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# Human Interaction in the State of Nature: Hobbes on Respect for Persons and Self-Respect

*Qui autem est fidens, is profecto non extimescit;  
discrepant enim a timendo confidere  
(But he who is full of faith is certainly under no fear;  
for there is an inconsistency between faith and fear).  
Cicero, Tusculan Disputations III, VII.14*

**Abstract:** In this chapter I shall attempt to identify different forms of respect in Hobbes' state of nature, by way of an identification and critical engagement with some of the key notions which, as I believe, inform his views of the mechanism of human interaction: power, recognition, honor, esteem and fear. My general contention is that the philosophical issues of respect for persons and self-respect offer a lens through which Hobbes can: (1) describe some features of the state of nature and the aspects which elicit a transition from such a state to the creation of a commonwealth; (b) some prescriptive indications on how human beings ought to behave towards each other with a view to a condition of peace and security. I will identify four kinds of respect: esteem, honor, an equal respect based on fear and one grounded in recognition of each other's legitimate needs and interests.

## 1 Introduction

Hobbes's reflection on human nature and the mechanisms of the constitution of political government exhibits a rich array of interrelated themes and philosophically problematic issues. Among them, the nature of the epistemic and the agential powers that human beings possess by nature or acquire over their lifetimes, the individual psychological motives inspiring their pursuits, and the strategies of reciprocal interaction that they usually enact to prevent conflict. Hobbes examines these issues and situates them in an elaborate philosophical edifice, set up with the following aim: a systematic discussion and a reconstruction of the conceptual mechanics that, in his view, enervate the transition from a supposedly pre-political condition of human coexistence (which Hobbes notoriously calls the "state of nature") to a civil society bereft of inner strife.

Within this framework of investigation, the philosophical issues of respect for persons and self-respect do not stand out (at least *prima facie*) as subjects which Hobbes is keen to discuss in a systematic way. On the one hand, this might explain a substantial absence of scholarly studies on the topic of respect in his philosophy; on the other, his concern for the ideal of respect is evident in his remarks on esteem, honor and the equal regard that persons owe to each other *qua* human beings. In this essay I will briefly review various expressions of respect for oneself and respect for others in the Hobbesian state of nature, stressing in particular the role that the idea of “recognition of power” plays in conceptually shaping each form of respect.

With a view to this, I shall focus on two of Hobbes’s works:<sup>1</sup> the *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, a philosophical tract written before the outbreak of the Civil War (1640) which represents a sort of “trial run for Hobbes’s system” (Bobbio 1993, p. 26), and *Leviathan*, published in English in 1651,<sup>2</sup> where he provides a wide-ranging treatment of the theory of formation of civil society. As I believe, these works provide not only compatible, but also reciprocally enriching accounts of the ideal of respect.<sup>3</sup>

In the first section of this essay I give a short description of the main agential powers that guarantee human knowledge and agency, and show how these are at work in the state of nature. In the subsequent sections I address the following forms of respect in the state of nature: 1) respect as esteem and reputation; 2) respect as honor; 3) well-grounded and ill-grounded respect for oneself; 4) respect as reliance on oneself as an authoritative judge; 5) two kinds of equal respect for persons: (5a) one grounded on recognition of the human power to hurt other individuals; (5b) respect for one’s agential powers (one prescribed by Hobbes’s laws of nature).

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1 All the passages from Hobbes’s works quoted in this essay are taken from *The Complete Works of Thomas Hobbes*, edited by Sir William Molesworth (1839–1845).

2 As Bobbio (1993, p. 27) suggests, the Latin edition of *Leviathan* was probably written in part before the English version, but published only in 1670 with minor corrections.

3 The *Elements*, by virtue of the systematic description of human powers provided by Hobbes, may contribute to a more accurate understanding of issues related to the ideal of respect. I follow Carlo Galli’s view that *Leviathan* offers a less rigid and rigorous account of human nature than the *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* (Galli 2013, p. v).

## 2 The State of Nature: Its “Scientific” and Anthropological Premises

Both in the “Preface to the reader” of *De Cive* (EW II, xvii) and in the first chapter of *Leviathan* (I, XIV; EW 117), Hobbes notoriously declares that the state of nature is a condition of war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*). His urge to make such a forceful, apodictic statement in the opening sections of his work supposedly suggests that any attempt to understand the aims and strategies for the successful preservation of civil society must cope with the risk of returning to a pre-political state. On the one hand, as several scholars have pointed out, the state of nature represents a theoretical device by which Hobbes, in line with his method of exploration and presentation of reality to his readers, attempts to analyze the conceptual premises for the legitimacy of sovereign power (Kavka 1986, pp. 83–92).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the state of nature can also be viewed as one to which “politicized” human beings risk returning if the civil society in which they live suffers from inner strife and lack of regulation.<sup>5</sup> As Helen Thornton for instance maintains (Thornton 2005, p. 17), “the state of nature was also a constantly threatening possibility – a condition into which a weakened commonwealth had the potential to dissolve. In other words, it was a condition in which human beings living in civil society had the potential to fall, if they arrogated to themselves the judgment of good and evil, and in doing so disobeyed their rightful sovereign”.<sup>6</sup> Whether conceived as the logical premise of the origins of society or as the nefarious outcome of civil disobedience, the state of nature represents a privileged space of observation from which Hobbes is able to draw consequences about human behavior (Thornton 2005, p. 17)<sup>7</sup> and, nonetheless, find reasons to justify the need for human beings to submit to the sovereign authority of civil society (Lloyd 2009, p. 212).

In order to understand how the state of nature generates (and is identified with) a condition of mutual conflict, it must be acknowledged that, in this

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<sup>4</sup> For many of Hobbes’s contemporaries, however, the state of nature represented a description of the pre-historic origin of society. For this interpretation see Ewin 1991, p. 94 and 96.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Bobbio 1993, pp. 41–42, who claims that Hobbes, rather than considering the state of nature a pre-political condition, characterizes it as an *anti-political* situation, such as civil war in existing states.

<sup>6</sup> Thornton follows Sheldon Wolin (1960, p. 264) in regarding Hobbes’ state of nature as a political version of the Biblical story of the Fall.

<sup>7</sup> On Hobbes’s description of the state of nature as a theory of human behavior see Kavka 1986, p. 19; cf. Boonin-Vail pp. 21–50.

state, people appear to commit to the pursuit of what they believe makes up their personal good and the avoidance of whatever obstructs that pursuit. Hobbes does not seem to come to this conclusion from sheer experience.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, he situates the human tendency to seek one's own good within the framework of natural necessity.<sup>9</sup> As he explains for instance in the *Elements of Law*, this necessity:

[M]aketh men to will and desire *bonum sibi*, that which is good for themselves, and to avoid that which is hurtful; but most of all, the terrible enemy of nature, death, from whom we expect both the loss of all power, and also the greatest of bodily pains in the losing. (EL XIV, 6; EW IV, 83)

Here, the word “power” seems to evoke the generic idea of a man’s “present means; to obtain some future apparent good”, as Hobbes explains in *Leviathan* X, 41.1 (EW III, 74). In that chapter, Hobbes divides human powers into two classes: *natural* powers, which he describes as “eminence[s] of the faculties of body or mind: as extraordinary strength, form, prudence, arts, eloquence, liberality, nobility” and *instrumental* powers, that is, “means and instruments to acquire more [power]: as riches, reputation, friends” (EW III, 74).<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted, however, that in *The Elements of Law* Hobbes introduces a more “basic” sense of power, one on which the possibility of both natural and instrumental powers seems to rest. Here is the notion of “power” Hobbes employs while offering a definition of “human nature”:

[M]an’s *nature* is the *sum of his natural faculties and powers*, as the faculties of *nutrition, motion, generation, sense, reason, etc.* These powers we do unanimously call *natural*, and are contained in the definition of man, under these words, *animal* and *rational*. (EL I, 4; EW IV, 2)

Unlike “eminent” or “instrumental” powers, the powers above are possessed by each and every human being, and so is the natural tendency to use them both in

**8** It is worth noting, however, that several scholars have stressed the relevance of empirical observation (and even of “self-inspection” in Hobbes’ method of knowledge. See for instance Strauss 1936, p. 29; Oakeshott 1975, ix and Skinner 2002, p. 65; Kavka 1986, p. 7.

**9** Hobbes’s insistence on the “causal” nature of scientific knowledge coexists with the belief that science in general (and, more specifically, the science of nature) is knowledge of mechanical causes (see Jessephe 1996, p. 86). In Hobbes’s view, the notion of “motion” can be adopted as the unifying criterion for different branches of theoretical science, such as optics, physics, and geometry.

**10** A definition of “instrumental powers” is also given in EL VIII, 4; EW IV, 37–38.

cognitive and in practical endeavors with a view to the achievement of one's own good. In this light, people can not only recognize each other as equal, but also claim equal treatment by virtue of the act of recognition.

In the attempt to identify the sources of human interaction and its manifold expressions (conflictual or respectful), Hobbes sets aside the powers of the body and narrows the focus on the powers of the mind. As show in this essay, the various types of respect that human beings can display in the state of nature (as well as in the civil state) can be viewed as specific forms of rational recognition of these powers accompanied by the relevant passions (passion itself being a power that represents the outcome of recognition). Notably, Hobbes identifies two kinds of natural power of the mind: *cognitive* and *motive* (L I, VII; EW IV, 2). By putting his account of the connections between the human mind and external reality into a strictly deterministic framework, he maintains that both are to be understood as matter in motion.<sup>11</sup> Cognitive capacities as sense-perception, imagination, memory and rational understanding set off desires and processes like deliberation and choice. One cognitive power in particular, imagination,<sup>12</sup> is able to determine various kinds of “interior beginnings of voluntary motions”: the so-called “endeavours” (L I, 6; EW III, 39). These are the motions that constitute the inherent mechanics of passions.<sup>13</sup> Hobbes employs the notion of “endeavour” to define two basic tendencies entrenched in each and every human being: appetite and aversion. Appetite is treated as interchangeable” with the notions of “desire”, and “love” (L I, 6; EW III 39; cf. EL VII, 2; EW IV, 31–32),<sup>14</sup> and is defined as an endeavor toward something that delights (EL VII, 2; EW IV, 31). An expression of appetite is pleasure (or *contentment* or *delight*),<sup>15</sup> which in *The Elements* is described as a principle that helps the vital motion (EL VII, 1; EW IV, 3). By contrast, when the endeavor is fromward something, it is generally

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**11** In this respect, Hobbes' view of the human mind is a stark departure from Descartes, who considers the mind incorporeal. For the Hobbesian view of the mind as a mode of organization of matter see Pettit 208, p. 12. See also Boonin-Vail 1994, pp. 34–38, who argues that both the minds and its inner workings can be viewed as natural bodies themselves.

**12** As Boonin-Vail (1994, p. 39) claims, the salient difference between vital and voluntary motion is that voluntary motions are caused by the imagination.

**13** From a mechanistic perspective, passions appear to derive from the action of external objects on the brain, going on to the heart (EL X, 1; EW IV, 54). They arise from that motion and agitation of the brain which Hobbes calls “conception” (EL VIII, 1; EW IV, 35).

**14** In L I, 6 (EW III, 40), however, Hobbes points out that by “desire” we always mean the absence of the desired object, whereas by “love” we most commonly signify the presence of the object.

**15** See L I, 6; EW III, 42: “But the appearance, or sense of that motion [i.e. the motion in which appetite consists is that we either call *delight* or *trouble of mind*”.

called *aversion* or *hate*. This tendency is accompanied by pain, i.e. a principle that hinders and weakens the vital motion (EL VII, 1; EW IV, 3).

From the notions of “desire”, “pleasure”, “aversion”? and “pain” Hobbes derives his conception of good and evil in the state of nature. As he believes, good and evil do not exist as concrete realities in nature (L I, 6; EW III, 41; cf. Thornton 2005, p. 18). They are simply names, which individuals apply to their own and other people’s actions on the basis of what they like or dislike (L I, XV; EW III, 146; cf. EL VII, 3; EW IV, 32; DC I, 2; EW II, 5). If considered in conjunction with the idea that every man differs from others in constitution and experiences, this implies the lack of an objective, absolute and unanimously accepted view of good and evil in the state of nature. Even one’s own view is open to change over time, depending on what one desires and praises or opposes and disparages (L I, XV; EW III, 146). Hobbes concludes,

from whence [i. e. this fact] arise disputes, controversies, and at last war. (L I, XV; EW III, 146)

Although Hobbes views appetites and aversions as the subjective measure of good and evil, that does not mean that he endorses a relativistic theory of morality (Kavka 1986, pp. 349 – 357; Boonin-Vail 1994, pp. 58 – 123<sup>16</sup>). On the contrary, there is some evidence that he held morality to be conventional (Gauthier 1979, p. 547<sup>17</sup>). In L I, 13 (EW III, 115), for instance, he claims that

[T]o this war of every man, against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice.<sup>18</sup>

As I comment in the last section, there is an objective standard of conduct in the principles Hobbes calls “laws of nature”, i. e., the laws a well-governed commonwealth ought to adopt.<sup>19</sup> It is primarily in the light of this moral standard that

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**16** For a different view see Tuck (1989, p. 64), who claims that Hobbes’s ethical vision is the “grimmiest version of sceptical relativism”. See also Reik (1977, p. 90), who claims that there are by no means objective, absolute ethical norms in Hobbes’ system.

**17** Gauthier maintains that Hobbes establishes “a place for morality as a conventional constraint on our natural behavior”.

**18** Cf. L I, 6, (EW III, 41), where Hobbes says that in the civil state there are common rules of good and evil as established by the person who represents it, or by an arbitrator (or judge) whom men agree to set up.

**19** See for instance L, II, 26 (EW III, 253), where Hobbes claims that civil and natural law “contain each other”.

human beings may respect each other as equals. However, Hobbes also provides evidence that certain forms of respect for oneself and for persons (equal respect included) are at work even in a condition of war of all against all, where fellow humans refuse to abide by shared rational prescriptions. I will explore this by showing that some of the conceptual models of respect for oneself and for persons discussed by Hobbes (such as esteem, honor, glory and even embryonic forms of equal respect) not only prefigure practicable possibilities of human agency in the state of war, but also help Hobbes to conceptualize this state and to identify its causes.

### 3 From Potential to Actual Conflict. Forms of Respect for Oneself and Respect for Others in the State of Nature

Before identifying the kinds of respect that apply in the state of nature, it is interesting to note that Hobbes does not describe this state as a purely potential state of war, that is, characterized by the disposition to fight unless there are assurances to the contrary (Kavka 1986, p. 90). It is certainly true that, unlike the state of nature in John Locke,<sup>20</sup> Hobbes does not necessarily envisage active signs of hostility. Indeed, for Hobbes, the state of nature is primarily one in which people experience mutual distrust and, most crucially, fear (a passion of aversion generated from fear of receiving hurt, i. e. prompted by an anticipated displeasure; EL VII, 2; EW IV, 31–32; cf. L I, 6; EW III, 43). On the other hand, as in the Lockean state of war, Hobbes describes a state of paralysis hindering human cooperation based on common rules of conduct (Kavka 1986, p. 91). As Hobbes declares in L I, XIII (EW III, 113):

[I]n such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation [...] no arts; no letters; no society [...]; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death ...

What assumptions, then, does Hobbes make to identify the state of nature as a state of open conflict? Also, how does the issue of respect help to clarify the transition from the idea of potential conflict to an actual war? We might begin

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<sup>20</sup> See the second of the *Two Treatises of Government* (chap. 3, sec. 16, 319), where the state of war is described as one “declar[ed] by Word or Action, not a passionate and hasty, but a sedate settled Design, upon another Mans Life”.

to answer these questions by stating that, as Hobbes himself declares in L I, XIII (EW III, 112):

... in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation.

Here, competition is mentioned as a relational condition which Hobbes considers with reference to the human tendency to pursue gain. This tendency might be qualified as desire for either material goods, in which case Hobbes speaks of “covetousness”, or office or precedence, which he calls “ambition” (L I, 6; EW III, 44). Both names are always used to indicate “blame”; what is blameworthy is not desire for certain goods in themselves, but the fact that the men contending for gain are displeased with one another.

In *The Elements of Law*, on the other hand, human beings are portrayed by Hobbes as naturally competitive even with regard to the passion for glory. In EL IX, 21 (EW IV, 52–53), for instance, Hobbes compares human life to a race which has “no other *goal*, nor other *garland*, but being foremost”, and one’s irreducible desire for superiority involves the search for glory, reputation and honor (Zagorin 2009, p. 32). These values, as we shall see, are viewed by Hobbes as goods that help people preserve and enhance a positive view of themselves. Moreover, like riches in a condition of limited resources, these are “inflationary” goods, i. e., if one person has them, another person is deprived of them. Competition over glory, reputation and honor can therefore be viewed as a “zero-sum game”, in which one person’s gain (or loss) of utility is exactly balanced by the losses (or gains) of the utility of others.<sup>21</sup>

For Hobbes the nature of the characteristic conflict between human beings in the state of nature is not determined by the lack of an absolute, objective good (a lack which, paradoxically, might compel people to look for different goods and therefore reduce competition), but by a desire to be and appear superior to others. This tendency is placed by Hobbes within the framework of a more basic inclination shared by human beings: the pursuit of one’s own happiness, which he presents as “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death” (L I, 11; EW III, 85–86).

Hobbes’s idea that each person always acts to satisfy her own desires has prompted scholars to argue that he endorses egoistic views of human nature.

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<sup>21</sup> A well-established trend in contemporary Hobbesian scholarship analyzes Hobbes’s theory of the state of nature in terms of “game-theory”. For a discussion of the most important views on the matter see for instance Eggers 2011.



Understood in this light, however, egoism appears to be a sheer truism (Kavka 1986, p. 35),<sup>22</sup> and it fails to account for the idea that people might have desires which, although aiming at their own happiness, go well with the pursuits and personal interest of others.<sup>23</sup> Non-tautological versions of human egoism are needed to support Hobbes's arguments against conflict and anarchy (Kavka 1986, p. 64). In other words, to explain Hobbes's state of nature as a condition of conflict, self-interested individual motives must be assumed to be "predominant" over other-regarding motives (see Kavka 1986, pp. 64–80, who speaks of a "predominant egoism").

Egoism can take the form not only of greediness for riches, knowledge and honors (that is, a desire to "have more"), but also of a desire to defend the powers and goods that are already possessed, i.e. a desire that can be fulfilled only by attempting to increase one's own powers (in which case, achieving more would not be an aim in itself, but simply a means to further ends) (cf. L I, 11; EW III, 86). In the following subsections I show that respect for oneself and respect for others help Hobbes to characterize this sort of egoism and, all the same, the conditions that prompt human conflict in the state of nature.

### 3.1 Reputation

In Hobbes' view, one's search for reputation (as good reputation) is a characteristic tendency of human beings, although he suggests that not every man is equally drawn to it.<sup>24</sup> Hobbes places reputation in the category of instrumental goods (L I, X; EW III, 74). People look for reputation not as a good in itself, but by virtue of the use they can make of it. A good reputation is achieved in relation to some kind of power and excellence, which consists in comparison and implies a form of superiority over others (cf. L I, VIII; EW III, 56). Unlike Aristotelian virtues, whose outstanding nature is rooted in an intermediacy between excess and defect in passions and actions (see especially Book II of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*), Hobbesian excellences are "relational" goods. Given

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<sup>22</sup> See also Gert 1972, p. 7, who has defined this form of egoism "tautological egoism".

<sup>23</sup> See for instance those actions arising out of other-regarding passions like charity, benevolence and good will. These passions are defined by Hobbes as "desire of good to another" (L I, 6; EW III, 43). In EL IX, 17 (EW IV, 49–50) Hobbes explains that one's desire to assist other men in accomplishing their desires can ultimately be traced back to one's desire to advance one's own good and power.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance L I, XI; EW III, 86, where Hobbes suggests that some desire fame from new conquest, others sensual pleasure, and others admiration for some excellence of their own.

people with similar or an equal degree of excellence, the power of each would lose value and its distinctive excellent nature would dissipate.

In this respect “reputation of power, is power” (L I, X; EW III, 74). For a good reputation draws with it the adherence of those that need protection (*Ibid.*), and it is plausible to suppose that the force of people’s consent enables the person of high repute to achieve (at least some of) his plans. Moreover, a well-respected person represents for those who respect her a point of trust. This is for instance the case of people who excel in prudence:

[R]eputation of prudence in the conduct of peace or war, is power; because to prudent men, we commit the government of ourselves, more willingly than to others (L I, X; EW III, 74).

To think highly of someone can be considered a form of “evaluative respect”, and its basis may be any sort of identified excellence (whether other-regarding or not).<sup>25</sup>

One’s striving for good reputation is successful only if desire is accompanied by a serious commitment to the achievement of natural powers including forms of excellence. The pursuit of a good reputation might represent a valuable motivational source for actions productive of power, and a sense of shame – a passion that Hobbes defines as the “apprehension of some thing dishonourable” (L I, 6; EW III, 47) – might be triggered by the prospect of failure to achieve the esteem of others. As he explains,

in young men, [shame] is a sign of the love of good reputation, and commendable: in old men it is a sign of the same; but because it comes too late, not commendable. (L I, 6; EW III, 47)

By commending shame in young people, Hobbes probably means to say not only that the young are generally more inclined to act than the elderly, due to their energy and strength, but also that, by possibly having a longer life ahead, they can achieve a great deal through their individual powers.

Hence, being held in high esteem is not a good desirable in itself in Hobbes’ view, but is instrumental in achieving one’s aims. A good reputation is a starting point for the pursuit of greater power, and this pursuit (as well as the search for limited goods, riches and social position) exacerbates human competition. As Hobbes claims in L XI, 85 (EW III, 86),

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<sup>25</sup> This version of “evaluative respect” was conceptualized by Hudson (1980, pp. 71–73). A different version is provided by Stephen Darwall (1977, pp. 41–45), whose notion of “appraisal respect” applies not only to cases of respect for excellence of a moral nature, but also to respect for non-moral excellences employed in an other-regarding way.

[C]ompetition of riches, honour, command, or other power, inclineth to contention, enmity, and war: because the way of one competitor, to the attaining of his desire, is to kill, subdue, supplant, or repel the other.

The following lines go on to show how the tendency to compete in the state of nature causes people to cultivate ill-grounded views of their own powers and those of others. A glaring example is the widespread inclination to show reverential respect for the ancients, rather than for one's competitors:

[P]articularly, competition of praise, inclineth to a reverence of antiquity. For men contend with the living, not with the dead; to these ascribing more than due, that they may obscure the glory of the other. (L XI, 85; EW III, 86)

A reasonable implication is the idea that, when a person's view of herself (well-grounded or not) does not match the opinion of others, her expectations might be thwarted and her search for power be hindered by others. Mutual impediments, in their turn, generate conflict.

### 3.2 Honour

For Hobbes honour is a relational concept. One might recognize one's own powers by certain signs, that is, by the actions that proceed from those powers (EL VIII, 5; EW IV, 38); "honour", however, comes into play only when those signs are recognized by others. Honor is defined as "the acknowledgment of power" (or "opinion of power"; L I, X; EW III, 80) and, more to the point, of one's superiority regarding that power:

to honour a man inwardly, is to conceive or acknowledge that man hath the odds or excess of that power above him with whom he contendeth or compareth himself. (L I, X; EW III, 80)

All the things that express the power from which they proceed are honorable, such as all actions and speeches that proceed or seem to proceed from experience, science, discretion or wit, because the sources from which they proceed are powers (L I, X; EW III, 79–80). By contrast, actions or speeches that proceed from error, ignorance or folly are dishonourable.

A power which, acknowledged, prompts a form of respect – honour – is not of absolute value; on the contrary, it is amenable to comparisons, as is the worth of a person.<sup>26</sup> As Hobbes points out in *Leviathan*,

the *value*, or worth of a man, is as of all other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependant on the need and judgment of another [...] to value a man at a high rate, is to *honour* him; at a low rate, is to *dishonour* him. But high, and low, in this case, is to be understood by comparison to the rate that each man setteth on himself. (L I, X; EW III, 76)

One's criteria of assessment of others, being based on the evaluation of one's own powers, appear unstable, especially if we consider that people tend to assess their own powers as superior to those actually possessed. Only in a commonwealth is value assigned according to public, shared criteria. Respect as honour, in this case, is recognition of the public worth of a man, his *dignity* (L I, X; EW III, 76). This can be expressed through the concession and establishment of professional and social positions, and is used by the sovereign to guarantee a stable, well-ordered political community.

In the civil state, each person is responsible and accountable for the lack of recognition of the worth of other persons (and the role assigned to each in the political community). The conceptual model of honour at work in this case seems to match Darwall's description of honour as a "second-personal" form of respect, one which, featuring a substantial asymmetry of power between those who respect and those who are respected, obliges the former to take the latter and to conduct themselves accordingly (Darwall 2008, pp. 5–7). By contrast, in the state of nature, the recognition of another's power is not normatively binding, nor does it contribute to preventing open conflict. Indeed, the addressees of honour in that state do not possess the authority to be treated with respect; hence the respecting subjects are not accountable for failing to honour them.

That the idea of respect for persons taking shape against the backdrop of a condition of mutual struggle and competition is all the more evident in Hobbes's definition of "reverence" in *The Elements of Law* (EL VIII, 7; EW IV, 40):

*Reverence* is the conception we have concerning another, that he hath the *power* to do unto us both *good* and *hurt*, but not the *will* to do us *hurt*.

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<sup>26</sup> In *De Cive*, however, Hobbes addresses the issue of value from a prescriptive point of view, suggesting that people should try to gain a "non-comparative" view of their own worth. In DC II, 2 (EW II, 5) he says that "every man must account himself, such as he can make himself without the help of others".

In Hobbes's account, a person is worthy of reverence not only through possession of a given power, but also the capacity and attitude which causes that person to refrain from using the power in ways that might damage others (for instance, by jeopardizing the pursuits undertaken by others). A pure conception, however, does not necessarily involve trust and confidence, and reverence for a person due to her attitude of restraint in specific situations does not dissipate distrust towards the person showing restraint.

### 3.3 Well-Grounded and Ill-Grounded Self-Respect

In Hobbes' view, acquiring a good reputation certainly helps a person to shape a positive view of herself and, as a consequence, develop the self-confidence needed to embark on certain pursuits. In this respect, Hobbes seems to foreshadow the idea of self-respect found in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Here, Rawls claims that

[I]t is clearly rational for men to secure their self-respect. A sense of their own worth is necessary if they are to pursue their conception of the good with zest and to delight in its fulfillment. (Rawls 1971, p. 178)

In par. 67 he treats self-respect as a value endowed with two distinctive aspects: on the one hand,

it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out (Rawls 1971: p. 440);

on the other,

self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions. When we feel that our plans are of little value, we cannot pursue them with pleasure or take delight in their execution. (Rawls 1971: p. 440)

By endorsing a "proto-Rawlsian" view, Hobbes believes that self-respect does not rise simply from the opinions of external observers. Life-plans cannot be cultivated without recognition of one's own powers, that is, without an attempt to achieve a well-grounded self-knowledge.

As we have already seen, in the state of nature there are no public and agreed criteria for the assessment of one's powers. Nevertheless, Hobbes makes it clear that, even so, it is possible to develop a well-grounded opinion of oneself through experience of one's own actions, and consequently feel pleasure in relation to that

opinion. The implicit premise of Hobbes' view is that the actions that enable some goals to be reached are proof of an authentically good power. In EL IX, 20 (EW IV, 52), for instance, Hobbes defines the virtue of "magnanimity" and claims that

[M]agnanimity is no more than glory [...] but *glory well grounded* upon certain experience of a power sufficient to attain his end in open manner.

As Hobbes explains in *De Cive* (II, 2; EW II, 5), glory is a good opinion of oneself, and all the pleasures of the mind are either glory or refer to glory in the end. In the same passage, he states that

[A]ll society therefore is either for gain, or for glory; that is, not so much for love of our fellows, as for the love of ourselves.

By "glory" Hobbes also means an "internal gloriation or triumph of the mind", that is,

the passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power above the power of him that contendeth with us. (EL IX, 1; EW IV, 40; cf. L I, 6; EW IV, 46)

This concept retains an aristocratic flavour (Slomp 2000, p. 48; cf. Pacchi 1987, p. 115), incorporating a sense of superiority over others; as proof of this, as already mentioned in L I, XIII (EW III, 112), Hobbes includes it among the causes of competition. On the other hand, he also seems to understand glory as self-respect, a passion that accompanies a specific kind of rational recognition: the acknowledgment of one's own powers.

As Hobbes explains in *The Elements*, (EL IX, 1; EW IV, 40–41), the acknowledgment of one's worth can be well-grounded:

this passion, of them whom it displeaseth, is called *pride*; by them whom it pleaseth, it is termed a *just valuation* of himself. This imagination of our power or worth, may be from an assured a certain *experience* of our own actions; and then is that glory *just*, and well grounded, and begetteth an opinion of *increasing* the same by other actions to follows.

Ill-grounded self-respect, in contrast, is of two possible kinds. Firstly, it may be false glory, a passion stemming from an improper opinion of oneself, nourished by fame and the trust of others (EL IX, 1; EW IV, 41). False glory is described as a passion prompting those who feel it to act on the basis of their conceptions of themselves, causing them to fall short of their ambitions (*Ibid.*)

The second kind of "fallacious" self-respect is represented by the so-called "vain glory", a passion consisting in the mere presumption of power, without

action. This passion consists “in the feigning or supposing of abilities in ourselves, which we know are not” (L I, VI; EW III, 45–46). As Hobbes clarifies in L I, XI (EW III, 88),

[V]ain-glorious men, such as without being conscious to themselves of great sufficiency, delight in supposing themselves gallant men, are inclined only to ostentation; but not to attempt: because when danger or difficulty appears, they look for nothing but to have their insufficiency discovered.

Understood in general terms, the search for glory is unstable in the state of nature. Human beings feel the seductive allure of power (Cooper 2010, pp. 245–246), which causes them to see themselves as superior to others (EL XIV, 4; EW IV, 82), so even a well-grounded confidence can easily become fallacious self-respect.

We might expect Hobbes to see false-glory as a source of conflict, given its capacity to produce real agency. Nevertheless, as some scholars have suggested, (Cooper 2010; Slomp 2000) Hobbes appears to present vain-glory (more than false-glory) as the primary cause of conflictual interactions. Why should vain-glory, perhaps more than false-glory, exacerbate conflict? The answer may lie in the idea that

vainly glorious men hope for precedency and superiority above their fellows, not only when they are equal in power, but also when they are inferior (EL XIV, 4; EW IV, 82).

The ill-grounded expectations cultivated by vainly glorious men, as Hobbes concludes in this passage of *The Elements*, produce an attempt to subdue even those who are equal or superior in power. Although vain-glory in relation to one’s powers does not lead to the realization of those specific powers, it is a passion that, in the long run, can fuel anger, which, as Hobbes states in *Leviathan*, is an excess of pride prompting the overwhelming desire for revenge (L I, VIII; EW III, 62; DC II, 4; EW II, 7).

## 4 From the Right of Nature to the Law of Nature

In the Hobbesian state of nature, every man has a right to all things, that is to say, to do whatever he wishes and to possess and use whatever he wants (EL XIV, 10; EW IV, 84). Hobbes calls this (*Jus*) “right of nature”, characterizing it as “*blameless liberty* of using our own natural power and ability” (EL XIV, 6; EW IV, 83). The right of nature (which we could think of a “permission right”; cf. Kavka 1986, p. 296) is not opposed to reason, given that it is natural and le-

gitimate for everyone to preserve their own body and limbs from death and pain (EL XIV, 6; EW IV, 83). On the other hand, the phrase “right of nature” does not indicate a series of entitlements enabling people to call for equal respect (such as those enshrined for instance in liberally-oriented contemporary Charters of rights). In the state of nature, everyone is the judge of their pursuits, of the necessity of the means to their established goals, and also of the degree of the danger involved in pursuing them (EL XIV, 8; EW IV, 83). It could be said that we are ourselves the yardsticks of our own agency. We might say, then, that one holds oneself as a yardstick for one’s own agency; we are a sort of “epistemic authority” to be respected.<sup>27</sup>

Hobbes explains this concept by means of a *reductio ad absurdum*:

[F]or if it be against reason, that I be judge of mine own danger myself, then it is reason, that another man be judge thereof. But the same reason that maketh another man judge of those things that concern me, maketh me also judge of that that concerneth him. And therefore I have reason to judge of his sentence, whether it be for my benefit, or not. (EL XIV, 8; EW IV, 83)

As we have already seen, however, the lack of shared criteria for assessing pursuits and dangers generates ill-grounded expectations, claims and conflicts. In the state of nature, the idea of respect for oneself as “judge” legitimizes not only one’s right to action, but also to resist action, and this is what sparks off open conflict:

[S]eeing then to the offensiveness of man’s nature one to another, there is added a right of every man to every thing, whereby one man invadeth with right, and another man with right resisteth, and men live thereby in perpetual diffidence, and study how to preoccupate each other; the estate of men in this natural liberty, is the estate of war. (EL XIV, 11; EW IV, 84)

Having said this, the human capacity to actively experience (or simply mentally represent) a condition of conflict gradually leads to the universal acknowledgment that what seemed, in itself, to be rational, i.e., the arbitrary pursuit of the good, becomes incompatible with the actualization of peace. This is the only condition under which life-plans can be pursued without the danger of mutual hindrance. Rationality, ultimately, recommends cooperation rather than conflict (Hampton 1986, p. 76). The need to achieve peace calls for an urgent re-definition of the standard criteria of rationality in the state of nature, and

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<sup>27</sup> See Darwall 2008, pp. 8–9, who outlines the conceptual model of respect as “recognition of an epistemic authority”.



also, as I argue in the last section of this essay, of the criteria for the respect of persons.

The transition from a life ruled according to subjective criteria of agency to one requiring the employment of a shared rationality (directed towards the promotion of a stable condition of peace and respectful interaction) takes shape through the universal recognition of the substantial equality of all human beings. What makes human beings equal to one another, in Hobbes' view, is not a presumed dignity possessed by all, but the equal power to hurt others. The capacity to inflict damage on others (including the stronger and more virtuous ones) neutralizes the undeniable differences between people in their natural and instrumental powers (i.e. differences which might cause superior people to demand higher amounts of goods than those they would be willing to assign to others). In *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes suggests that

if we consider how little odds there is of strength or knowledge, between men of mature age, and with how great facility he that is the weaker in strength or in wit, or in both, may utterly destroy the power of the stronger; since there needeth but little force to the taking away of a man's life, we may conclude, that men considered in mere nature ought to admit amongst themselves equality. (EL XIV, 2; EW IV; 81–82)

I maintain that the need to imagine ourselves equal to others can be understood as an embryonic form of equal respect, based on recognition of the equal power of human beings to hurt one another. This form of respect combines a rational aspect, the acknowledgment of this power, and the passions of fear and distrust, aroused by imagining the effects of this power. A similar form of respect was conceptualized by Hudson, who spoke of “respect as obstacle” with reference to objects worthy of consideration by virtue of their power to block the plans of others (among whom the same person who respects) (Hudson 1980).

In my view, in addition to representing a sort of “prudential recognition” and caution, this opens up the possibility of respect for oneself and others as equally dangerous subjects. Of course, the concept of respect as an obstacle is far from expressing the recognition of equal worth (or “dignity”) of human beings *qua* human. Nevertheless, this kind of equal respect might be the basis for the idea that each and every human being needs to be recognized as a subject whose existence should be taken seriously and perhaps even adopted as a constraint against the agency of others (see Darwall 1977). I would also suggest that, by virtue of the recognition of the power of subjects to inflict damage on one another, rationality, initially employed to promote strategies implementing individual life plans, gradually transcends the sphere of the right of nature and comes

to be a reflection on the most promising strategies for successful arbitration and the production of agreement between incompatible points of view.

A rationally-informed treatment of conflicts in the direction of peace does not represent a way out of the state of nature. Indeed, as Hobbes claims, reason is no less “nature” than passion (EL XV, 1; EW IV, 87), and even in the state of nature can be used for strategies of respectful interaction between people. In my view, it is primarily by means of the concept of the “law of nature” that Hobbes establishes a basis for equal respect as mutual recognition of an equal entitlement to survival and happiness. Departing from a tradition of thought that assimilates the law and right of nature,<sup>28</sup> Hobbes draws a stark distinction between the two. More pointedly, the law of nature and its various expressions, if understood and accepted universally as a legitimate source of human conduct, reduces the risk of conflict (the very conflict the right of nature itself, if freely pursued, ends up producing).

The nature of the laws of nature has been the object of intense debate among scholars, especially with regard to its supposed foundations. Some hold that these laws ought to be primarily understood as theorems of reason (see for instance Gauthier 2001), whereas others regard them as prescriptions ultimately issued by divine command (see for instance Martinich 1992). A detailed treatment of the laws of nature is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that these are precepts or general rules found by rational argument (L I, XIV; EW III, 116–117) of a normative nature. By abstracting from subjective plans, opinion and sensitivities, they provide the seeds for well-regulated human coexistence. The prescriptions do not oblige *in foro externo*, but only *in foro interno*, i. e. in one’s conscience (L I, XV; EW III, 145), implying that the failure to comply with the laws of nature would not be punishable under the laws established by a certain commonwealth.

The laws of nature can be thought of as “hypothetical imperatives” (Pacchi 1965, p. 118, note 1), rules that ought to be observed as an indispensable step towards the achievement of a condition of peace. From the founding law of nature, which prescribes that human beings act to preserve peace (L I, XIV; EW III, 117–118), Hobbes derives a second law, according to which every man who desires peace and the defense of himself thinks that it is necessary

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<sup>28</sup> For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Zagorin 2009, pp. 20–29. Zagorin mentions in particular Suárez (16<sup>th</sup> century), who points out that the word *lex* can be used interchangeably with *ius* (p. 24).

to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself. (L I, XIV; EW III, 117–118; cf. DC II, 3; EW II, 17; EL XV, 2; EW IV, 87)

The readiness to relinquish the right can be seen as a form of regard for other persons and their existence. This is all the more evident since depriving oneself of absolute liberty may be not only general in nature, but a transfer of rights. Unlike the act of *renouncing*, in which it does not matter to whom the benefit adheres, the act of *transferring* involves concern for the benefit to certain persons (L I, XIV; EW III, 118–119). This idea emerges for instance in EL XV, 3 (EW IV, 88):

[T]o *transfer* right to another, is by sufficient signs to declare to that other accepting thereof, that it is his will not to resist, or hinder him, according to that right he had thereto before he transferred it.

In order to achieve peace, no one should do to others what they would not want done to themselves (Cf. L I, XIV; EW III, 118), a notion, as Hobbes states, that can be found in Gospels:

whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them. And that law of all men, *quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris*. (L I, XIV; EW III, 118)

Respecting persons, in this sense, would amount to calibrating one's expectations to fit in with the equal expectations that other subjects, in their turn, ought to hold in order to attain peace. The idea of equal respect suggested here appears to be premised on a form of reciprocity which is not simply built against the backdrop of mutual fear, but on the capacity to open oneself up to the needs and expectations of others (Lloyd 2009). It is a reciprocity of respectful attitudes making of respect a genuinely "moral" value in Hobbes's theory. This emerges in particular in the following excerpt from *The Elements of Law* (XVII, 2; EW IV, 104), where Hobbes states that

... reason and the law of nature dictateth, *Whatsoever right any man requireth to retain, he allow every other man to retain the same* [...] for there is no acknowledgment of worth, without attribution of the equality of benefit and respect.

Hobbes points out in the following lines that the law of nature presupposes a principle of distributive justice which consists in allowing "*proportionalia proportionalibus*", a principle that, in his view, demonstrates that equal respect is an attribution of *aequalia aequalibus* (XVII, 2; EW IV, 104). The distributive principle at stake is premised on a human inclination mentioned by Hobbes in

DC II, 4 (EW II, 7): the inclination to permit as much to others as one assumes for oneself, according to natural equality. This, he says

is an argument of a temperate man, and one that rightly values his power.

The above law of nature, accepted and followed *in foro interno*, is not in itself a guarantee of safety in a state and does not make human beings accountable for their own conduct. Only the transition from the state of nature to a civil state can reduce (possibly even eliminate) distrust and mutual fear. It is primarily in the state of nature, however, that Hobbes seems to identify the anthropological premises underlying the transition. A founding act of mutual recognition between human beings as equal is the outcome of people with a firm view of themselves, their powers and limits.

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