

Handout 2

Compatibilism: Hobbes; Against compatibilism: Taylor

Remark 1. Numbers on the margins indicate paragraph numbers in Hobbes' text.

Remark 2. The symbols ' \square ' and ' \diamond ' stand for 'necessarily' and 'possibly', respectively.

DELIBERATION AND WILL. We begin with voluntary actions. These are actions (or outward motions) that are caused by a desire (=appetite). Every desire is a representation of ('thought of') some good or bad that will come to the agent. In this sense, every action is aimed at the agent's good, as it appears to him. We can also say, and more in line with traditional approaches (Aristotle), that voluntary actions follow a deliberation on the agent's part. But that's because deliberation is nothing but a 'succession of contrary appetites'.

Now 'voluntary' actions are those that are done 'willingly'. But what is will? It's nothing but the last desire prior to the action—i.e. the last in the succession of desires that constitutes deliberation. This, Hobbes argues, is equivalent to saying that voluntary actions are a result of the agent's choice.

So to take stock: every action that we would normally describe as such would qualify as a voluntary one. OK, but what are the involuntary actions? Elsewhere Hobbes implies that, e.g., digestion would be considered an involuntary action. Of course we don't normally describe them as 'actions' to begin with, but sometimes we do: 'He was now digesting his dinner.' (Aristotle gave examples of men pushed or carried, though this doesn't seem to be the cases Hobbes has in mind.)

FREEDOM. Hobbes defines freedom as absence of obstacles. Thus we have freedom of action—i.e. freedom of outward motion. So we can speak, in exactly the same way, of the freedom of a man and of the freedom of water.

But is there free will? Gammon, says Hobbes. Everything in the world has a cause. Now if will is just another desire (itself a form of inward motion, as he explains elsewhere), then will too is determined by its own causes, hence 'necessitated'.

HOBBS' REASONS. As for the notions of will and deliberation, we require no special proof. We need only to reflect on the common usage of words. Conveniently, he doesn't say exactly how this reflection would go.

More curious is his defence of the necessity of causal determination. First, in the dice example, he seems to say that, if only we saw well and reflected more carefully, we would see that every minute detail of every event has its own sufficient cause, always so.

But then he moves on to something else altogether. Consider:

(2-1) It will rain or it will not rain.

This, all agree, is a necessary proposition. So:

(2-2) Necessarily, it will rain or it will not rain (but not both).

Now Hobbes claims that (2-2) can't be true unless either of the conjuncts is necessarily true. Thus, in general, he argues that:

(2-3) $\square(P \vee Q) \rightarrow (\square P \vee \square Q)$.

But this is an invalid formula! Hobbes acknowledges doubts about (2-3), but professes himself unperturbed.

Question 3. Explain why (2-3) is intuitively invalid.

Remark 4. Note too that these related formulas *are* intuitively valid:

- (2-4) a. $(\square P \vee \square Q) \rightarrow \square(P \vee Q)$
 b. $\diamond(P \vee Q) \leftrightarrow (\diamond P \vee \diamond Q)$.

AGAINST SOFT DETERMINISM. Taylor calls the view we saw in Hobbes ‘soft determinism’. He isolates three elements in it: 44

- (i) All human behaviour is caused and determined.
- (ii) Free actions (inactions) are voluntary actions (inactions) performed without obstacles.
- (iii) Voluntary behaviour is caused by internal states of the agent like volitions, choices, decisions (what Hobbes called generally ‘endeavours’).

Taylor’s objection is straightforward. What of the endeavours themselves? Are they not caused? Indeed, Hobbes himself allows as much. 45

Now consider this case: suppose that some enterprising surgeon inserts electrodes in my brain and begins manipulating my endeavours (note that, according to Hobbes and soft determinism generally, we oughtn’t believe in a soul separate from the material body). Then my condition satisfies the requirements of a free agent. But am I free, really? More plausibly, I’m no more than a puppet controlled by external factors. 46

How can the debate go further? Perhaps we’re reaching an impasse. Hobbes happily concedes that there is no free will, precisely because all our endeavours are caused. But he also claims that with the freedom of action (=no-obstacles-freedom) we have all the freedom there is to have. The objector argues that this is no freedom, fake freedom really. Hobbes insists that this is how we actually think of freedom when we describe water as ‘flowing freely’ and a man ‘walking free’.

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