Thomas Hobbes

Introduction: (Hobbes’ Introduction is quite brief, but it is an exceptionally helpful explanation of what Hobbes plans to do in Leviathan, and rewards close reading.)

1. [Para. 1] A state or commonwealth (the thing Hobbes refers to with the term Leviathan) is analogous to what?¹

2. [Para. 1] For what is the state intended, according to Hobbes?

3. [Para. 1] What does Hobbes think the function of the soul is for a natural individual (that is, a person created by nature)? What constitutes the state’s soul?

4. [Para. 1] What in the state correspond to health, sickness, and death?

5. [Para. 1] Natural persons can be thought of as having been created by God’s fiat (“Let there be man”). What is it that creates the state?

6. [Para. 2] What are the basic theses of the first two things that Hobbes aims to show in Leviathan?

7. [Para. 3 & 4] In what sense does Hobbes think it important for the person who would understand the nature of the state to ‘read thy self’ (as opposed to reading books!). How should a person who will govern a nation interpret the dictum to ‘read thy self’?

PART ONE: Of Man
Part One of Leviathan is devoted to explaining human nature, since it natural man that makes up the matter of the state (see Introduction, paragraph 2). Hobbes is quite impressed with science and he himself worked on the physics of optics before he turned his attention to civil law & political authority in Leviathan. Hobbes is a ‘mechanist’—that is, he thinks life is nothing more than matter and motion, and all facts about humans (and the natural world) can be expressed in terms of matter and motion (see the Introduction, paragraph 1).

Chapter 3: Of the Consequence or TRAIN of Imaginations
Sections §§4-7

8. [Para. 4] After recognizing that some of our mental life is disordered or characterized by random sequences, Hobbes points out much of our thought is orderly or ‘constant’. What is it that regulates constant or ordered thought?

9. [Para. 5] What two kinds of trains of regulated thought does Hobbes think characterizes human thinking? Which kind is shared between man and other animals? What kind does Hobbes think is characteristic only of humans?

¹ Hobbes is continuing a long history in philosophy of suggesting that the state may be thought of in this analogous fashion. See, for instance, Plato’s Republic, Book II, at 368e. Much is made of the influence on Hobbes of Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian War, but two other works from the Greek world influence him as well, in particular on his method for political philosophy. Plato’s Republic is one for the analogy he draws, and another is Euclid’s treatise on plane geometry, Elements, the influence of which is evident from the start of Part One. Euclid’s geometry aims to be a deductive system, beginning with clear definitions and basic axioms, and then moving through theorems and their proofs.
10. [Para 7] What is prudence and what is its basis, according to Hobbes?\(^2\)

**Chapter 4: Of SPEECH**

**Sections §§11-13**

11. [Para.11] In what does truth consist? What lesson does Hobbes take from geometry? What is, therefore, the proper first step in political science?


**Chapter 5: Of REASON, and SCIENCE**

**Sections §§1-8; §17**

13. [Para. 1] In what does reasoning essentially consist? Notice that the essence of reasoning does not apply merely to numbers or geometrical figures. To what else does reasoning apply?\(^3\)

14. [Para. 2] What is reason as a faculty of the mind?

15. [Para. 3] Hobbes acknowledges that human capacity for reason is fallible (that is, that reason even of the ablest and most attentive is not always ‘right reason’). What does Hobbes think it necessary to do when there is controversy in the reckoning of persons? Does unanimity in the reasoning of persons guarantee that right reason has been achieved?

16. [Para. 4] What does Hobbes require for a person to know, rather than merely believe, something?

17. [Para. 5] What is the difference between error and absurdity?

18. [Para. 7] Whom does Hobbes regard most liable to absurdity? Why are these persons most liable?

19. [Para. 8] What is the first cause of absurdity, according to Hobbes?

20. [Para. 17] What distinguishes reason from sense and memory?

21. [Para. 17] What is Science and how is it dependent on reason?

**Chapter 6: Of the Interior Beginnings of Voluntary Motions, Commonly Called the PASSIONS, and the Speeches by Which They Are Expressed**

The importance of this chapter is to see that for Hobbes, in order to understand how and why a state comes about (that is, for what reasons a state will come about), we need to understand why individual persons act.\(^4\) For Hobbes, virtually all voluntary action is to be explained by reference to what the agents’ desires (or ‘passions’) are.

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\(^2\) Hobbes considers the ontological status (or the nature of the existence) of the past, present and future. Cf. his view to Hume’s.

\(^3\) Chemical analysis involves, among other things, breaking down complex substances into their constituent parts. Philosophy, especially when done in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, frequently involves something similar: conceptual analysis. Would Hobbes recognize this activity given his notion of reason?
22. What is the distinction between what Hobbes calls ‘vital’ motion and what he calls ‘animal’ motion?

23. What is the first ‘internal beginning of all voluntary motion’ for humans?

24. What is it that Hobbes refers to as ‘Endeavor’?

25. What are (and what is the distinction between) Appetite and Aversion?

26. What are Love and Hate? How is Love distinguished from Desire? And how is Hate distinguished from Aversion?

27. What are the origins of our appetites and aversions?

28. How is Hobbes’ definition of ‘contempt’ surprising?

29. In paragraph 6, Hobbes says that for a given individual, “it is impossible that all the same things should always cause in him the same appetites and aversions”. Moreover, Hobbes says, “much less can all men consent in the desire of almost any one and the same object”. While Hobbes does provide an explanation of the first point (a man’s body is in continual mutation), a CRUCIAL factor helping to explain the second is found here in paragraph 7. How does Hobbes say we should understand the terms “Good” and “Evil”? How are good and evil related to “the nature of objects themselves”?

30. In the absence of a commonwealth, how are we to understand the reference of terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’? What role does the commonwealth appear to play regarding the use of these terms when one does exist?

31. How are ‘pleasure’ and ‘displeasure’ defined?

32. No question here—notice how the definitions in the chapter from paragraph 14 on out are essentially constructed out of the six basic concepts defined up to paragraph 13. This chapter is an illustration of Hobbes’ aspiration for a method answering to the rigor of geometry.

33. How does Hobbes distinguish between ‘true religion’ and ‘superstition’?

34. How does Hobbes distinguish between ‘glory’ and ‘vain-glory’?

35. What is ‘pity’, according to Hobbes?

4 There are several important things to note here: first, Hobbes builds on his mechanistic view of life, hinted at in the book’s introduction when he says (para. 1): “Seeing that life is but a motion of limbs...”. Voluntary human action is going to be explained in mechanical terms (the interested reader can review Part One, chapters 1 & 2 for Hobbes’ mechanistic view). Second, notice Hobbes’ method, as hinted in his frequent admiration of geometry: like Euclid, he always wants to lay down clear definitions.

5 Notice in this paragraph Hobbes contrasts his view with he says is the view of “The Schools”. This is a reference to Scholastic education, the teachings of Aristotle as rendered through the Church, especially the teaching of Aquinas. Scholastic philosophy, the dominant position in the institutional teaching of his day, is a frequent target of Hobbes’ criticism.

37. [Para. 53] What is the Will, according to Hobbes? Is this conception consistent with Hobbes’ mechanistic view of human nature and action?


39. [Para. 54] Does an action that has its beginning in fear cease to be voluntary, according to Hobbes? Explain this.

40. [Para. 58] What is ‘Felicity’? What limit is there to our knowledge of felicity, according to Hobbes? [Compare Hobbes’ analysis of life here with his remarks from the Introduction.]

Chapter 10: Of POWER, WORTH, DIGNITY, HONOUR, and WORTHINESS
Sections §§1-18; §§53-54

41. [Para. 1-2] How does Hobbes define ‘power’? What two types of power are there, and what is the distinction between the two?

42. [Para. 3] What is the greatest of human powers, according to Hobbes?

43. [Para. 5-14] How does Hobbes rate the power of reputation and good looks (what Hobbes calls ‘form’) compared to the power of science? Why are they different?

44. [Para. 16] How does Hobbes construe the idea of a man’s Worth? How is this related to Hobbes’ conception of ‘power’ as explained in paragraphs 1 & 2 of this chapter?

45. [Para. 16] How, according to Hobbes, is the ‘true value’ of a man established?

46. [Para. 18] How is a person’s Worth connected to his Dignity? [How does Hobbes’ notion of dignity compare with the account of the value of dignity as Kant conceives of it?]

47. [Para. 53] How is a person’s Worthiness distinct from a person’s Worth?

48. [Para. 54] Is Worthiness a normative or prescriptive notion in Hobbes’ analysis? How is ‘Worthiness’ related to the notion of deservingness or merit? What do these latter two concepts presuppose, not presupposed by the notion of Worthiness?

Chapter 11: Of the Difference of MANNERS
All Sections

49. [Para. 1] What does Hobbes specify as is particular concern when he speaks of ‘Manners’?

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6 Hobbes uses two terms for the same thing in this context—‘original’ and ‘natural’. They are related if you recognize that ‘original’ is an adjectival form of the word ‘origin’.
50. [Para. 1] How does Hobbes contrast his notion of felicity with the notion of it that is characteristic of ‘the old moral philosophers’?

51. [Para. 1] What is the relationship between desires and being alive? [Cf. the Introduction on the analysis of life.]

52. [Para. 1] All persons desire, it seems, felicity, in Hobbes’ account, but there are differences between persons. What two things explain the differences among persons with respect to this universal desire for felicity?

53. [Para. 2] What general inclination does Hobbes claim characterizes human nature? What alone puts an end to this inclination?

54. [Para. 2] Interpretive Question: This general inclination from the previous question asserted by Hobbes in paragraph 2 often leads his present day readers to infer that Hobbes is saying that humans are never satisfied with what they have. Is this inference consistent with Hobbes’ actual explanation for the general inclination? Why or why not?

55. [Para. 3] What disposes humans to contention, enmity and war?

56. [Para. 4-5] What various things dispose humans to obey a common power? Why?

57. [Para. 6] Hobbes says that we are moved to do laudable actions because we desire praise. But whose praise matters to us?

58. [Para. 7] What factors determine how benefits bestowed from one person to another dispose the recipient to feel? Why? Does this sound plausible? [Interpretive question to ponder: Hobbes says that benefits ‘oblige’. Is this a prescriptive claim? Is it a merely descriptive claim? Is Hobbes making reference to a fundamental duty here? Is there some other possible explanation of this language consistent with his account of human nature? Cf. Hobbes’ phrase of ‘ought to be allowed’ in Chapter 13, paragraph 4; question 70 below.]

59. [Para. 9] What two options are rational for humans, according to Hobbes, if we fear oppression? (Note, these two options are distinct and, apparently, exclusive, options. See also Chapter 13, paragraph 4; question 69 below.) Oppression here is a threat to what two things in this context, according to Hobbes?

60. [Para. 16-20] Ignorance, both of causes (consequences) and of the signification (meaning) of words tends to produce what kinds of conduct in persons?

61. [Para. 21] Why does custom appear to so many adults (but not children!) to be the cause and origin of the nature of right, equity, law and justice? What allows custom to take on this function?

62. [Para. 21] Why is the doctrine of right and wrong perpetually disputed, according to Hobbes?

63. [Para 22-27] How is ignorance of ‘remote causes’ connected to natural religion and to government? [Inessential to the basic social contract view of Hobbes is his view of religion

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7 Again, given the Latin expression, this is a reference to Aristotle, and other philosophers of the Ancient period and, presumably, the Medieval moral theorists who build their moral and political theories on the ancient teleological frameworks.
Chapter 13: Of the NATURAL CONDITION of MANKIND, As Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery
All Sections

[Para. 1] Hobbes distinguishes between the faculties of body and mind. Hobbes acknowledges that there are differences between persons regarding their levels of bodily strength, but in a basic sense, there is equality. What is this basic sense of equality as to faculties of the body, (that is, equality as to strength of body)?

[Para. 2] With respect to faculties of the mind, Hobbes distinguishes between the ‘native faculties’ and mental faculties attained via education (words) and experience (prudence). What is the distribution of the native faculties of mind?

[Para. 3] What should we expect, according to Hobbes, if two persons desire the same thing which they cannot both have?

[Para. 3] What does Hobbes say, in this context, are the two principal ends for persons?

[Para. 3] What should persons who rely only upon their own powers expect with respect to goods in scarce supply?

[Para. 4] The distribution of physical and mental powers among individuals combined with the scarcity of goods relative to hope generated what attitude of persons towards others? What is rational (‘reasonable’) for individuals characterized by this attitude to do? [Cf. Chapter 11, paragraph 9; question 59 above.]

[Para. 4] Interpretive question: In what sense do you think Hobbes is using the term ‘allowed’ and ‘ought to be allowed’ in this paragraph? [Cf. Hobbes remark that ‘benefits oblige’ in Chapter 11, paragraph 7; question 58 above.]

[Para. 5] With no “power able to over-awe them” what can individuals expect? [Note: The situation in which persons have no such power will be defined as ‘the state of nature’.]

[Para. 6] What are the three principal causes of quarrel to be found in the nature of men?

[Para. 8] What are the elements of Hobbes’ definition of War? [A crucial distinction must be made here: we must distinguish between the definition of War and the (contingent) conditions that Hobbes will say characterizes a situation that satisfies the definition. Otherwise, we won’t be able to make sense of what Hobbes does in the latter part of this chapter.]

[Para. 8] Between whom is the War that is expectable in a state of nature?

[Para. 9] What conditions does Hobbes say characterizes (or is consequent to) a state of War?

8 It is common to refer to a situation in which there are as scarcity. Scarcity is a matter of degrees, but moderate scarcity is often distinguished from extreme scarcity. The former is where the shortage of goods relative to desire for them is not so great that cooperation among competing parties is impossible, while extreme scarcity is characterized by a shortage of goods relative to desire that cooperation is thought to be impossible.
A crucial move takes place here in Hobbes’ discussion. What sort of logic do you suppose Hobbes is talking about when he acknowledges the concern a reader might have when considering the trustworthiness of an “inference made from the passions”? What sort of logic do you suppose Hobbes is referring to when he suggests the reader confirm the inference “by experience”? How are these two sorts of logic connected in Hobbes’ methodological aspirations to have politics on as firm a theoretical footing as geometry?

What four pieces of evidence from experience does Hobbes offer as confirmation of his claim that the state of war is consequent to a state of nature?

What is Hobbes’ reasoning for the claim that in a state of nature there can be injustice?

What things does Hobbes identify as virtues for a state of nature?

What is a necessary condition for the existence of property (‘propriety’)?

In what lies the possibility of deliverance from the ‘ill-condition’ of the state of nature?

What, essentially, are the Laws of Nature, in Hobbes’ theory? How are they related to ‘ordered’ thinking which Hobbes describes back in Chapter Five, On REASON and SCIENCE?

Summary Question: Drawing on the assigned material from the Introduction to Chapter Thirteen, how would you explain the idea that Hobbes aims to offer a SCIENCE of POLITICS with an aspiration to geometric precision and an objectivity grounded in the world?