrained motion. The laws of nature, and especially the unstated basic law of nature, are consonant with this understanding of the world and this understanding of reason. They neither follow from fixed definitions, such as the fixed definitions that contradistinguish liberty and obligation, nor do they emanate from a supernatural source that specifically binds human beings to moral laws and thus differentiates them from all other beings. That is, the burden of Hobbes's laws of nature, as distinguished from his definition of a law of nature, rests upon not human reason—acquired wit—or divine reason, but natural reason. This doctrinal substratum gives a consistency to Hobbes's discussion, the constancy that marks *Leviathan* up until the point that the notion of specifically human laws of nature is introduced. This consistency is broken both by the introduction of a notion of reason as supernatural and extra-human, and by the acquired wit that by definition contradistinguishes obligation and liberty. In other words: the definition of a law of nature implies divine reason; obligation and liberty are defined by human reason, but imply natural reason. Thus, the definition of a law of nature is inconsistent with both the mode of defining obligation and with what is implied by the definition of obligation. But the burden of the laws of nature, and especially their basic premise—or basic command—is consistent with the form of reason—natural reason—implied by the definition of obligation. It is this basic reduction, to matter in motion and the normal tendency of matter in motion, that suggests the radical change that is occurring in Hobbes's time and continues to occur beyond his time in what is meant by a law of nature; and that provides the underlying consistency to Hobbes's view of things, if not to his explicit argument.

Dilemmas

In the passage we have been considering for some time, many things in Hobbes's thought come together. The laws of nature, and obligation, come together. Implicitly, the three notions of reason—natural, human, and divine—come together. The mixture is exceedingly complicated. Divergent understandings of the composition of the world, and of human beings, are forced together. The best that can be done is to sort them out, show

their respective bases, and indicate their inconsistency. As we have seen, the answer to the question, "Do the laws of nature oblige?" is "It depends upon what is meant by 'the laws of nature,' and what is meant by 'oblige.'" There are definitions of each of these terms, explicitly or implicitly present in *Leviathan*, that enable us to answer the question "yes" or "no." These definitions are underlain by different forms of reason, themselves in turn underlain by different understandings of the world. The situation may be sketched as follows:

<i>Form of Reason</i>	<i>Kind of Obligation</i>	<i>Understanding of Laws of Nature</i>
Divine	Duty	Moral, Specifically Human
Human	Contractual	—————
Natural	Physical Necessity	Modern Scientific

No difficulties develop as long as one of two conditions is met: first, that we stay on the same level, when considering reason or obligation or the laws of nature; second, if we theorize that the world is more complex than any one of these levels is, and that certain beings share in and reflect that complexity, that then we understand these beings as complex or compound beings. Hobbes's difficulties arise because he does not heed either of these conditions. He does not remain on a single level or defend without wavering a single thesis; and he does not consider the beings that he discusses in terms of reason, obligation, and the laws of nature to be complex or compound beings. While sometimes the implication of one or another of his statements—for example, his definition of a law of nature—implies that human beings are compound, Hobbes does not develop a theory of the soul which supports such an implication: on the contrary, he presents a theory of human beings that not only does not distinguish between qualitatively different portions of the soul—for example, a portion that hears voices as distinct from a portion that sees images—but does not even differentiate in principle between bodies and souls.¹¹

At this point, the logic of *Leviathan* has broken down. It is logically impossible to go from the natural world of men to civil society using any one of Hobbes's three notions of reason. If the thesis of natural reason is consistently maintained, a condition of other than sheerly physical obligation is impossible. If the thesis of human reason is maintained, obligation strictly understood is again sheerly physical, but obligation practically understood is wholly conventional. If the thesis of divine reason is maintained, in principle adherence to the laws of nature is perfect. This is the most perplexing situation of all, since Hobbes's understanding of the es-

sence of a law of nature—a divine command that binds moral creatures—is inconsistent with either of his divergent understandings of the content of the laws of nature—first, observed regularities in the behavior of unreflecting, non-choosing beings and, second, maxims of self-interest that conduce to self-preservation whether or not within civil society. In short, the thesis of natural reason yields no moral obligation and no civil society; the thesis of human reason, while it may produce civil society, yields no natural condition, no laws of nature, and no moral obligation; and the thesis of divine reason in theory makes civil society unnecessary, and in practice may or may not yield civil society. Our sketch may be continued as follows:

<i>Form of Reason</i>	<i>Kind of Obligation</i>	<i>Understanding of Laws of Nature</i>	<i>Condition of Men</i>
Divine	Duty	Moral, Specifically Human	(Theoretically) Perfect Harmony (Practically) Whatever Conduces to Self-Preservation; Constant Individual Reassessment of Utility of Any Given Situation
Human	Contractual	—————	In Civil Society; Consent Given and Maintained Due to Fear of Powerful Sovereign
Natural	Physical Necessity	Modern Scientific	Unorganized Beings Unreflectively Maintaining Motion

Of these three models, the middle one most closely fits the kind of human situation advocated and, to a lesser extent, presented in *Leviathan*. Reason is human. Men are divided into makers and matter. The maker defines what words mean:

Right is laid aside, either by simply renouncing it; or by transferring it to another. By *simply* renouncing; when he cares not to whom the benefit thereof redoundeth. By transferring; when he intendeth the benefit thereof to some certain person, or persons. And when a man hath in either manner abandoned, or granted away his right; then he is said to be obliged, or bound, not to hinder those, to whom such right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it: and that he *ought*, and it is his duty, not to make void that voluntary act of his own: and that such hindrance is injustice, and injury, as being *sine jure*; the right being before renounced, or transferred. (XIV, 86)

Again in this passage, the meaning of Hobbes's key terms shifts subtly. As we have seen, the right of nature is defined as a condition of unrestrained motion or, if it has a specific definition, as the unrestrained exercise of the means to self-preservation. Now, Hobbes argues that one's right can not only be renounced, but transferred. The former may be possible: one may renounce a condition of unrestrained motion, or cease the unrestrained exercise of the means of self-preservation. If one does, one is obliged not by an external impediment to motion, but rather by the fact that one has bound oneself by the act of renunciation. Thus, Hobbes contradicts the strict meaning of the term "obligation"; here, it appears that there is a specifically human—that is, moral—kind of obligation, which has nothing to do with external impediments to motion. But more than this: the latter, the transfer of a right, is impossible. One cannot give to another a condition of unrestrained motion, or the unrestrained exercise of the means to self-preservation. One can give to another means, of whatever kind; one can allow another to preserve him, with those means or others; but, if one does, then preservation is no longer self-preservation. Thus, there can be no such thing as the benefit another enjoys of the unrestrained exercise of the means to our self-preservation, much less of our condition of unrestrained motion. He now either uses those means to his own self-preservation, or he uses those means to our preservation, but not to our *self*-preservation.

Hobbes's contradiction of his own logic has two kinds of implications which concern us. The first kind involves the explicit argument of *Leviathan*. To reach his immediate conclusion, it is necessary that the argument proceed from two premises: first, that men can be obliged—that is, bound—not only by external impediments to motion, but also by their own words and deeds; second, that the right of nature, *jus naturale*, is the kind of thing which can not only be renounced but also transferred. If the right of nature can only be renounced, mutual covenanting results in a situation where some substantial number of men have divested themselves of their right. Logically, to divest themselves of their right leaves them either motionless or without self-protection. But Hobbes does not want an argument that leaves men in this condition, but rather wants one which transfers all these individual rights to a sovereign. Thus he must make it appear that the right of nature is the kind of thing which can be transferred.

The second kind of implication concerns forms of reason. Hobbes has defined obligation, liberty, and the right of nature. These definitions have served certain purposes, but they do not serve Hobbes's immediate purpose; namely, to depict men obliging themselves by renouncing their right and, apparently in practically the same breath, transferring their right to create

an absolutely powerful sovereign. The previous definitions having lost their utility, the terms in questions are redefined. This is human reason, but in a peculiar form. It continues to be men, and particularly the architect of the commonwealth, who say what words mean. But words no longer have consistent definitions, first snuffed and purged from ambiguity, from which deductions are logically drawn. Now, words are redefined so that premises lead to predetermined conclusion. Not the canons of science but the demands of politics determine the meaning of words. Human reason, at first ungrounded and thus dogmatic but at least self-consistent, now loses even its internal consistency. Human reason becomes what it is inclined to become, given the absence of all external standards including the standard of logical consistency. It becomes rhetoric, and hardly noble rhetoric.

Obligation reflects reason. This is not to say that the notion of obligation that is most politically significant in *Leviathan* exactly parallels the form of reason which is simply human. It does not. Rather, obligation reflects the weakened condition of human reason brought about by Hobbes's desire to reach certain conclusions not logically entailed by his definitions and not consistent with his basic philosophical understanding of the world.

Obligation in what appears to be the moral sense is based upon one giving one's word. Hobbes says at one point that giving one's word is not merely arbitrary and ungrounded, but that this act implies an external standard: ". . . *injury*, or *injustice*, in the controversies of the world, is somewhat like to that which in the disputations of scholars is called *absurdity*. For as it is there called an absurdity, to contradict what one maintained in the beginning: so in the world, it is called *injustice*, and inquiry, voluntarily to undo that, which from the beginning he had voluntarily done" (XIV, 86). There is not merely an obligation but a duty not to undo willfully that which one has done willfully. To do so is unjust: thus it is one's duty at least not to be unjust. This duty is based upon the principle of non-contradiction, or on the analogue in human action—voluntary action—to the principle of non-contradiction in logic. This seems to be either a principle of reason in some superhuman sense, or the close analogue in moral affairs to a superhuman principle of reason. In either case, there is an apparent ground to duty independent of passing desire or passing will. That ground is constancy as between word and subsequent word, act and subsequent act. Human obligation thus appears to be based not upon human reason, but upon divine reason. According to this argument, to be obliged is to have incurred a duty, and to be bound by the principle of consistency. One's word becomes one's bond, and one's word is stronger than desire or interest or will. Once given, a person's word is external and superior to that person.

In almost the next breath, Hobbes says of these bonds, they “have their strength, not from their own nature, for nothing is more easily broken than a man’s word, but from fear of some evil consequence upon the rupture.” On the face of things, the bond that obliges is not a man’s word, but fear. Hobbes rejects his previous argument, that the ground of obligation is superhuman, and argues now that the ground of obligation is not even human, but subhuman. But this understanding subtly changes the argument, and has profound consequences for our understanding of what is subhuman and what is superhuman. The true ground of obligation is not the internal passion fear, but the cause of the internal passion, the existence of “some coercive power, to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants, by the terror of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their covenant . . . : and such power there is none before the erection of a commonwealth” (XV, 94). The ground of obligation is that terrible thing Leviathan. Thus Hobbes returns to the strict definition of obligation. Men are obliged, not by the superhuman principle of consistency, or even by their own human words conventionally given and, by the various usual means, conventionally maintained, but by an external impediment to motion.

There is however a difference in this argument that compels us to pay close attention to what is superhuman and what is subhuman. Leviathan is the external impediment to motion, and as such impedes the motion—or liberty, or right of nature—of human beings. But the world in which Leviathan exists is not simply natural, and Leviathan is not simply subhuman. Rather, Leviathan is “to speak more reverently, . . . that *mortal god*” (XVIII, 112). Leviathan is subhuman, in that its existence creates, or re-creates, the kind of obligation that is subhuman. But Leviathan is superhuman, in that it rules over men and has been brought into being by the highest kind of reason which, for all practical purposes, Hobbes holds to exist; namely, acquired wit. In a word, Leviathan is the replacement of the divinely superhuman by the artificially superhuman through the exercise not of divine reason but of acquired wit.

What then is obligation? An answer to the question is suggested by asking the further question, how does Leviathan come into being? The answer to this question reveals the deep inconsistencies in his understanding of obligation. Men hear the voice of reason in their souls, which informs them of the laws of nature. Those laws say, first, “Preserve yourself!” and then, “the way to preserve yourself is to renounce the right of nature and submit yourself equally with other men to a common power.” Thus men are instructed to renounce the right of nature, and to bind themselves to their renunciation. But words, and especially words which entail the rejection of a possible advantage over others, are weak. To be bound by

one's word means to forego the advantage; but to give one's word and then not act on it means to gain the advantage. Individual desires and individual wills rebel against the keeping of promises which have no stronger bond than the words of the promise itself. Promises then do not bind until there is a common power to compel obedience to the promise, and thus oblige. But the common power comes into being as a result of the promise to rid oneself of the right of nature. Thus we have one horn of the dilemma: ". . . the nature of justice, consisteth in keeping of valid covenants: but the validity of covenants begins not but with the constitution of a civil power, sufficient to compel men to keep them" (XV, 94); and the other: "The only way to erect such a common power, . . . ; is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will" (XVIII, 112). The dilemma is this: men are not bound until there is a common power, but there is no common power until men bind themselves. Can men bind themselves? The various kinds of reasons answer, or do not answer, as follows. Divine reason says, be at ease, you need not bind yourself, since you are bound by the laws of nature heard in your soul; human reason says, bind yourself by adherence to your word, and keep your promise, in full knowledge that your promise is a convention and has no natural or supernatural ground or sanction; natural reason, which cannot speak, somehow conveys its message, you are free until you are bound by some external impediment to motion—stay free, for motion is life, and life is all.

Solution

Which of those voices or impulses rules? If none rules, how can there be an end to the argument? How can choices be made or possibilities eliminated?; how can human beings bind themselves or be bound to a course of action?; how can doubt and uncertainty be ended? Philosophically, there is no answer. Obligation follows reason, and in *Leviathan* reason exists in multiple forms, no one of which is shown to rule over the others. Practically, there is an answer. The practical answer rests upon the inability of Hobbes's premises to yield a philosophical answer. Were there a philosophical answer, human beings, to the extent to which they are reasoning beings, could not help but be persuaded by that answer and desire to act upon it, however improbable the success of such action. Their desire would instruct them in the possibility and the method of attaining the truth in the affairs of this world. But the order implicit in their desire would have its effect. They would gradually become philosophical beings, and the desire for wisdom would gradually replace the desire to realize their speculations in the here and now.

Thus the practical answer rests upon the replacement of the desire for

truth by the desire for success, just as a philosophical answer would rest upon the dominance of the desire for success by the desire for truth. To build Leviathan, in practice, its architect must be able to substitute one fundamental opinion for another fundamental opinion: explicitly, he must replace the opinion that the greatest good is the attainment of the unchanging truth with the opinion that the greatest good is the attainment of success in this world. This transformation of opinion becomes the task of human reason. Human reason, turning its back upon logical consistency when bothersome, aims at the creation of a mode of discourse that instills the opinion that the greatest good is the attainment of worldly success or, what amounts to the same thing, the opinion that the greatest good is the attainment of individual desire. This new mode of discourse must be of great power. It will probably be mixed, compounded of words used to influence and persuade, and images. Thus the new mode of discourse will be the mean between not divine reason and natural reason, but rather between human reason strictly, which is bound by fixed definitions, and natural reason. This new, mixed mode of discourse will aim at inculcating the opinion that the greatest good is worldly success, in other words, prudent self-indulgence. It will attain its aim when human beings are bound to a course of life in part by a belief in the truth of this opinion, and in part by that powerful thing Leviathan.

In the final analysis, then, obligation follows reason. Human beings are to be obliged in part by an external impediment to motion—Leviathan—but primarily by the words and images in their minds. These words and images will be their thought. They are to be placed in men's minds neither by divine things nor by natural things, but rather by artificial things. To be more accurate: these words and images are to be placed in men's minds by an agent—Leviathan, or its operators—that is pseudo-divine and pseudo-natural. Thus men are to be obliged by the belief inculcated in them by an elaborate new art, a form of obligation that reflects the workings of human reason in its weakened condition. But, if this elaborate new art or new rhetoric is imperfect, or until it is perfected, a less sophisticated form of obligation, that appropriate to men understood as matter simply, and not to men understood as the recipients of the kind of indoctrination engendered by the new art, will be necessary.

¹ Reference are to the chapter and page in *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

² "Endeavour" is the point of transition between being acted upon and acting. In

other words, it is the motion both of the "external" thing acting and the "internal" reaction. Cf. Richard Peters, *Hobbes*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), 86.

³ Cf. VIII, 46, where Hobbes argues: "The cause of this difference of wits, are in the passions; and the difference of passions proceedeth, partly from the different constitution of the body, and partly from different education." Attributing the passions in part to education throws into doubt the simple and direct relationship between the motion of external things and the motion of the mind. I have discussed this question at length in "Hobbes, Scepticism, and Politics" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Albany, 1973), C. X.

⁴ In this respect, *Leviathan* marks a radical departure from Hobbes's prior thought. In *The Elements of Law*, right reason is defined as reasoning "from principles that are found indubitable by experience, all deceptions of sense and equivocation of words avoided," (*EL*, I, V, 12); and science as "evidence of truth, from some beginning or principle of sense:" (*EL*, I, vi, 4). In *Leviathan*, natural wit grounded in sense, and acquired wit are decisively separated. I have discussed the evolution of Hobbes's understanding of reason in detail in "Hobbes, Scepticism, and Politics," C. V-VIII.

⁵ Elsewhere, Hobbes remarks that philosophy, which he equates with science, can exist only within commonwealths; and states again that prudence is not part of philosophy. See *Leviathan*, XLVI, 435-56.

⁶ In C. XIII, Hobbes places emphasis on prudence rather than natural wit, because he wishes to argue the natural equality of men. For a discussion of the implications of inequality in natural wit, see my "Hobbes, Scepticism, and Politics," C. X.

⁷ Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 19.

⁸ Warrender, *ibid.*, 101.

⁹ The absence of significant difference between the law of nature and the right of nature is obvious in Hobbes's explicit statement of the first law of nature. Logically, the first law of nature is this whole statement, "that every man, ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of war," since Hobbes defines a law of nature as "a precept or general rule, found out by reason," and identifies this statement in the same terms. Illogically, he divides the statement in two, calling the just portion—"seek peace"—the law of nature, the second portion—"defend yourself"—the right of nature.

¹⁰ The absence of a moral dilemma in Hobbes's positive and explicit law of nature is apparent if it is contrasted with Hooker's principal law of reason, "that the greater good is to be chosen before the less." (*Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, viii, 5).

¹¹ There are particular difficulties with *Leviathan*, relative to *The Elements of Law* and *De Cive*. In the *Elements*, Hobbes presents his natural philosophy but does not distinguish between natural wit and acquired wit. Thus, comparing the *Elements* with *Leviathan*, there are two and not three understandings of reason and obligation. In *De Cive*, Hobbes does not present his natural philosophy, and does not distinguish between natural and acquired wit. Thus, comparing *De Cive* with *Leviathan*, there can be only two and not three understandings of reason and obligation, and one pair of them, natural reason and physical obligation, is not very much in evidence due to the exclusion of the natural philosophy. The latter fact explains the tendency of A. E. Taylor, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes" in *Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Bernard H. Baumrin, (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), 35-48, and Warrender, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, to use *De Cive* in support of their theses.