

3. HOBBS

As we have noted, all the major thinkers whose views we are presenting in this article (perhaps excepting Malebranche) were determinists: they held that everything that happens in the world is brought about by antecedent causes. But of these thinkers only Hobbes and Spinoza called much attention to their determinism. Hobbes not only made his commitment to what he called the 'doctrine of necessity' explicit, he flaunted it. One reason he did so may be the connection he saw between this doctrine and the metaphysical materialism he advocated - Hobbes is in fact the only materialist among our six philosophers. But his exaltation of determinism may also have been prompted by his controversy on this subject with an Arminian bishop, John Bramhall of Derry. Bramhall 'hated' (his word) determinism: he thought it morally pernicious as well as intellectually mistaken. And Hobbes was not one to sidestep a challenge.

Hobbes' determinism is quite straightforward. As a materialist he takes the only (natural) beings to be bodies, and the only (natural) actions or events to be the motions of bodies. (The qualification 'natural' is called for because Hobbes allows that God exists and acts, but appears - at least in some passages - to exempt Him from the order of nature (see *Eng. Works* I 10), even though in other passages he appears to make God a body after all (see *Lat. Works* III 560-563).) Since no motion goes on forever, every action has a beginning in time; and what begins must have a cause distinct from and antecedent to itself. In Hobbes' words, 'nothing taketh beginning from *itself*, but from the *action* of some other immediate *agent* without itself' (*Eng. Works* IV 274). That nothing begins without a cause Hobbes holds to be both necessary and self-evident. He also holds it to be necessary that if some particular *x* causes a particular *y*, then it is necessary that if *x* occurs then *y* ensues. This is what he means when he says that causes necessitate their effects and that every cause is a necessary cause.

But what does Hobbes mean by 'necessary'? Many philosophers - Leibniz for one - distinguish 'logical' from 'natural' (or 'metaphysical' from 'physical') necessity. The question is, which necessity is it that Hobbes thinks attaches to the causal relation? In one passage he defines 'necessary' as 'that which is impossible to be otherwise, or that which cannot possibly otherwise come to pass' (*Eng. Works* V 35), but this merely shifts the question to 'impossible' and 'possible,' and these modalities have the same two kinds that necessity does. The truth is that, although Hobbes does not make this distinction explicitly, it appears to be logical necessity that he takes to characterize the relation of causes to effects. For when he comes in his treatise *De corpore* to define 'cause' he says that when the cause is 'supposed to be present, it cannot be understood but that the effect is produced' (*Eng. Works* I 122). The suggestion is that a cause not followed by its effect is inconceivable, a violation of the laws not merely of nature but of logic. Hobbes' view of the causal nexus is thus the same as that of Spinoza, who holds explicitly that effects follow their causes with logical necessity.

Hobbes holds that every action has a necessary cause. It is important to note that he does not take the necessary cause of a particular action to be another particular action. He acknowledges that we may sometimes call a single particular event a cause: thus 'the last feather' may be said to break the horse's back' (*Eng. Works* IV 247). But this is really only part of the cause as a whole: the 'last cause' yet not the 'whole cause' (*Eng. Works* IV 268). For Hobbes, the 'cause simply' or the 'entire cause' (*Eng. Works* I 121-2) of any action, that which, he says, 'necessitateth and determinateth' it, 'is the sum of all things, which ... conduce and concur to the [its] production' (*Eng. Works* IV 246). Furthermore, since every member of such a 'concourse' of (partial) causes is itself 'determined to be such as it is by a like concourse of *former* causes', each of which is in its turn determined by another such concourse, and so on; and since all these causes were 'set and ordered by the eternal cause of all things, God Almighty' (*ibid.*); it follows that the entire cause of every present action is a vast series of collections of partial causes extending back to and including the original action by which God created all things. So God himself, or more precisely the will of God, though not the whole cause, is nonetheless a partial cause of everything that happens in the world.

Among the things that happen in the world for Hobbes are the actions of human beings. In his view these, like actions generally, are nothing more nor less than motions of bodies - either of human bodies taken whole or of the various material parts of which such bodies are composed. Hobbes grants that some human actions are voluntary, and that these have special properties which give them moral significance. But these too, he holds, are merely motions of or in human bodies. It must be noted that Hobbes gives the word 'action' a broad sense, assimilating it to 'event', so that not only the things an agent does, but those a patient suffers, count as actions: a man engages in an action as much when he accidentally falls from a bridge as when he deliberately jumps. It is true, however, that all of Hobbes' voluntary actions are actions in the narrower sense of performances by an agent.

The converse may hold as well, though he is not explicit on this point.

Since in Hobbes' view all actions are caused, and thus determined or necessitated, he is committed to holding that all voluntary actions are determined or necessitated. Indeed, he explicitly says that they are, on numerous occasions. What differentiates such actions from those that are involuntary or nonvoluntary is the nature of the cause that determines them. Hobbes defines voluntary actions in what sounds like the standard seventeenth-century way: they are actions which 'have beginning in the will' (*Elem. of Law*, p. 62), or which 'proceedeth from the Will' (*Eng. Works* III 48). So a voluntary action is one that has the will for its cause (that is, for its immediate or last cause: like everything else, the entire cause of a voluntary action is a concatenation of partial causes stretching back to and including the will of God). But Hobbes conceived the will in a manner very different from that of his contemporaries. According to the usual conception, will is 'rational appetite', a power belonging to man's spiritual or intellectual nature and thus distinct from feelings and emotions and from sensual desire or 'animal appetite', all of which are rooted in the body. For Hobbes, however, there is only one kind of appetite in man, and it is of a piece with that found in animals. Indeed, Hobbes recognizes only one kind of psychological phenomenon in general. All mental activities, intellectual and sensual, consist of motions, and thus are affections of the human (or animal) body or its parts; and all mental powers are powers to move or be moved.

Hobbes does draw the standard distinction, within the general class of mental phenomena, between 'cognitive' and 'motive' powers. The former yield knowledge or at least conception, whereas the latter have to do with action: Hobbes calls their exercises 'passions', but in their function they are inclinations or motives, that is, factors immediately responsible for the overt actions of men and animals. Hobbes subdivides these passions into positive and negative, according to whether they incline one towards or away from their objects; and he distinguishes several different species of passion under each head: pleasure, love, and desire or appetite on the positive side, pain, hate, and fear or aversion on the negative. One might expect to find willing among Hobbes' specific passions, but that is not how he regards it. Rather, he says, 'will' is what we call the last passion, whatever its specific nature, in a sequence of alternately-occurring passions in a process of deliberation. (Thus there is no special faculty or power of willing in Hobbes' theory, only actions thereof.) It is this last passion which terminates the process, and which immediately precedes the action (or its omission) which was the subject of the deliberation. Will therefore presupposes deliberation, as does voluntary action. Indeed, Hobbes sometimes defines voluntary action as action following deliberation. This makes a problem for him, since he admits that agents sometimes act without deliberation: one may act so suddenly that there is no time to deliberate, or with such assurance that there is no need to. Hobbes solves this problem by pointing out that even in such a case the agent is in some emotional state which causes his action, and that this state is his will, since will is the last appetite before the action, 'and here where is one only appetite, that one is the last' (*Eng. Works* IV 272). Besides which, he says, 'no action of a man can be said to be without *deliberation*, though never so sudden, because ... he [will have] had time to *deliberate* all the precedent time of his life, whether to do that kind of action or not' (*ibid.*).

Since a voluntary action is caused by a will (sc. an act of willing), it follows for Hobbes that voluntary actions are necessitated by wills: 'of *voluntary* actions', he says, 'the *will* is the *necessary* cause' (*Eng. Works* IV 274). Of course to put this accurately we should say that a voluntary action is necessitated by a long chain of partial causes of which willing to do it is only the last link. Furthermore, each of the earlier links in this chain is in turn necessitated by the links that precede it, so that acts of willing are themselves effects of necessary causes. This account of willing was anathema to Bramhall. To begin with, Bramhall, unlike Hobbes, took the will to be a special power of the mind, with its own characteristic nature and way of operating. Second, the will for Bramhall is a 'self-determining power', by which he means not only that acts of willing have no cause other than the will itself, but also that the will is not determined to act by any factors besides itself. Bramhall allows that other factors, such as 'dictates of the understanding' and 'passions and acquired habits', may influence the will to act. But, he says, 'I deny that any of these do necessitate or can necessitate the will of man by determining it physically' (*Eng. Works* V 374). He does admit that the will may be determined 'morally', as 'when some object is proposed to it with persuasive reasons and arguments to induce it to will' (*Eng. Works* V 108); and he is even willing to attribute a kind of necessity to the will's response - what he calls 'moral' or 'hypothetical' necessity. But this is not the 'absolute necessity' which is entailed by physical or natural determination, the necessity by which Hobbes, according to Bramhall, holds acts of willing to be produced. For in cases of moral necessitation, Bramhall says, the will still is able to direct its act upon a different object, or suspend it altogether; this it cannot do when the necessitation is natural. Finally, as to the relation between the act of willing and the (overt) voluntary action thereby commanded, Bramhall rejects Hobbes' claim that the former is the 'necessary cause' of the latter. But his

actual response to the claim is an *ignoratio elenchi*: he takes Hobbes to mean by ‘necessary cause’ cause that is itself necessitated (by some further, antecedent cause) rather than cause that necessitates (*Eng. Works* V 374–6). In another passage, however, Bramhall indicates that he takes this relation too to be one of merely hypothetical necessity. ‘The election of our ... will’, he writes, ‘produce[s] an hypothetical necessity, that the event be such as ... the will [hath] elected. But for as much as ... the will [might] have elected otherwise, this is far from an absolute necessity’ (*Eng. Works* V 364).

Hobbes of course had his own criticisms to make of Bramhall’s view of willing. The whole idea of moral determination, or of any necessity other than the natural (which, as noted earlier, he evidently took to be not natural in our sense but logical), Hobbes found to be unintelligible. The doctrine of the self-determining will, he charges, violates the maxim that ‘nothing taketh beginning from itself’, which entails that ‘when first a man [has] an *appetite* or *will* to something, ... the *cause* of his *will* is not the *will* itself, but *something* else not in his own disposing’ (*Eng. Works* IV 274). Besides which, he suggests, the very idea of a will capable of controlling its own operations - of producing or suspending or directing its acts of willing - is incoherent. For such a will would be a voluntary agent, and its operations voluntary performances; whereas in truth such acts ‘proceed not from but are the will: ... a man can no more say he will will, than he will will will, and so make an infinite repetition of the word will; which is absurd and insignificant’ (*Elem. of Law*, p. 63).

Despite his insistence that everything that happens is necessitated, Hobbes does not deny that there is freedom in the world. On the contrary, he explicitly affirms that human beings (as well as animals) are free agents, and that at least some of the actions of these agents are free actions. Obviously, the freedom he allows, whatever its specific nature (a problematic matter which we take up in a moment), must be logically compatible with necessity; and that it is so compatible is indeed a point he frequently stresses: ‘*Liberty*, and *necessity* are consistent’, he says in a famous passage in *Leviathan* (*Eng. Works* III 198). Hobbes was not the only thinker of his time who conceived freedom in this compatibilist way: he cites the Protestant reformers Luther and Calvin and even St. Augustine as having had the same idea (*Eng. Works* V 1–2, 298–9). But the incompatibilist conception promoted by Bramhall and other Arminians had achieved considerable currency in England. For Bramhall and company, the only true freedom was ‘freedom from necessity’, a freedom to which necessitation by antecedent causes is directly contrary. These thinkers granted the consistency of ‘freedom from constraint’ with the necessity of action; and this is what they took the compatibilist’s freedom to amount to. But they denied that this or any freedom other than freedom from necessity is adequate to ground the practice of morality and the truth of certain doctrines of the Christian religion. For example, they claimed that it would be unjust, for God or man, to punish a sinner whose sins were the product of necessary causes; and to make sinners free in any sense that failed to render their sinning unnecessary would also fail to remove the injustice of punishing them. Although Hobbes thought the chief fault of the incompatibilist’s conception of freedom was its intrinsic incoherence, he took pains to rebut this charge of the moral and religious inadequacy of his own conception, and sought to show by detailed arguments that the ‘inconveniencies’ alleged to follow from it in fact did not do so.

One main source of the incoherence Hobbes saw in the incompatibilist’s freedom concerns the locus of freedom, the precise subject of which it is or ought to be predicated. Hobbes ascribed freedom both to actions and to agents, and in the case of human beings the proper agent, the true subject of freedom, he insists, is the whole man, not his mind or some particular department thereof. For Bramhall, by contrast, the primary subjects of freedom are the will, conceived as a special faculty or power of the mind, and the volitions or acts of willing which are the exercises of this faculty. Bramhall did not scruple to ascribe freedom to whole men as well as to their wills, and to overt actions as well as to the acts of willing that produced them. But in each of these cases, he claims, the freedom of the former is derived from and subordinate to that of the latter. For, as he says, ‘all the freedom of the agent is from the freedom of the will’. Furthermore, since ‘no effect can exceed the virtue of its cause, if the action be free ..., the power or faculty to will [that action], must of necessity be more free’; and ‘if the will be determined, the [action] is likewise determined’ (*Eng. Works* V 43). But in Hobbes’ view there is no such thing as ‘the will’, conceived as a special mental faculty. And even if there were, it would simply be an improper use of the English language, he urged, to attribute freedom to it, as if this will were not a power of an agent but itself an agent in its own right - a point also made by Locke some years later. Hobbes also claimed that it is no less ‘an absurd speech’ to call an act of willing free than it is to call one voluntary (*Eng. Works* IV 240).

Apart from making it compatible with necessity, and restricting its application to whole men (or animals) and their overt actions, how does Hobbes conceive of freedom? In several texts he defines freedom (or liberty) as the absence of impediments to motion, or more specifically, as the absence of external impediments, meaning those

‘that are not contained in the nature and intrinsical quality of the agent’ (*Eng. Works* IV 273; cf. *Eng. Works* II 120 and *Eng. Works* III 196). As Hobbes notes, even inanimate beings are free by this definition, so that water, for example, ‘is said to descend *freely*, or to have *liberty* to descend by the channel of the river, because there is no impediment that way, but not across, because the banks are impediments’ (*Eng. Works* IV 273-4). But in his characterizations of the freedom of animate creatures - those which have appetites and can form opinions and thus are voluntary agents - Hobbes includes a reference to their wills, or rather their willings. Thus ‘a FREE MAN is he that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to’; and the liberty of such a man ‘consisteth in this, that he finds no stop in doing what he has the will ... to do’ (*Eng. Works* III 196). More simply, ‘a free agent is he that can do if he will, and forbear if he will’ (*Eng. Works* IV 275). It follows from this account that every action a voluntary agent actually performs is a free action, or as Hobbes puts it, that ‘all voluntary acts are free’ (he also takes the converse to be true) (*Eng. Works* V 365). For if a man wills to do something, and then actually does it, he must be able to do what he does, by the principle that what is actual is possible. And if he wills to do something, and then is prevented from doing it by some external impediment, he performs, not a voluntary action that is not free, but no action at all, and a fortiori no voluntary action.

This all seems quite straightforward; but the situation is complicated by the fact that Hobbes sometimes speaks in a quite different way about freedom, linking it with the deliberation that precedes voluntary action rather than with the impediments that may manifest themselves after deliberation has ended. ‘Of a *voluntary agent*’, Hobbes says, ‘it is all one to say, he is *free*, and to say, he hath not made an end to *deliberating*’ (*Eng. Works* IV 273); and again, ‘we retain the liberty of doing, or omitting, according to the appetite, or aversion [until] deliberation ... end[s]’ (*Eng. Works* III 48). Not only is this way of speaking about freedom different, but what is said about it may actually conflict with what is said in terms of impediments. Bramhall thought it did, and so too have some recent scholars. According to Bramhall, it follows from these two statements that ‘the same person, at the same time, [may] be free and not free’, as when ‘a man deliberates whether he shall play tennis: and at the same time the door of the tennis-court is fast locked against him’ (*Eng. Works* V 346). Bramhall’s point is that the man is free to play tennis because, with the question still under deliberation, the possibility of his doing so is open to him; but that he is not free to play because the locked door impedes his doing so. Hobbes responded to this by denying that the would-be tennis player is not free to play tennis. It is true, he says, that it is impossible for him to play, ‘yet it is no impediment to him that the door is shut, till he have a will to play; which he hath not till he hath done deliberating whether he shall play or not’ (*Eng. Works* V 352). That is, nothing actually impedes an action for Hobbes until the action has actually been started, or at least attempted or undertaken, and this happens only after deliberation has stopped and a will so to act has occurred. Hobbes’ response, however, does not dispose of Bramhall’s argument. For one thing, Hobbes cannot consistently restrict what counts as an impediment in this way, in view of other things he holds about freedom. But even if Bramhall’s example is deflected by Hobbes’ move, there are others which are not. According to A.G. Wernham, if Bramhall’s tennis-player ‘wills to play tennis and the court is not locked’, then ‘in so far as he wills to play, he is no longer free to play according as he shall will; but he is still free in so far as he is not hindered to do what he has a will to’. Wernham concludes that Hobbes must recognize two different ‘senses’ of ‘freedom’, or, as he also puts it, ‘two different kinds of freedom’. The ‘still-deliberating’ formula, Wernham claims, commits Hobbes to ‘a “two-way” freedom (to do or forbear) which excludes will ... and is abolished by it’, whereas the ‘absence-of-impediments’ formula entails ‘a “one-way” freedom which presupposes will’; and an agent may enjoy one of these freedoms and not the other, at the same time and with respect to the same action (Wernham 1965, p. 119).

It is unlikely, however, that Hobbes did recognize such different senses of ‘freedom’ (or kinds of freedom). Not only does he emphasize, in several passages, that ‘liberty’ means ‘the absence of external impediments’ ‘according to the proper signification of the word’ (*Eng. Works* III 116), or is ‘rightly defined’ in this way (*Eng. Works* IV 273); but such passages occur in the same works and in close proximity to those in which he links freedom to deliberation. In any case, a careful reading of Hobbes’ text provides no basis for the two-freedoms interpretation.

As we have noted, when Hobbes defines ‘freedom’ merely as ‘the absence of external impediments’ he is thinking of freedom as a property that may belong to any agent, even an inanimate one. When he wants to focus specifically on the freedom of a voluntary agent, however, he adds a reference to the agent’s will. For such an agent, to be free is to be able to do what one wills to do, with ‘being able to do’ understood as ‘not being prevented from doing by any external impediment’. So if *m* is a voluntary agent, and *d* is an action, then *m* is free with respect to *d* - that is, free to do *d* - if and only if *m* both wills to do *d* and is able to do *d*. Now there are, in Hobbes’

view, two different times at which a question as to *m*'s freedom with respect to *d* (or as to the freedom of *d* itself) can legitimately be raised. The one (call it *t1*) occurs while *m* is deliberating whether to do *d* or not and hence before *m* has willed either to do or not to do it. The other (*t2*) occurs after *m* has willed to do *d* but before he has actually done it (he may only have started doing it, or be trying to do it, or be set to do it, etc.). (No such question arises after *m* has done *d*, since an action already done is a fortiori one that its agent was able to do.) At both times, according to Hobbes' understanding of freedom, *m* is free to do *d* if and only if he wills to do *d* and also is able to do it; so the two cases are in that respect exactly the same. What differentiates them is that in the latter the truth value of the first conjunct of the apodosis of the conditional is already settled, and only the value of the second conjunct remains to be seen; whereas in the former case, while *m* is still deliberating, the truth of both conjuncts is open. But this is an epistemic or pragmatic difference and not one of semantics: there is no difference in the meaning of 'free' between the two cases.

As for Wernham's example, it fails to establish that Hobbes is committed to two kinds of freedom (or else contradicts himself). For Hobbes admits no sense of 'free' in which an agent is free to play tennis while deliberating whether to play, solely on the basis that the court is not locked against him; and hence there is no Hobbesian sense in which the same agent is not free after he has stopped deliberating and willed to play. What freedom requires, in the one and only way that Hobbes did understand it, is that the player will to play, as well as that there be no impediment to his playing (and the court's being locked, be it noted, is such an impediment, Hobbes' response to Bramhall notwithstanding). This point is confirmed by the fact that Hobbes often expresses his conception of freedom by saying (in effect) that *m* is free to do *d* if and only if he is able to do *d* if he wills to do it. And in a passage in *De homine* he makes the requirement of willing explicit: 'When we say someone is free to do this or that, or not to do it, this is always to be understood with this added condition: *if he will*. For to say that someone is free to do this or that whether or not he wills is to speak absurdly' (*Lat. Works* II 95).

There is also this further difference between an agent deliberating whether to do something and one who has already willed to do it - between *m* at *t1* and *m* at *t2*. In the first situation *m* may well be free, if not in two ways, then at least with respect to two contrary things: doing *d* and not doing it. For here *m* is free to do *d*, if he so wills, provided he is able to do it, and free not to do *d*, if he so wills, provided he is able not to do it. And in many cases an agent is able both to do something and not to do it (indeed it is hard to imagine a case in which someone who is able to do a thing could then fail to be able not to do it). In the second situation, by contrast, *m* is free with respect to one thing at most, since having already willed he has ruled out one or the other of doing *d* and not doing it. And indeed in every instance but one in which Hobbes speaks of the freedom of an agent who 'hath not made an end of deliberating' he characterizes it as the freedom 'to do or not to do' (*Elem. of Law*, pp. 61 and 78; *Eng. Works* III 48 [twice]; *Lat. Works* II 95: the one exception is the passage at *Eng. Works* IV 273 which prompted Bramhall's charge of inconsistency). This point no doubt explains why Hobbes says, as he does in one response to Bramhall, that a deliberating agent has *more* freedom than one who has willed something at the end of a process of deliberation. What he must mean is that such an agent has freedom with respect to more things, namely, the non-performance as well as the performance of some action (assuming the requisite will in each case).

Near the end of his treatise *Of Liberty and Necessity* Hobbes charges that 'that ordinary definition of a free agent, namely, that a free agent is that, which, when all things are present which are needful to produce the effect, can nevertheless not produce it, implies a contradiction, and is nonsense' (*Eng. Works* IV 275). Further on he says that 'the whole controversy' between himself and Bramhall turns on the question whether there is any such thing as a free agent so defined (*Eng. Works* IV 277). Bramhall had not himself given this definition in his *Discourse of Liberty and Necessity*, to which Hobbes' treatise was a reply. But in responding to Hobbes' charge he endorsed it, and called it 'the very definition which is given by the much greater part of Philosophers and Schoolmen' (*Eng. Works* V 385). Bramhall was not quite correct in this last claim: the definition was in fact first formulated by Molina, and hence is not to be found in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Still, it was widely known and repeated in the seventeenth century, having been taken over nearly verbatim by the Dutch Arminians and passed on by them to their English sympathizers, of whom Bramhall was one. The fact remains, however, that Hobbes in his treatment of freedom challenged not only the extreme libertarianism of the Molinist and Arminian sort but the whole Scholastic approach to this topic, including the more moderate position of Aquinas himself. Hobbes spends considerable time in his polemic with Bramhall attacking not merely the doctrines but the very terms and distinctions that his contemporaries had learned from Aquinas. What the purveyors of School-learning say, he exclaims, 'especially in the maintenance of free-will, when they talk of *liberty of exercise, specification, contrariety, contradiction, acts elicite and exercite*, and the like [is] but jargon, or that ... which the Scripture in

the first chaos calleth *Tohu* and *Bohu*' (*Eng. Works* V 63). Hobbes's own position may be crude, as critics have charged: a little School-learning might have improved it. But there is no doubting its originality.

