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Spinoza's Hobbesian Naturalism and Its Promise for a Feminist Theory of Power

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SPINOZA'S HOBBSIAN NATURALISM AND ITS PROMISE FOR A FEMINIST THEORY OF POWER

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Thomas Hobbes is an easy philosopher to hate. Hobbes built a theory of the political state that appears to deprive subjects of their power and freedom, leaving them at the mercy of a monstrously powerful sovereign. Hobbes seems to reduce human reason to a mere instrument – a means-ends calculator that allows us to reckon the best means to achieve our self-interested goals. Hobbes' understanding of human nature appears pessimistic in the extreme, suggesting that cooperation between equals is impossible without some coercive power. In a redeeming moment, he gives women dominion over children in the state of nature and argues that women are not naturally under the power of men;¹ but otherwise, Hobbes' potential for feminist theory seems fairly minimal. My aim in this paper is to unseat some of these assumptions about Hobbes by showing that much of what feminist theorists have come to celebrate in Spinoza is developed from Hobbesian conceptual resources. I will show that rather than diminish human power Hobbes, like Spinoza, tries to understand it. Hobbes' naturalism and Spinoza's development of Hobbes' naturalism is a powerful asset for feminist theorists, to the extent that we are interested in empowering women.

Empowering women has always been an important if implicit goal of much feminist philosophizing. Using various philosophical traditions and methods, feminists work to

understand and critique those social categories, norms and institutions that disempower women and others through harmful ideas of gender, sexuality and human nature. For many years feminist philosophers have identified various aspects of Descartes' dualist picture of human nature as harmful to women and have offered a variety of critiques of Descartes' mind-body dualism and the rejection of the bodily passions in favor of reason. This dualist conception of human nature set mind above body and viewed humans as essentially separate, ideally rational, independent and free beings. This picture clashed with women's lived realities and justified women's unequal treatment as associated with bodies, dependence and emotion. This dualist picture of human nature effectively excluded women.²

Recently, a group of feminist philosophers has discovered in Spinoza a fruitful source for an alternative picture of human nature.³ Spinoza developed his positive conception of human nature in opposition to that of Descartes. Where Descartes' subject is essentially mind, Spinoza's is part of nature, and is therefore necessarily affected by the forces of nature impinging upon it. Spinoza's positive conception of the human individual forms the basis of his naturalistic social theory that not only explains individuals' strong attachments to norms and identities that are potentially disempowering, but also provides counsel for reforming these norms and identities through the reform of the affects and

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¹ Thomas Hobbes in Edwin Curley, (ed.) *Leviathan*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), L.II.xx, 128-9.

² Scheman (2001), Jaggar (1983), Lloyd (1984). Although I agree that this is a bad picture of human nature, I do not necessarily think it applies to Descartes, but this is a subject for another paper.

³ This group includes Moira Gatens, Genevieve Lloyd, Heidi Ravven, Hasana Sharp, and Susan James.

imagination.⁴ Feminist philosophers have shown that Spinoza's integrated naturalistic understanding of human individuals and the trans-individual character of emotions explains how the power of an individual is increased or decreased by the community of affects in which an individual lives. However, the aspects of Spinoza's theory which feminists have found so useful for projects of empowerment are in fact the notions he developed from Hobbes.

Because of centuries of misconceptions about Hobbes as a normative egoist, understanding humans to be uniquely motivated by their self-interest, we have missed important aspects of Hobbes' conception of the human emotions.⁵ When Hobbes' contribution is recognized as the foundation of the mature Spinozan picture of the human individual we can make better sense of how the affects can conflict within individuals and how the internal emotional scales can be tipped in favor of those affects which increase our power. Hobbes provides not only the basis for Spinoza's conception of the human individual, but his conception of the internal conflict of the affects adds to Spinoza's mature affect theory a *mechanism* for understanding and overcoming the difficulty of affective change.

Spinoza's view suggests affective change is needed for any social change, and that affective change cannot be achieved without understanding the body. Social categories, norms and practices gain their power through individuals' affective attachment to them. If we want to reform one of these categories, norms or practices, we need to understand the affects that support them and then to fight these affects. A dualist might say – if these norms and categories are really bad, let's

critique them and show that they are contrary to reason. However, Spinoza and Hobbes argue that this is not possible. Reason is relatively powerless when it comes to the affects – alone, reason cannot unseat the affects.⁶ The affective inertia of the social norms through which we have come to understand ourselves cannot be overcome by critique or reason alone. Affects, Spinoza writes, must be fought with affects. But how? One promising possibility is the mechanism of the internal 'weighing' of the affects suggested by Hobbes.

When we see Hobbes through the lens of his theory of the emotions and what Spinoza built from these Hobbesian foundations, we can begin to see a new Hobbes, one who cannot be accused of 'normative egoism' or of a necessarily pessimistic conception of human nature. Hobbes, like Spinoza, understood humans as part of nature, and as the building blocks of the state. To understand how to create a legitimate and stable state, both believed one must first understand the parts that make it up – individual humans and their emotions. Hobbes and Spinoza developed models of human nature in order to understand how to create a strong state where the law could be most effectively enforced. Although the idea of a 'strong state' and ensuring obedience to the law may seem hopelessly out of date and conservative at best, I will show that for at least a subset of laws, namely those that aim to empower women and those which prohibit customs and practices which are harmful to women, feminists need to understand what can make these laws more effective. When we properly understand the Hobbesian foundation of Spinoza's naturalistic picture of the human individual and the state, then we can develop effective tools for contemporary feminist projects of empowerment.

TWO SENSES OF NATURAL

I have thus far proposed that feminist philosophers have found Spinoza's theory of the affects and his conception of human power useful to the extent that it conforms to the naturalistic

⁴ In this paper I will use the term 'affects' and 'emotions' interchangeably. The term affect is a technical term for Spinoza, who distinguishes active and passive affects in Book 3 of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Here, what is important is that emotions, on the view of Spinoza and Hobbes, are caused by external forces affecting our bodies, thus they are called 'affects'. Hobbes occasionally calls them 'perturbations' or 'emotions', internal motions.

⁵ Sharon Lloyd argues that Hobbes cannot be conceived as a normative egoist, though not for the reasons I suggest. S.A. Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes' Leviathan*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics* in Shirley, (ed.) *Complete Works*. (Indianapolis: Cambridge University Press, 2002), E4P7, 325-326.

approach he shares with Hobbes. However, there are doubtless many readers for whom 'naturalism' is nothing to be particularly excited about, but rather a term that has worryingly normative and exclusionary implications. I will take a moment to explain the sense of naturalism which characterizes Spinoza and Hobbes' philosophies for the sake of clarification, but also because doing so illuminates an important motivation of Hobbes' work. There are two senses of 'natural' that I would like to distinguish.

NATURAL₁

This first sense of 'natural' is the one in which humans are understood as naturally sociable or in Aristotle's terms, '*zoon politikon*'.⁷ This conception of humans as naturally social supports the view society is natural; that is, that social customs, hierarchy and inequality in the family are 'natural'. Hobbes wrote explicitly to challenge this normative conception of humans as 'natural'.

NATURAL₂

This is metaphysical naturalism or materialism, which Hobbes supported. Hobbes explained human action, science, causes and politics in terms of matter and motion. This is the sense of natural which Hobbes employs to explain the political state through its component parts, individual humans, who themselves are natural beings made of matter and motions and who are affected by the motions of matter of other humans and of other parts of the natural world.

Hobbes wrote to undermine the Natural₁ and to investigate Natural₂. Hobbes believed that if he explained the social world in terms of naturalism₂ he could destroy the illusions of naturalism₁. Hobbes argued against the view that humans were sociable not because he thought humans necessarily 'evil' or 'bad' or somehow unfit for society. Rather, Hobbes believed that humans can be both incredibly useful to one another or they can be vicious. He wrote that humans could be gods or wolves to one another,

⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* in Bernard Gert (Ed.), *Man and Citizen (De Cive and De Homine)*. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), D.Cv.,Li, 110.

helps or harms, depending on the circumstances.⁸ Human emotions can lead both to love and to hate. The emotions, which Hobbes called alternately perturbations and internal motions, are natural forces.⁹ They can draw humans into society and they can lead them to destroy it.

By critiquing this first sense of natural with respect to human society, Hobbes opens up the possibility of challenging those customs and hierarchies that could not otherwise be questioned. Against this feudal picture of united peoples justly and hierarchically ordered by God, Hobbes proposes that humans are naturally₂ equal beings with equal 'natural_[2] right' to everything.¹⁰ Aristotle's picture of a world where some naturally lead and others naturally serve was a truism of the political theories that Hobbes sought to undermine. Recent attempts by political theorists to resurrect Aristotelian politics ignore the meaning that Aristotelian political theory had in the 17th century. In Hobbes' time, Aristotelians argued that political societies were natural₁: peoples were naturally₁ united, benevolent and sociable. Even slavery (within the family and without) was a natural₁ feature of human life. For Hobbes, all so-called natural₁ hierarchies were the result of social conventions. Social conventions, slavery, inequality in the family and in social status are propped up by an artificial power.

For Hobbes, the Reformation and the bloody wars of religion that followed served as a *reductio* of such Aristotelian faith in human sociability, benevolence, and natural₁ hierarchy. The historian Christopher Hill has called the period of the English Civil war one in which the world was 'turned upside down'.¹¹ Religious, economic and status hierarchies were challenged in bloody battles throughout the wars of religion,

⁸ Hobbes, D.Cv., Dedication, 89.

⁹ Hobbes, *De corpore politico, or, The elements of law, moral and politick with discourses upon severall heads, as of the law of nature, oathes and covenants, several kinds of government : with the changes and revolutions of them.*

(London: Printed by T.R. for J. Ridley, 1652), Chapter XXV.13.

¹⁰ Hobbes, L.I.xiii.[1-3], 110-111.

¹¹ Christopher Hill, *World Turned Upside Down: radical ideas during the English Revolution*. (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

the peasants' wars, and the English Civil war.¹² Martin Luther's critique of the legitimacy of Church hierarchy opened up questions of the legitimacy of hierarchy of all kinds. Peasants reading the Bible for the first time in their vernacular argued that the priesthood was universal. The Levellers in England argued for universal suffrage, the Diggers for common ownership of land. Even though the peasants were massacred and the English crown eventually restored, the idea that traditional hierarchies were sufficiently natural so as to need no justification was no longer tenable. For Hobbes, a new political theory of the foundations and legitimacy of the state was necessary.

The destructive wars caused by religious division proved, for Hobbes, that humans are not naturally sociable. The emotions that yield sociability in some circumstances – for example, love and devotion – can also lead to divisions and war in other circumstances. The wars of religion also taught Hobbes the important lesson of security. Once the bonds of society and politics were broken all hell seemed to break loose. Within the midst of a violent and chaotic situation nothing can really be done – no academic research, no long-term projects, no real industry. When one cannot count on the stability of the state, only the barest form of life and survival from moment-to-moment is possible. Life in such a state is 'nasty, brutish, and short'.¹³ So, whatever form the new state would take, it would need to be secured and stable in order to allow any sort of flourishing.

Hobbes, as a proponent of the New Science and the geometric method, believed that in order to really understand something, one needed to understand its parts and their manner of organization.¹⁴ For Hobbes, the parts of the state were the human individuals within it; their manner of organization determined by their 'motions', that is, their 'emotions' or 'perturbations'. Hobbes sought to understand humans as natural₂ beings; that is as bodies, affected by other bodies,

whose behavior could be understood by understanding the internal and external motions by which they are affected. We can understand humans in terms of the emotions, those internal motions that govern their conduct, and by understanding the effects of external bodies on those internal motions. Hobbes builds his entire political theory on this naturalistic understanding of human beings. Instead of assuming that humans are naturally sociable and that hierarchical divisions between them are necessary, Hobbes believed that the only sure way to build a secure state was by building it up from its component parts – the individuals within it – assuming no natural connections or hierarchies. Hobbes' great achievement in political theory was building from this naturalistic₂ basis, from mere human individuals and their emotions, desires, and a bit of reason, a state that would secure them all.

THE MULTITUDE

Hobbes' political philosophy began not with an already-organized and allied society of families, classes and social statuses, but with a multitude of individuals.¹⁵ Unlike Locke, for whom hierarchies of class and sex are natural and so exist in his pre-political state of nature, Hobbes proposed that all inequality was a result of political agreement, convention. In the state of nature, each individual was relatively equal in intelligence and power. In this multitude of individuals, each follows his or her appetites. From this minimal set of assumptions, with no requirement that the individuals involved share similar interests, social, ethnic or familial ties, Hobbes shows that the multitude can come to an agreement to bind them all in a stable and secure political society. The individuals who come to contract together and join in a civil state do not have to share the same race, ethnicity or religion. They do not have to be pre-organized in families or tribes, they are just relatively equal individuals, who try to do what they judge is in their best interest, and which will satisfy their appetites. From this multitude of separate, relatively independent individuals seeking their

¹² Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History*. (New York, Viking, 2004); Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714*. (London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

¹³ Hobbes, D.Cv. I.i.13, 118.

¹⁴ Hobbes, D.Cv., Dedication, 91; *Leviathan*, L.I.v.[6-8]), 24.

¹⁵ Hobbes, D.Cv. II.vi.1, 174.

own preservation, Hobbes argues that we can build a strong and stable political state.

Although it was revolutionary in the 17th century, Hobbes' conception of human nature was taken up by Liberal political theorists in the 18th and 19th centuries to exclude women and to deny the legitimacy of strong social institutions and to exclude those who were not 'independent' or equal from participation in political life.¹⁶ Feminist theorists have been the most persistent critics of the liberal conception of human nature. The classic account of the feminist critique of the liberal conception of human nature and its relation to liberal political theory is Alison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*.¹⁷ Jaggar argued persuasively that the liberal conception of human nature, including its supposedly Hobbesian provision that individuals are normative egoists, determines the limited conception of political obligation of liberal theory. If individual humans can only be obliged to do those things in their self-interest, then the list of duties to others is going to be fairly minimal. Jaggar argues that this 'thin' conception of human nature engenders skepticism about social obligations. Iris Young seconds Jaggar's assessment that the liberal conception of human nature is inadequate for political theory and for projects of empowerment, since it poorly describes individual behavior, it is normatively inadequate and misleading; thus, it hampers our social imagination.¹⁸ Young argues that 'bad' social ontology, particularly social atomism and methodological individualism as practiced by distributive (sometimes identified as aggregative) democratic theorists, masks the importance of social group and other social relations which impinge upon individuals in ways that are important and relevant for claims of justice. Young writes,

The social ontology underlying many contemporary theories of justice is methodologically individualist or atomist. It presumes that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. This individualist social ontology usually goes together with a normative conception of the self as independent. The authentic self is autonomous, unified, free, and self-made, apart from history and affiliation, choosing its life plan for itself.¹⁹

Such theorists, according to Young, are in the grip of a false picture of human nature and social life, where individuals are seen as separate, rational, and with a certain share of goods. This conception of the human individual as separate, independent, ideally rational (and consequently impartial), motivated by the self-interested accumulation of goods underwrites aggregative democracy theorists' methodological individualism and exclusive focus on distribution of goods as matters of justice. Because of their narrow conception of human nature, liberal theorists then cannot accept social groups in their ontology and cannot countenance the important effects of social norms on individual behavior.²⁰

Thus, we are trained as feminist theorists to treat with suspicion any conception of human nature, which appears to make individuals separate, independent, self-interested and equal. I agree wholeheartedly that the conception of human nature as developed by Liberals in the 18th and 19th century is too thin to support the kind of social obligations and institutions that any decent society requires. However, I want to distinguish Hobbes' conception of human nature from that of later theorists, since Hobbes gives us a richer account of human motivation than views of him as a normative egoist would suggest.

AGAINST NORMATIVE EGOISM

I began this paper noting that Hobbes is a somewhat hated figure in the history of philosophy. He is hated most vehemently not for his advocacy of a strong sovereign, but primarily

¹⁶ MacPherson, C.B. *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 and Den Uyl, Douglas and Stuart Warner, "Liberalism and Hobbes and Spinoza." *Studia Spinozana Volume 3: Spinoza and Hobbes*. (Alling: Walther & Walther Verlag, 1987).

¹⁷ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. (Rowman and Littlefield, 1988).

¹⁸ Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 228.

¹⁹ *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 45.

²⁰ Amartya Sen, "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4. (Summer, 1977), 336, 342.

for the position in ethics known as 'Hobbesian' or normative egoism.²¹ 'Normative Egoism' is the principle that whatever we believe to be in our self-interest is justified. It is usually joined to the corollary: only that which is in an individual's self interest is obligatory. To be a normative egoist requires accepting the following two propositions:

- 1) that humans strive to do whatever they think will preserve themselves,
- 2) that this is the best way to act.

Although Hobbes affirms 1), he argues explicitly against 2). Hobbes believes that the best way for people to act is according to 'right reason'; however, he writes that there are any number of perturbations which can cloud right reason.²² Hobbes and Spinoza share this view that humans strive to preserve themselves. The power or characteristic motion with which individuals preserve themselves is understood as 'conatus' for both Hobbes and Spinoza. However, neither thinks that individuals striving alone following their appetites are preserving themselves in the best way. Unlike liberal or libertarian theorists who argue that individuals following only their self interest yields the best possible outcome for the collective, Hobbes thought that each individual following their desires characterizes the state of nature where life would be nasty, brutish, and short.²³ The state of nature, for Hobbes, is the worst possible state for human beings.²⁴ Only by leaving the state of nature and giving up their right to judge what was best for them and to do what they thought best, could individuals gain the security necessary for any kind of flourishing life.

Hobbes is no liberal, nor does he take humans to be ideally rational; however, his conception of human nature and his conception

of political obligation are based on a similar picture of humans as naturally₂ separate and seeking self-preservation (indeed, the liberal conception of self-interest is derived from Hobbes' and Grotius' formulation of the principle of self-preservation). Hobbes does not believe that social groups are natural and so his theory would appear to number among those Young finds useless for any feminist empowerment project. However, even though Hobbes argues against the naturalness of social groups, he can account for the power of social norms and obligations on individuals through his theory of the emotions.

Hobbes' formulation of his theory of the contract, where unattached, separate individuals, individually judge what is best for them, was a radical alternative to naturalized social hierarchies in his own time.²⁵ His account offers on the one hand a critique of Aristotelian-feudal ideas of a natural hierarchy of classes and persons such that men justly ruled women, nobles justly ruled peasants, etc; on the other hand, a critique of those skeptics who argued that there could be no possible just political order, given the bloody-minded and anti-social nature of human beings.

Hobbes' account focuses on individual human 'power' – a notion that is lost in later liberal theories. Hobbes' theoretical connection of legitimacy and power makes his account incredibly valuable for any empowerment project, particularly one trying to understand the power of social emotions on individuals. Despite its apparent emaciation or thinness, Hobbes' subject creates the foundations of a robust theory of human power and human emotions. Hobbes reconstructs the problem of political stability as a problem of the organization of the multitude of individuals that make up the state, particularly the organization of their emotions. From this essential Hobbesian foundation Spinoza will

²¹ C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1962.); Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983).

²² Hobbes, *De Homine*, xii, 55-56.

²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.xiii [9], 76.

²⁴ Edwin Curley, "I durst not write so boldly," in *Hobbes e Spinoza: scienza e politica*. Daniela Bostrenghi, (ed.), (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1992).

²⁵ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume Two: The Age of Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978; Q. Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); U. Goldenbaum, "Sovereignty and Obedience," in Desmond Clarke and Catherine Wilson, (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

build a theory of human empowerment which will take as basic the idea that social forces (which act on individuals through their emotions) can increase and decrease individuals power, depending on whether they are active or passive, based on joy or sadness, respectively.

Because Hobbes' 'thin' conception of human nature has been taken up by liberals and then by rational choice theorists for relatively nefarious purposes, we completely lose the context of Hobbes' original formulation. From the meager foundation of equal individuals desiring things and trying to obtain what they want (whatever that may be), without assuming people were naturally good or evil, Hobbes argued that we could derive the basis of a stable state. Although Hobbes' conception of human nature has been called 'thin', it was not without content. Hobbes conceives the human individual as passionate, endowed both with an ability to find the best means to obtaining its individual needs and desires (reason) and also an ability to critique and to evaluate these needs and desires (right reason).

Hobbes' exploration of the ways that individuals' passions and desires shape their actions was systematic, taking individuals and their passions to be made up of matter and motions, and as such was of enormous importance to Spinoza. If state stability depended on the organization of the passions of the individuals within it, then the passions of those individuals must be understood. Hobbes' conception of human nature seems quite 'thin', assuming very little about human sociability, or human psychology. While feminists' have long critiqued this notion of a theoretically thin liberal subject, Hobbes' conception of human nature offers something valuable to the project of empowerment. The simplicity of his account masks his insights into human emotions and their role in motivating individual human actions on the one hand and coordinating the actions of a multitude of individuals on the other.

THE HOBBSIAN INDIVIDUAL

Although Spinoza's theory of the human affects have been celebrated, philosophers whose primary interest is in Spinoza's development of

this naturalistic view occasionally note his debt to Hobbes, but rarely explore Hobbes' theory of the emotions and the human individual in detail.²⁶ Moreover, persistent misreading of Hobbes as a normative egoist and as one of the fathers of the thin 'liberal conception of human' have blocked attempts to understand Hobbes' real contribution to a naturalistic conception of human nature. Hobbes' and Spinoza's shared naturalism meant that instead of deriding human emotions and heaping criticism on the body, they would try to understand the body and its emotions as part of the natural world.

In what follows I will offer an interpretation of Hobbes' contribution: his conception of what I will call the 'affective machine'.²⁷ Hobbes was the first philosopher in modern times to propose a fully corporeal or materialist conception of human beings. Before Spinoza, Hobbes was a vocal and public critic of Descartes' dualism. Hobbes aimed to explain human individuals both as physical bodies and as the components of the civil state.

Hobbes proposed a conception of the human individual as a being with a kind of internal scale, on which appetite and aversion are weighed. For Hobbes, the human (and animal) body is an affective machine moving alternately towards and away from those things we desire or fear.²⁸ For every potential action, consciously or unconsciously, the affective-emotional stakes are internally weighed. If appetite outweighs aversion, the act is completed. If aversion outweighs appetite, the action is omitted or avoided. Hobbes defines this internal weighing of appetite and aversion as 'deliberation'.²⁹

As we venture into the world following our strongest affects, we gain experience. Through this affective experience we learn which of our appetites and aversion lead us to felicitous

²⁶ An important exception to this is Susan James' *Passion and Action: emotions in 17th century philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

²⁷ Those familiar with Deleuze and Guattari's 'desiring machine' idea will note parallels to Hobbes' affect-machine. Deleuze's work on Spinoza and Freud yield his conception of the desiring machine presented in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

²⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.vi, 27-28.

²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, LI.vi [49], 33.

outcomes. Whichever one wins out, appetite or aversion, Hobbes defines as an individual's will.³⁰ Rejecting and deflating the Aristotelian notion of the will as 'rational appetite', Hobbes' will is *merely* the last appetite that tipped the scales toward action; it is shared by humans and other beasts.³¹ This scale tips sometimes towards, and sometimes against 'reason'.³²

Hobbes even understands reason naturalistically and mechanistically, as a kind of subroutine within the affective or 'emotional' machine. Affects provide a short-hand guide to what ends serve the individual best, though they may be unreliable. Over time, the individual learns about what is actually better or worse for them.³³ Given a specific end, reason suggests the best means to follow, and can be understood as a kind of program which inputs ends and outputs means. *Right* reason is a constraint on the reason program, that after sufficient experience, suggests better ends for the individual. Hobbes understands *right reason* as what is *actually* best for us, rather than just what we feel is better. Right reason is best understood as an 'end-evaluator'; one that becomes better over time, given the experience of the individual. Spinoza takes up Hobbes' view of the role of reason as strengthened through experience and as reliant on the affects.

From his affect-machine view of human individuals, Hobbes builds a political theory and argues for a conception of sovereign power strong enough to coordinate these affect-machines. When we understand Hobbes' notion of the individual as continually moved by a process of internal weighing of appetite and aversion we can understand Hobbes' state of nature and his conception of the sovereign properly.

THE STATE OF NATURE

Writing in the wake of the 16th century wars of religion and in the midst of the English Civil War, Hobbes understood first-hand how

religious division could cause violence and undermine the social and political order. He worried that the Aristotelian basis of the political state, the so-called natural sociability of humans, could no longer be counted upon as a firm foundation for political stability. The many and conflicting sources of value that had previously determined individual behavior – religion, social hierarchies, political institutions – were no longer aligned. The stability of the feudal hierarchies in which duty to God could be satisfied without conflicting with one's social or political duties had been dissolved by the wars of religion on the Continent and the Civil War in England. To ensure stability and avoid war, Hobbes argued that these separate sources of norms and values had to be organized under one single power, the sovereign. Thus, ensuring the stability of the sovereign was the primary responsibility of political theory. For this task, Hobbes argues we need to understand the parts that make up the state, to wit, the individuals within it. To understand politics, we need to understand the multitude of individuals, their power, their emotions, what motivates them and what leads them astray. The strong state is one in which the power of this multitude can be oriented toward the ends of the state, freed from the multifarious fears of the state of nature.

The Hobbesian conception of the state of nature is a state without natural connections, where individuals live in mutual fear of one another.³⁴ Hobbes argues that that this fear arises from their natural equality, and their equal right to preserve themselves.³⁵ Each individual in the state of nature has the right to do whatever is in their power and whatever they judge necessary to preserve their lives.³⁶ This equal natural right that each individual has to whatever will preserve their lives, and their equal strength in mind and body³⁷ do not lead to peace, but rather are the causes of this war.

Life in Hobbes' state of nature is famously "fierce, short-lived, poor, nasty, and destroyed of all that Pleasure, and Beauty of life."³⁸ But

³⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.xiv, [49-53], 33.

³¹ Hobbes argues against the Scholastic understanding of the will as 'rational appetite' in *Leviathan*, L.I.vi, [53], 33.

³² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.vi, [53], 33.

³³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.v.[1-2], 22.

³⁴ Hobbes, D.Cv.I.i.2, 113.

³⁵ Hobbes, D.Cv. I.i.2-3, 113-114.

³⁶ Hobbes, D.Cv I.i.7-8, 115-116.

³⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.xviii.[1], 74.

³⁸ Hobbes, D.Cv.I.i.13, 118.

why is it so? For Hobbes, the state of nature is an emotionally challenging position for the fragile human affect-machine. As each individual attempts to deliberate, weighing their desires against their fears, acting on whatever tips the internal scales one way or another, the state of nature presents a calculation problem that is particularly difficult. In the state of nature, individuals do not have coordinated affects. They each feel and desire according to their internal weighing of appetite and aversion. The unique experiences of each individual create habits, affective subroutines, even rational subroutines, which are in principle different for each. Every individual has reason to fear each of the others in the state of nature. Each individual's internal processes of weighing alternatives is bound to try to weigh the potential danger of each and every other individual for each move one wishes to make. Jean Hampton has famously argued that Hobbes' state of nature is akin to a multiple-iteration prisoners' dilemma.³⁹ In fact, the problem of action is much more difficult for the denizens Hobbes' state of nature. The calculations are much more complicated, and involve the potential actions of not just one but all the other individuals in the same anarchic state. The decision problem the individual in the state of nature faces is much more like a 'travelling salesman' problem than a prisoners' dilemma. Even, and perhaps, especially the agent who has more information has little room for making a rational decision.⁴⁰ When one has to take into consideration fear of all the other individuals in the state of nature, the calculations of appetite and aversion become overwhelming and uncertain. In brief, the state of nature throws the internal scales of the individual out of balance, leaving the will effectively paralyzed.

For Hobbes, the uncertainty of such arrangements is enough to undermine them. The reasonable fear of all which characterizes the state of nature overwhelms the individuals' internal affective scales. For each appetite, the

individual has to weigh the fear of the other individuals in the state of nature. This fear of other equal individuals acts as a constant pressure on the individual. For each action the individual contemplates, they must fear the incursion of the multitude of others whose desires may overlap. Such a calculation is impossible, so the individual will either be paralyzed or choose non-optimally. There is no upper boundary to this fear of what others might do, what others might want. Reason cannot calculate the best decision. Thus, Hobbes argues, reason teaches us to leave the state of nature as soon as possible.⁴¹

No decision made in this state can lead to an individuals' best or to felicitous conditions other than the collective decision to leave it. The 'fear of all' leads to violence or inability to use one's power and right to preserve themselves. Flourishing is impossible in a situation where one has reason to fear that nothing one accomplishes will last. Because living in a state of nature where one has reason to fear all is untenable, Hobbes believes that dissatisfaction with the state of nature will lead individuals to give up their right and equality in order to find peace in the civil state. To do so, he argues they must contract among one another to give their power and will over to the sovereign.⁴² This much is familiar. However, let us return to the image of the Hobbesian individual's internal scale.

Joining the civil state with such a powerful sovereign is, for Hobbes, a way to realign the emotions, to recalibrate the internal emotional scales. No longer does the individual in the civil state have to fear every individual around them. The fear that binds them together with the other individuals is the fear of the sovereign and the fear of breaking the sovereign's law. The sovereign must make its laws good and well known,⁴³ but above all enforced with a power to keep the multitude in check. Entering the civil state, individuals trade an overwhelming and uncertain fear of all for a fear of a much more manageable sort. One can fear the sovereign and still organize a life plan. No such planning is possible in the state of nature.

³⁹ Jean Hampton, *Hobbes And The Social Contract Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ Paul Weirich, *Realistic Decision Theory: Rules for Nonideal Agents in Nonideal Circumstances*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 128-130.

⁴¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.xiv [4-7], 80.

⁴² Emphasis mine. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.I.xiv [4-7], 80-81.

⁴³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, L.II.xxvi [3-4], 173.

THE SOVEREIGN

The picture of Hobbes' individual as an 'affective-machine' can also help us understand the role of the sovereign in the civil state. Because the internal affective scales of the individual are tipped by stronger affects, the legislator or sovereign must understand human appetites in order to design penalties for the law which are strong enough to 'tip the scales' for each individual in favor of following the law. Hobbes writes,

"For the end of punishment is not to compel the will of man, but to **fashion** it, and to make it such as he would have it who hath set the penalty. And deliberation is nothing else but **a weighing**, as it were in **scales**, the conveniences and inconveniences of the deed we are attempting; where that which is **more weighty**, doth necessarily according to its **inclination prevail** within us. If therefore the legislator doth set less penalty on a crime, than will make our aversion more considerable with us than our appetite, that excess of appetite above the fear of punishment, whereby sin is committed, is to be attributed to the legislator, that is to say, to the supreme power."⁴⁴

The civil state frees the individual from the paralyzing fear of uncertainty. The civil state creates security, in that the individuals in the civil state no longer have one another to fear. They must fear the sovereign. However, Hobbes makes it clear that what they need to fear in the civil state is much less onerous than their fear in the state of nature.

By reevaluating Hobbes' conception of human nature and his political theory through the lens of his theory of emotions and what Spinoza develops from Hobbes, we can make better sense of the role of fear in the state of nature, and the reformed role of fear in the state. Hobbes' sovereign delivers the multitude from an intractable and overwhelming fear of others. As soon as they join together and have a common power above them, these individuals are no longer enemies but fellow citizens, living together in a peaceful commonwealth, guaranteed by the overwhelming power of the sovereign, a power necessary to guarantee the security of the law.

⁴⁴ Hobbes, D.Cv.II.xiii, 16, 269.

Hobbes' conception of the role of corrective fear also provides a mechanism for Spinoza's idea that a harmful 'affect' must be fought with an equal and opposite affect. Although Spinoza developed Hobbes' notion of the conatus more fully,⁴⁵ both understand the conatus as the source of individual motivation to explore the world, as connected to the individuals' appetites and aversions, and as capable of becoming more coherently organized, and thus more powerful. The power of an individual is increased through experience of the world. Experience of the world is affective; one learns from interactions with the world what yields pain and pleasure, which desires are frustrated and which are not.

We seek what we feel is best, and over time, we get better at predicting what will make us feel better. Both Hobbes and Spinoza agree that there is an important distinction between what we feel 'preserves us' and what preserves us in the best way.⁴⁶ Sometimes we may need to change an affect that is bad for us. Hobbes' conception of the individual as an affect-machine shows how changing an existing affect or affective subroutine requires an 'equal and opposite' affective force to tip the internal scales. Further, Hobbes' political theory shows how the state can provide the mechanism for such 'scale-tipping'. Spinoza's political theory rests on the Hobbesian notion that coordinating the affects of the multitude is the main responsibility of the sovereign, and that political institutions have to be built with the aim of coordinating and motivating individuals' affects. However, Spinoza differed from Hobbes in his eventual evaluation of fear as a motivator. Although Spinoza moves beyond Hobbes' account, his critique of Hobbes' is very much an internal one.

FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF SPINOZA

In the last ten years there has been an increasing interest in Spinoza's *Ethics* and

⁴⁵ E. Tucker, "Affective Disorders of the State," "The Affective Disorders of the State," *Journal of East-West Thought*, Special Issue: Crimes Against Humanity and Cosmopolitanism. Volume 3, No. 2, Summer, 2013, 97-120.

⁴⁶ Spinoza, *Political Treatise* in Shirley (2002), *Political Treatise*, TP 5.1, 698-699; *Ethics*, E4Prop52, 347; L.I.vi, 26-27; D.H. xi.4, 47, D.H. xii.4, 56-58.

political philosophy in feminist philosophy circles. In particular, feminist theorists have prized Spinoza's theory of the affects and the imagination, his conception of 'conatus', and the social and political theory he builds from these. Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd's pioneering work *Collective Imaginings* (1999) presents Spinoza as 'the road not taken' in the history of philosophy and as an important source for a non-dualistic understanding of human nature. These philosophers mine Spinoza's work for a set of tools to build a non-reductive embodied account of ethics which can be used to understand and properly theorize human power, responsibility and freedom. In the introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*,⁴⁷ Gatens surveys the many ways that feminist philosophers have taken up Spinozan ideas, including: "using Spinoza's mind-body thesis to challenge the sex-gender distinction, developing his views on 'sensual love' to question the grounds of normative heterosexuality, and exploring the role of the imagination in determining how 'difference' is configured."⁴⁸ In outlining the elements of Spinoza's philosophy that commend him to contemporary philosophers, Gatens cites "his commitment to an immanent, naturalistic worldview that is amenable to the human understanding through 'scientific' explanation."⁴⁹

Spinoza's project to 'embody and naturalize ethics'⁵⁰ opposes attempts by moral philosophers (in our day and in his) to demean the body and its affects, and to blame these for moral failures. In my own work, I take up Spinoza's conceptions of individual power to construct a theory of democracy in which maximal inclusion and participation yield empowered individuals and a stronger state. However, in this feminist work on Spinoza (my own included) there has been only passing recognition of the influence of Hobbes' on Spinoza's views. The tendency in the feminist Spinoza scholarship is rather to distance him from Hobbes. This is an understandable strategy,

given the persistent misinterpretations of Hobbes and the understandable difficulty of imagining that an early modern male philosopher would have much to say to contemporary feminist theory. It is strange enough that Spinoza could provide feminists with tools to empower women, but Hobbes? In this section, I will set out the aspects of Spinoza's naturalistic ethics that feminist philosophers have found so promising: Spinoza's rejection of Cartesian dualism, his theory of the affects, his conception of the conatus, and the basics of the social and political theory that he builds from this naturalized conception of human individuals. I will then show how these emerge from his reading of Hobbes.

SPINOZA AND FEMINIST SPINOZISM

One of the most attractive aspects of Spinoza's philosophy has been his rejection of Descartes' dualism of mind and body, and the related hierarchy of reason over emotion. Feminist critiques of Descartes' dualism and his conception of mind are legion,⁵¹ so it is no surprise that feminists would have found in Spinoza's "non-reductive psycho-physical monism"⁵² an important alternative to Descartes. Where the Cartesian subject is understood as essentially rational, not primarily embodied, Spinoza's individual is interconnected with others, primarily affective, and necessarily embodied. For Spinoza, each human being derives his or her power from Nature, of which each individual is a

⁴⁷ Moira Gatens, *Feminist Interpretations of Spinoza*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2009).

⁴⁸ Gatens (2009), 2.

⁴⁹ Gatens (2009), 2.

⁵⁰ Heidi Ravven, "What Spinoza can Teach us About Embodying and Naturalizing Ethics," in Gatens (2009).

⁵¹ Naomi Scheman, "Though This Be Method, Yet There Is Madness in It: Paranoia and Liberal Epistemology" in J. Kourany, ed. *The Gender of Science*. (New York: Prentice Hall, 2001); Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983); Genevieve Lloyd (1984) *The Man of Reason*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Young, Iris Marion. "Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice." *The Journal of Political Philosophy*. (Volume 9, No. 1, 2001, pp. 1-18); Susan Bordo (1987) *The Flight to Objectivity*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1987; Peter Lindsay, "The 'Disembodied Self' in Political Theory." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, (Vol. 28, No. 2, 2002), 191-211.

⁵² Heidi Ravven, "Spinozistic Approaches to Evolutionary Naturalism: Spinoza's anticipation of contemporary affective neuroscience." *Politics and the Life Sciences* (Vol. 22, no. 1, March 2003), 70.

part. Spinoza's affect theory, and the social and political theories follow from this.⁵³

Spinoza understands the human individual as a complex of parts.⁵⁴ Different forces in the world affect each of an individual's parts in divergent ways.⁵⁵ Each individual is pulled in different directions by these different parts, which are experienced as conflicting desires pulling one toward different actions.⁵⁶ To coordinate these parts, to organize these desires is an achievement which increases the individual's power. In Spinoza's view we come into the world with rather confused appetites, which can conflict and which can pull the body in different direction, acting on the different parts of the body. Without a way to coordinate and prioritize affects and desires, an individual would follow their strongest affect at any given time, and would be pulled this way and that by external forces. To unify the conflicting affects, individuals must construct a notion of a 'self', an imaginative construction which organizes the desires. Only by developing a conception of the 'self', which can organize and prioritize appetites through understanding what actually increases one's power, can one actually increase one's power.⁵⁷ The development of a coherent notion of the self is one that parallels one's understanding of the world and what is 'good' or 'bad' for one, a process that for most occurs within the context of a social world where what is 'good' and 'bad' are already determined. For Spinoza, selves are not created in a vacuum, but in a social world.

SPINOZA'S DEBT TO HOBBS

Spinoza's mature account of the power of the affects provides a promising naturalistic

foundation for projects of empowerment; however, in its early versions, Spinoza's conception of what he then called 'the passions' was not particularly consonant with naturalism at all.⁵⁸

In his early work Spinoza's conception of the affects was highly intellectualized. In *The Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-being*⁵⁹ Spinoza's account of the affects, or as he is calling them at this point, 'the passions', are caused by opinion, a variety of knowledge. However, this intellectual theory of the passions left Spinoza with a problem: if a passion was based on an opinion or a mistaken idea, then learning the truth should make the passion disappear or change. However, certain passions survived countervailing evidence. Spinoza does not yet have the theoretical resources to explain why some passions are so strong and seemingly impenetrable by reason. Further, in these early works, Spinoza recognizes the importance of increasing the power of those around us and trying to get them to improve their minds and to love God.⁶⁰ However, if an individual committed to the difficult path of reason has trouble overcoming passions, how could we expect the multitude to ever follow reason? The question of how to shape the affects of the multitude so that they would not be so easily swayed by divisive and violent passions became urgent for Spinoza in the 1660s. Political events in the Netherlands⁶¹ forced Spinoza to come up with a solution to his 'passion' problem. Sensing the danger to free thought and to his own work, in 1665, Spinoza put aside his work on the

⁵³ Although my account is consonant with and indebted to those feminist philosophers who have taken up Spinoza's work as promising for feminism (Gatens and Lloyd, Lloyd, Ravven, Sharp), the precise formulation of Spinoza's theory of the affects, and his social and political theory here is my own.

⁵⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, E3Prop51, 303-304; E2P13L7S [Postulates I-VI], 251-255.

⁵⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, E3Prop17S, 287-288.

⁵⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, E4Prop33, 295.

⁵⁷ Heidi Ravven, *The Self Beyond Itself: An Alternative History of Ethics, the New Brain Sciences, and the Myth of Free Will*. The New Press, 2013.

⁵⁸ Susan James, *Passion and Action: Emotions in 17th century philosophy*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Amy M. Schmitter, "17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/emotions-17th18th/>>

⁵⁹ Spinoza began work on the *Short Treatise* in 1660 (Spinoza, 2002, xviii) and was finished with it by 1665, probably earlier, since he is already focused on other projects by 1662.

⁶⁰ Spinoza, *Treatise on the Improvement of the Intellect* in Shirley (2002), TIE [14-16], 6.

⁶¹ Israel, Jonathan. *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

*Ethics*⁶² and began writing the *Theological-Political Treatise* in which he hoped to show, “that freedom of philosophizing” was consistent both with peace and piety, and that if such freedom were denied both peace and piety would be at risk.⁶³

While in the middle of wrestling with these issues, the Latin collected works of Hobbes were printed in Amsterdam.⁶⁴ In the Latin works, particularly *De Corpore* and *De Homine*, Hobbes sets out the details of his materialist theory of the emotions. In the *Leviathan* he brings them to bear on the politics. Spinoza would have found Hobbes’ work immediately useful for his own projects: namely, how to understand and control the affects of the multitude. Hobbes’ thoroughly materialist theory of individual and collective affects integrated with a material conception of political power provided the answers Spinoza sought. Only after reading Hobbes’ materialist conception of the affects did Spinoza develop his mature theory, first seen in the final chapters of the *Theological-Political Treatise* and developed more fully in the final five-part version of the *Ethics* and in the *Political Treatise*. Hobbes’ theory of the affects, although it has been underappreciated in our time, was of enormous significance for Spinoza, and it helped Spinoza develop his uniquely useful theory of human power.

NORMS AND EMPOWERMENT

Spinoza’s naturalistic understanding of the body and of the imagination provides a blueprint for human empowerment. Through understanding the forces in the natural world which affect us and by reforming our imaginative pictures of the world to become more adequate we can increase our power. Society can help us increase our power, since by joining with others

with whom we agree can allow us to join our power with theirs, allowing us to do more and to understand more than we could ever do alone. However, joining with others also means sharing an imaginative view of the world that may not be entirely adequate and thus may not be best for us.

Our affective lives, and hence our ability to be free, are caught within forces, made up only of individuals and their affects, but which form and are formed by institutions, customs, practices. Social norms become like physical forces within each individual member of a society who has either been trained up in these norms or who lives in the society long enough to feel their force. Community norms are based on shared passion and passions are not necessarily based on reason.⁶⁵ So, for Spinoza, social customs based on passions might not be best for us. We have more than enough experience to show that, for women, social norms and customs may not always yield empowerment or freedom.

Spinoza argued that reason alone, that is, understanding what is best for us, is not enough to overcome those affects that are reinforced by experience.⁶⁶ Since we live in society most of our affects are shaped by communal norms and practices. Not all community norms and practices are necessarily what’s ‘best’ for those in the community. So the individual in such a community seeking what is best for them may come to dissent from certain community norms and practices. However, the power of a single individual is small in relation to an affectively united community. Just as the individual must fight ‘affects with affects’ to reform his or her individual passions, so to unseat harmful community norms and practices one must use ‘affects to fight affects’. Although Spinoza proposes this solution, it is Hobbes who gives us the mechanism for understanding how affects might be fought with affects.



⁶² This early version of *The Ethics* was in 3 parts and we have reason to believe retained the intellectualist conception of the passions of the *Short Treatise*. It probably contained a similar structure to the *Short Treatise*, and had sections on God, Improving the Mind and Freedom.

⁶³ *Theological-Political Treatise* in Shirley (2002), 387.

⁶⁴ *Bibliotheek van het Spinoza Huis. Catalogus van de Bibliotheek der Vereniging het Spinozahuis te Rijnsburg.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965).

⁶⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, E4Prop37S, 339-340

⁶⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, E4Prop1, 323; Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, in Shirley, (ed.) *Complete Works*, (New York: Hackett, 2002), Ch. 21, 92-93