

War, Madness, and Death: The Paradox of Honor in Hobbes's *Leviathan*

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The citizens of a Hobbesian state, timorous and risk averse in times of peace, are expected to become valiant soldiers ready to face death for the sake of king and country in war. Far from being an outright error, this glaring contradiction is an intentional incoherence in Hobbes's political philosophy. Hobbes creates a consistently logical model of politics based on a simplified vision of man as a psychological egoist, which he superimposes onto what he knows is a more complex human nature. In political society, man's innate desire for honor must be tamed through education. Hobbes's rhetorical strategy thus casts as insane anyone willing to take up arms for any reason other than direct threats to their own lives. Hobbes, however, aware of the inadequacy of his own narrowly self-interested depiction of man, expects that man's yearning for honor and fame after death will resurface in times of war.

“Fortitude is a royal virtue; and though it be necessary in such private men as shall be soldiers, yet, for other men, the less they dare the better it is both for the commonwealth and for themselves.”

—Thomas Hobbes (*Behemoth*)

“Nor is there any repugnancy between fearing the laws, and not fearing a public enemy.”

—Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*)

The worst part of life during wartime, which is the same as the state of nature, Hobbes claims, is the “continual fear, and danger of violent death” (Hobbes 1996, 89; hereafter *Leviathan*).¹ And it is this that individuals seek to escape when they establish political society. Once in political society, though, Hobbes clearly expects citizens to submit themselves again to the constant fear of violent death in the service of national defense. On this basis, many commentators have concluded that Hobbes is guilty of a glaring contradiction, since, they claim, he can offer no plausible reason a citizen is obligated to fight and risk his life for his country (Johnson Bagby 2009, 89, 100; Lloyd 2009, 147; Walzer 1970, 82). The individual, it seems, should never be required to do

what Hobbes clearly expects him to do. Yet, the desire to preserve one's life at nearly any cost, the apex of rationality in Hobbes's works, must, in the precincts of a national war, be cast aside.

I argue that Hobbes is imposing a simplified and consistently logical vision of man onto what he realizes is the more complex and contradictory truth about human nature. This logical system, which draws on Hobbes's materialism, is essential to his rhetorical educative strategy. He expects that a desire for honor, and in particular the desire for fame after death, will persist without much need for instruction or encouragement, despite his teaching that one should above all strive to preserve one's life. Hobbes relies on at least some citizens to act in ways he condemns as fundamentally irrational. This paradox in Hobbes's thought, I argue, is an intentional incoherence.

The key to unraveling this intentional incoherence is understanding Hobbes's treatment of honor. Because of its close connection with pride and glory, the desire for honor is one of the major obstacles to creating a peaceful and stable political community. The other such impediment to promoting a civically responsible fear of death is religion, which I will not discuss here.² For Hobbes, honor is politically

¹An online appendix for this article can be found at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613001072>.

²For a good recent treatment of religion as an obstacle to the fear of death and civil peace, see McClure (2011). I agree with Lloyd, who states that, “Hobbes took social disorder to be primarily the result of action on transcendent interests” (1992, 271), but where Lloyd rightly emphasizes the religious aspect of this issue, I am concerned here with the desire for transcendent honor, or the desire for fame after death.

destabilizing and in need of reinterpretation and ultimately excision in its most dangerous forms from the domestic sphere. At the same time though, it is necessary, especially the kind that leads to fame after death, in the inevitable cases of external warfare. In most contexts this type of honor, Hobbes wants to teach his readers, is a form of madness; it relies on a communal bond Hobbes otherwise eschews in favor of preservation-oriented egoism. But in times of war, it is nonetheless, a necessity for the survival of the Hobbesian polity.

The Central, but Problematic, Role of the Fear of Death

Until recently, Hobbes scholars have tended to emphasize the role of the fear of violent death as the key factor holding the commonwealth together and maintaining the sovereign in his position of absolute control (Ahrensdorf 2000, 582; Berns 1987, 399; Martinich 1992, 267; Oakeshott 1991, 253; Strauss 1963, 16). This line of interpretation helped to validate a view of Hobbes as a mechanistic thinker for whom human beings act on the basis of fixed and entirely calculable factors.³ Since individuals are necessarily incapable of escaping their fear of death, according to this narrative, applying enough of this fear is a reliable method of ensuring complete obedience to the sovereign.

Hobbes, though, clearly states that the fear of death is not absolute, and, more importantly, cannot be sufficient to guarantee obedience.⁴ The historical circumstances during which Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* provide the most obvious evidence against the efficacy of fearing death; the work was written during a civil war in which a significant percentage of the populations of England, Scotland, and Ireland died for the sake of honor, religion, and political ends. In addition, Hobbes, in his dialogic history of the civil war has the elder character “A” claim that a large number of common people cared little for any of these more exalted causes and were willing to risk their lives for either side, “for pay or plunder” (Hobbes 1990, 2; hereafter *Behemoth*). Indeed, the first part of *Behemoth* reads like a compendium of motives to fight in the upcoming war, all of which to some degree had to have been stronger than a supposedly overriding

concern for personal safety.⁵ In *The Elements of Law and De Cive*, Hobbes states unequivocally that pride (which is connected to honor) will trump the fear of death. For example, he states that “many a man had rather die” than allow another to wreak even non-lethal revenge on him (Hobbes 1994a, 52; hereafter *Elements*). “Life itself,” he asserts, “with the condition of enduring scorn is not esteemed worth the enjoying” (*Elements*, 92). In *De Cive*, similarly, he claims that, “most men prefer to lose their peace and even their lives rather than suffer insult” (Hobbes 1998b, 49; hereafter *De Cive*). Further, in *Leviathan*, he states that “most men choose rather to hazard their life, than not to be revenged” (Hobbes 1996, 107, hereafter *Leviathan*). We also learn that honor seekers will continue to risk their lives in duels (*Leviathan* 67), and in *On Man*, that when the pains of life become too great, “unless their quick end is foreseen, they may lead men to number death among the goods” (*Leviathan* 67, Hobbes 1998a, 48; hereafter *On Man*). Hobbes also maintains that the fear of death is not enough to dissuade individuals from breaking the law (*Leviathan*, chap. 30); rights, he says, “cannot be maintained by any Civill Law, or terrour of legall punishment,” and a law against rebellion cannot therefore be effective (*Leviathan*, 232).⁶ The desire for self-preservation, then, is not in all cases mankind’s highest goal, and the fear of death is not simply or naturally the strongest passion, or the *summum malum*, as many scholars suggest.

One solution to this apparent inconstancy has been to argue that Hobbes in fact places very little weight on the fear of death and instead relies on a hitherto unseen moral sense.⁷ In fact, Hobbes is quite explicit about the essential role the fear of death plays in his political theory. As he says in *Elements*: “And if no covenant should be good, that proceedeth from the fear of death, no conditions of peace between enemies, nor any laws could be of force; which are all consented to from that fear” (86). In addition to binding citizens to their covenants, Hobbes is also unequivocal that self-preservation is the primary goal of those forming a commonwealth: “The finall Cause, End, or Designe of men . . . in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves...is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby”

³Hobbes, as is well-known, is frequently studied in conjunction with some form of game theory. For three of the best-known examples, see Kavka (1986), Hampton (1986), and Gauthier (1969).

⁴For good synopses of these exceptions to the overriding power of the fear of death, see Kateb (1989), Seery (1996), and Sreedhar (2010).

⁵For a good overview of this compendium, see the introduction to *Behemoth* by Stephen Holmes (Hobbes 1990).

⁶In this vein, I agree with Bejan (2010, 615).

⁷See Lloyd (2009, 247). I expand on this point in the appendix, section B.

(*Leviathan*, 117). Hobbes is also quite clear that when it comes to creating a stable polity, “The Passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear,” and he means here fear for one’s own fate (*Leviathan*, 99). The problem of self-sacrifice for the sake of the state, then, remains problematic for Hobbes.

War, Part One: The Egoist in Battle

The specific problem the need for soldiers presents to the strictly egoistic system Hobbes presents runs as follows: the citizen, who enters the commonwealth as an individual primarily concerned with his own preservation, can never identify with the community in a way that would make the sacrifice of life seem entirely reasonable or desirable. Walzer, discussing Hobbes, outlines this tension well:

A man who dies for the state defeats his only purpose in forming the state [preservation of his life]: death is the contradiction of politics. A man who risks his life for the state accepts the insecurity which it was the only end of his political obedience to avoid: war is the failure of politics. Hence, there can be no political obligation either to die or to fight. Obligation disappears in the presence of death or of the fear of death. (1970, 82)

If the state’s primary function is the preservation of the individual’s life, demanding that he die in war to preserve the state is a bald contradiction. As Johnson Bagby argues, “In the end, [Hobbes] could not justify any reason for obligating a soldier to face imminent death for a chance to preserve his country” (2009, 7).

There is, though, an argument for going to war founded on egoism built into Hobbes’s system. The clearest reason Hobbes gives for soldiers to take up arms in war is that they will be punished with death if they do not and that it is therefore very much in their interest to fight (*Leviathan*, 151). Soldiers who take “imprest money” also forfeit the right to run away from battle, and this implies that they also abandon their most fundamental right to self-preservation because they have been paid to do so (*Leviathan*, 152).⁸ Because volunteer soldiers have forfeited this right, they may be justly punished with death for cowardice. Running from battle in this case is akin to a capital crime. Although Hobbes makes allowance for conscripts who are cowardly, he maintains that the sovereign retains the right to put them to death. The goal here is to make the fear of certain death at the hands of

state’s agents outweigh the threat of possible death in battle. As Hobbes explains in an analogous context, “man by nature chooseth the lesser evill, which is danger of death in resisting, rather than the greater, which is certain and present death in not resisting” (*Leviathan*, 98). If the state comes together for the sake of self-preservation, but cannot defend itself, its constitution was in vain. The sovereign facing this difficulty must then leverage the desire for self-preservation to his advantage.

Although one way to do this is to threaten disobedient soldiers with death, the wise sovereign, who is in part the audience of *Leviathan*, could also establish a vast military superiority, or at least a stable balance of power. One goal of Hobbes’s sovereign is to unify the largest possible number of citizens, thereby making the odds of a successful invasion as low as possible: “The Multitude sufficient to confide in for our Security, is not determined by any certain number, but by comparison with the Enemy we feare; and is the sufficient, when the odds of the Enemy is not of so visible and conspicuous moment to determine the event of warre, as to move him to attempt” (*Leviathan*, 118). The implication is that a larger unified multitude will be able to field a larger and better army and deter any opponent from going to war in the first place. Joining an army with overwhelming deterrent power, and thus a very low long-term casualty rate, is far less irrational than joining a vulnerable army that is very likely to engage a more powerful enemy. A wise sovereign will never allow his military to be inferior to potential enemies.

When the sovereign fails to establish such superiority or a stable balance of power, he risks, in Hobbes’s system, widespread defection and defeat. Since the pact that subjects make with their sovereign is an exchange of obedience for protection, soldiers are not bound to obey their sovereign if he can no longer protect them. Properly speaking, if the sovereign can no longer protect his subjects, he is no longer the sovereign. And although Hobbes claims that, “every man is bound by Nature, as much as in him lieth, to protect in Warre, the Authority, by which he is himself protected in time of Peace,” he goes on to say that it would be contradictory “to destroy him, by whose strength he is preserved” (*Leviathan*, 484). This is more a prohibition against actively opposing the sovereign than a command to fight to the death to protect him. Hobbes is quite clear that soldiers are not bound to risk their lives in the face of imminent death and that it is up to the individual to make this assessment. If a soldier or group of soldiers is outnumbered, they are within their rights to surrender and pledge allegiance to their

⁸I agree with Warrender (1957, 192) who believes that this obligation no longer applies to those in mortal danger; Pace Baumgold (1988, 91–92) on the “strenuous obligation” of volunteer soldiers.

enemy (*Leviathan*, 485). Soldiers thus act on the same principle as nonsoldiers:

For where a number of men are manifestly too weak to defend themselves united, every one may use his own reason in time of danger, to save his own life, either by flight, or by submission to the enemy, as hee shall think best; in the same manner as a very small company of souldiers, surprised by an army, may cast down their armes, and demand quarter, or run away, rather than be put to the sword. (*Leviathan*, 485)

If soldiers' supplies are cut off and they cannot survive otherwise, they may do what they must to remain alive: they are permitted both to surrender and to pledge allegiance to the enemy. A subject is no longer obligated to his former sovereign, "when the means of his life is within the Guards and Garrisons of the Enemy; for it is then, that he hath no longer Protection from him, but is protected by the adverse party for his Contribution" (*Leviathan*, 484). And further:

a Souldier . . . hath not the liberty to submit to a new Power, as long as the old one keeps the field, and giveth him means of subsistence, either in his Armies, or Garrisons; for in this case, he cannot complain of want of Protection, and means to live as a Souldier. But when that also failes, a Souldier also may seek his Protection wheresoever he has most hope to have it; and may lawfully submit himself to his new Master. (485)

Just as the individual retains a right to resist the sovereign because he can never be understood to have given up his right to self-preservation, so soldiers are never bound to die for their country if they can possibly avoid it.

In this section, we have seen that Hobbes overcomes Walzer's objection through an argument based on self-interest. We have also seen, however, that on the basis of this argument, there is no incentive for going above and beyond a very limited call of duty, but rather an expectation that the fear of death will continue to be the decisive factor determining one's actions. The logical system he proposes leaves no room for courageous action, which, we will see that Hobbes claims in several places, is necessary for the survival of the commonwealth. This system is in fact an important part of Hobbes's rhetorical strategy to inculcate a more peaceful ethos among citizens.

Hobbes's Education in Sanity and Insanity

Hobbes did not expect that the system outlined above would be perfectly replicated in reality, but he did think the world would become a more peaceful place

if this way of thinking became more prevalent. Hobbes, therefore, is engaged in an educative strategy that famously involves replacing the works of Aristotle and the scholastics with his own works (*Leviathan*, 237, 491).⁹ Hobbes's teaching on madness, I will argue in this section, serves as a crucial underpinning to this egoistic system and also reveals the extent to which Hobbes's education involved subtly altering the way individuals thought about and used certain words and concepts.¹⁰ In particular, Hobbes seeks to define as insane those who are willing to risk their lives, along with the political stability of their states, for the sake of honor. In so doing, Hobbes attempts to establish a new standard of normalcy and reasonableness that involves avoiding danger and excessively passionate behavior.¹¹

As scholars have noted, Hobbes teaches a new set of virtues which supplant traditional and classical republican virtues,¹² but the chapter in *Leviathan* in which he purports to discuss the intellectual virtues and their defects is primarily a discussion of various types of madness. Virtue is a type of preeminence, but when it becomes too preeminent, according to Hobbes, it is insanity: "to have stronger, and more vehement Passions for any thing, than is ordinarily seen in others, is that which men call madness" (*Leviathan*, 54). He goes on to explain that the chief causes of madness include, "great vainglory, which is commonly called pride and self-conceit," because "Pride subjecteth a man to anger, the excess whereof is the madness called rage, and fury" (*Leviathan* 54). A relative term, madness depends on what is considered ordinary, and it is the latter that Hobbes hopes to change. Those who are particularly prone to the excessive pride that leads to madness are those who are not content with equality, but who act rashly, or madly, from a desire for honor and power. It is the demagogues and those who can persuade large numbers of citizens to fight or rebel that Hobbes

⁹For a good recent treatment of Hobbes on education see Bejan (2010). See also Garsten (2006) and Tuck (1998, 147).

¹⁰Both Mintz (1962, 151) and Parkin (2007, 110 ff.) discuss Hobbes's linguistic strategies in this regard. See also Pettit (2008). As Mintz (1962, 151) puts it, Hobbes surreptitiously won over his critics because he was able to "penetrate their defences by obliging them to adopt the rationalist approach." It was partly because of this rhetorical strategy that Hobbes was able to claim that *Leviathan* had, "framed the minds of a thousand gentlemen to a conscientious obedience to present government, which otherwise would have wavered in that point" (Hobbes 1845, 336).

¹¹In this context, see Cooper (2010) who emphasizes Hobbes's promotion of modesty and humility as an antidote to vainglory.

¹²See Strauss (1963), Johnston (1986), Dietz (1990), and Berkowitz (2000).

wants to portray as mad, those Hobbes is thinking of when he says in *Behemoth* that “*there were an exceeding great number men of the better sort [who were eager for war], that had been so educated, as that in their youth having read books written by famous men of the ancient Grecian and Roman commonwealths concerning their polity and great actions*” (*Behemoth*, 3).¹³ In depicting such men, who had been raised on classical literature, as inherently dangerous, Hobbes hopes to temper the ambition of potential Alexanders, those “much taken with reading of Romants,” not only by having them worry that they will be perceived as mad, but also causing ordinary citizens to be wary of following such madmen (*Leviathan*, 16). Moreover, in *De Cive*, Hobbes warns of those orators like Cataline who, because of their eloquence are able to stir up sedition through “their ability to render their hearers insane,” by agitating their passions and thus “minimize the risks [of sedition] beyond reason” (*De Cive*, 139–40). Those who follow orators such as Cataline are insane because they are convinced to risk their lives for a cause, and they lose their grip on the meaning of “*justice and injustice, honour and dishonour, good and evil*” (139–40). Labeling someone insane is an effective way to end discussion of the relative value of motives. Thus, by calling those who are filled with pride, anger, and lack of discretion mad, Hobbes goes a long way towards changing our perception of men who put their lives at stake for the sake of honor.

For Hobbes, then, being risk averse is a source of both moral virtue, since it is a requirement of the first law of nature, and sanity. Rather than cultivating the martial virtues as thinkers such as Machiavelli and Sydney urged, Hobbes’s system teaches us to avoid ever putting ourselves in harm’s way. Goldsmith in this context notes that for Hobbes, “suicides are in fact insane” (1966, 123). “Fortitude,” “A” says in *Behemoth* “is a royal virtue; and though it be necessary in such private men as shall be soldiers, yet, for other men, the less they dare the better it is both for the commonwealth and themselves” (45). In fact, Hobbes wants not only to promote the fear of death as a civic virtue, but also to foster a fear of ever being placed in dangerous situations, or what we could call the fear of the fear of death.¹⁴ It is through this fear of fear that Hobbes is able to overcome the paradox noted by some scholars that

the Hobbesian state is meant to free us from the worst feature of the state of nature, continual fear of death, but it must itself rely on fear.¹⁵ This particular paradox is resolved when we realize that Hobbes is talking about two distinct types of fear. As he says in response to an objection to *De Cive*,

The objectors believe, I think, that fearing is nothing but being actually frightened. But I mean by that word any anticipation of future evil. In my view, not only flight, but also distrust, suspicion, *precaution and provision against fear* are all characteristics of men who are afraid (25, my italics).¹⁶

Taking precautions against being afraid is a sign of fear; it is possible to, so to speak, be afraid of the fear of death and to insulate oneself against it. For example, a person who avoids skydiving because of a fear of parachute failure is, for Hobbes, experiencing a different kind of fear than the person who, after jumping out of an airplane, realizes that the parachute has in fact failed. Hobbes wanted to promote the less intense of these fears, which is closely connected to his teaching on prudence. When Hobbes discusses the train of thought of the potential criminal running from “The Crime” to “the Officer, the Prison, the Judge, and the Gallows,” he is connecting prudence to the fear of possible and far-off consequences, and promoting a general aversion to dangerous behavior (*Leviathan*, 22). In this way, he was attempting to establish the avoidance of danger as an entirely rational norm. Facing and overcoming our fear of danger might lead to boldness, which Hobbes clearly does not want to encourage. Citizens of the commonwealth will be afraid of experiencing the very intense fear of those who live in an anarchic state of nature and will therefore prize stability and personal safety above all else.

As noted above, the greatest obstacle to individuals adopting this standard of fearfulness in the secular realm is the desire for honor among glory seekers. Hobbes’s system overcomes this problem by making the sovereign the sole source of civil honor (although not of natural honor, which I will discuss in the following section). In chapter 30 of *Leviathan*, which describes how a sovereign should educate his citizens regarding equality before the law, Hobbes says that “The honour of great Persons, is to be valued for their beneficence, and the aydes they give men of

¹³See also Hobbes’s deconstruction of Brutus and his warning that without some reform in the universities, another Achilles is likely to rise (*Leviathan*, 18; Hobbes 1994b, 477).

¹⁴Consider also Shklar, who speaks of liberalism as being motivated by “the very fear of fear itself” (Shklar 1989, 29), quoted in Robin (2004, 10).

¹⁵As Tuck notes in his introduction to *Leviathan*, “(contrary to many people’s belief) Hobbes wished to free people from fear” (xxvi). Pace Ahrens Dorf (2000, 584).

¹⁶For a good treatment of the persistence of fear in Hobbes’s thought, see also Blits (1989).

inferior rank, *or not at all*. And the violences, oppressions, and injuries they do, are not extenuated, but aggravated by the greatness of their persons” (*Leviathan*, 238, my italics). If we compare this statement with Hobbes’s frequent indictments of the classically educated and war-hungry elites of his time, it becomes clear that he was attempting to encourage a more humane standard of honor based on charity. Hobbes hoped to label those who contravened this standard reckless and mad.

This is evident in Hobbes’s discussion of one of the more dangerous pastimes among civilians in his time: dueling. Hobbes claims that “at this day, in this part of the world, private Duels are, and always will be Honourable, though unlawful, till such time as there shall be Honour ordained for them that refuse, and Ignominy for them that make the challenge” (*Leviathan*, 67).¹⁷ Hobbes is sympathetic to duelers since he recognizes that the dishonor involved in not accepting the challenge could be damaging to a person’s future. He therefore recommends mild punishment for those involved, since it is unjust for princes and governors to “countenance anything obliquely, which directly they forbid” (*Leviathan*, 211). Changing the law is clearly not enough. Only a more fundamental change in attitudes and mores could make refusing a duel acceptable, and this is part of Hobbes’s strategy in describing those who use violence—“for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name”—as one of the root causes of anarchy (88). We cannot help but think of those who would risk their lives for a word (calling a man a “knave” was one of the chief causes of duels in the seventeenth century) or a smile as not only irrational, but as reckless and possessed by the type of rage Hobbes describes as madness.¹⁸ In Hobbes’s system, self-preservation is supposed to be the highest priority, and only madmen deviate from this priority.

It is partly on this basis that we can understand Hobbes’s ever-perplexing right to resistance. For Hobbes, even dying out of respect for the law would appear crazy; citizens never give up their right to resist, and, as Walzer notes, “Given Hobbes’s theory,

the behavior of Socrates [in Plato’s *Crito*], is literally inexplicable; Hobbes would have to say that the man was mad” (1970, 81).

War, Part Two: The Persistence of Honor

Despite his prescriptive description of man as primarily concerned with avoiding death, and casting as mad those who do not do so, Hobbes recognizes that, despite his educative efforts, a certain desire for honor that leads one to potentially deadly acts of heroism would remain a part of human nature, and, indeed, a necessity for the state in times of war: the natural punishment for cowardice, Hobbes says, is oppression (*Leviathan*, 254).

For the most part, Hobbes’s use of the term “honor” involves worldly affairs and what is useful to one while alive, including a sense of individual dignity that must be respected. To honor, Hobbes says, is “To Value a man at a high rate,” and honor itself is “The manifestation of the Value we set on one another” (*Leviathan*, 63). In general, unlike glory or vainglory, which is something one attributes to oneself and involves the “imagination of a mans own power and ability,” honor for Hobbes is something that others bestow upon us because of our superior power and out of some hope of gaining aid or avoiding offense (*Leviathan*, 42).¹⁹ In the tenth chapter of *Leviathan*, the list of things for which one is honored is more focused on immediate goods such as receiving great gifts, having one’s advice followed, being obeyed, being trusted and loved (*Leviathan*, 64). This account of honor is consistent with Hobbes’s description of human beings as seekers of power and commodious living and avoiders of pain. Gaining public offices and riches are honorable from this point of view because they fit within this economy of power. Hobbes, though, also uses the term “honor” to refer to future, non-worldly, goods, such as fame that outlives the individual and the attendant pleasure in imagining these. In *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes is more explicit about the distinction between the “imagination of honour and glory, which...have respect to the future,” and sensual pleasures, “which please only for the present and taketh away the inclination to observe such things as conduce

¹⁷Francis Bacon also attempted such a transformation of the definition of honor in 1614 in his piece written against the practice of dueling (Peltonen 2001).

¹⁸Historically, the practice of dueling in England reached its peak in the early seventeenth century but gradually became less common and less lethal. Historians tend to agree that this was the result of a changing view of what was considered honorable (Andrew 1980; Shoemaker 2002).

¹⁹On the distinction between glory and honor, see especially Slomp (2000, 38–40). Although Hobbes does not always maintain this distinction strictly, honor is generally something we give to each other, while glory is something we give ourselves.

to honour” (*Elements*, 61). It is the former type of honor in particular that I am concerned with here.

As I have indicated above, neither Hobbes’s teaching on insanity nor the egoistic explanation of why soldiers fight is the whole story for Hobbes, nor do these fit particularly well with observable phenomena, as Hobbes must have been aware. Clearly soldiers faced with an enemy’s superior military might do not always defect or abandon their countrymen or government. Nor do soldiers remain and fight in dangerous situations simply through fear of the military police or because they might otherwise forfeit their pay. No amount of money can compensate for one’s death if individuals are the psychological egoists some Hobbes scholars have claimed. Hobbes draws attention to this tension in the “Review and Conclusion” of *Leviathan* when he adds what is often called the extra law of nature, which says that subjects are bound to protect their sovereign in war (*Leviathan*, 484). Volunteer soldiers must be bound by something more than the fear of death, or narrow self-interest, because of the positive act of signing on. As we shall see, this obligation is founded precisely on the love of honor Hobbes finds so dangerous in political society. Just as Hobbes acknowledges that the fear of death can be overcome, so he knows that the system he describes is not fully in accord with his own understanding of human nature. Hobbes does not want to eradicate the love of honor that drives individuals to seek immortal fame in war. He sought to tame this desire through education, but he did not expect or want to be entirely successful in this endeavor. In fact, he believed the residual desire for honor could be harnessed in the armed forces.

Kateb is one of the most vocal critics of Hobbes’s apparent irrationality in this regard, which he describes as “a kind of hysterical doublethink” (Kateb 1989, 382). He claims that Hobbes, although usually rational and desirous of peace at home, was blinded by “an unpurged patriotism or ethnocentrism” when it came to external enemies: “He tries to see through everything except national feeling. He cannot shake free of the sickest of all sick political thoughts, the abstract we. To want nationhood, whether the numbers are few or in the millions, is to want war and death” (382). Hobbes, then, according to Kateb, wants to promote both longevity at home and death in wars abroad. The contradiction Kateb and numerous others have noted does in fact exist in Hobbes’s theory, and, given how often this contradiction is observed, and how unlikely that Hobbes would have missed it, it should be understood as an intentional incoherence.

That is, Hobbes quite consciously expects individuals to act on the basis of opposing priorities in different situations: to fear the laws at home but not to fear the public enemy (*Leviathan*, 484). Despite the rigidly logical account of how and why soldiers will act in wartime sketched in the previous sections, and despite his claim to have “sufficiently, or probably proved all the Theoremes of Morall doctrine” Hobbes was aware of the inadequacy of his educational framework in this crucial respect (*Leviathan* 254). In fact, such inadequacy was essential to the survival of the commonwealth. Just as Hobbes taught that rebellion leads to a state of anarchy which is worse than anything, while also recognizing that this fact would not prevent irrational citizens from rebelling from a negligent prince, so he relies on the fact that the educational dam he builds to hold back the politically disruptive desire for honor would fail when foreign enemies threatened the state. The incoherence in Hobbes’s thought is not that he needs soldiers to fight, but cannot explain why they would do so. Rather, he undermines the self-interested system he presents to explain why they would fight by claiming that no state can be secure on the basis of this kind of narrow self-interest but requires for its defense acts of courage motivated by a desire for honor.

The laws of the commonwealth and culture, according to Hobbes, can only go so far in manipulating what is considered honorable. We have seen that Hobbes expects the sovereign to be the sole arbiter of civil honor. But, as he explains, there are also, in addition to institutional or conventional forms of honor, natural forms: “There be some signes of Honour, (both in Attributes and Actions,) that be Naturally so; as amongst Attributes, *Good, Just, Liberrall*, and the like; and amongst Actions, *Prayers, Thanks, and Obedience*” (*Leviathan*, 249, see also 253). Wearing the king of Persia’s robes could be either honorable or dishonorable depending on the king’s decrees (as in Hobbes’s example). Courage, great actions, and ambition for great honors will always be honorable for Hobbes, and disobedience will always be a form of dishonor, as will weakness or cowardice (*Leviathan*, 64–66).

When Hobbes speaks of excusing “men of feminine courage” from fighting in war, he can only mean that the standard soldiers are to follow is that of manly courage (*Leviathan*, 151). It is clear that Hobbes regards women as unfit for the dangerous activities of a soldier (Mansfield 2006, 174), and since Hobbes defines courage as “the Contempt of Wounds, and violent Death,” he must mean that most soldiers will be able to overcome their fear of death (*Leviathan*, 151). As noted

above, Hobbes mentions in several places that many would rather die than suffer insult, and given this, the very punishment for cowardice in the army, in addition to being branded as “womanly,” may entail such a degree of dishonor that many would rather die than submit to it. Indeed, as Johnson Bagby, notes, in Hobbes’s *The Whole Art of Rhetoric*, he “lists several things of which men are ashamed. To throw down their arms and run away is considered cowardly” (2009, 60).

The standard of manliness Hobbes indirectly implies here involves a sense of communal belonging that Hobbes tries to prevent in civilian life and is part of the ethos of duty which survives to this day in military units. Indeed, the bond among soldiers is a rare exception to Hobbes’s individualism and overall fear of civic association (Boyd 2001). Hobbes seems to sanction this bond, because, “the strength of an Army, [consists in] the union of their strength under one Command” (*Leviathan*, 126). Mansfield says that “Hobbes deserves the mantle . . . of having created the sensitive male” and that Hobbes was “more wary of men than favorable to women,” because he is “mainly against manliness” (Mansfield 2006, 173–74). This is a good description of Hobbes’s vision for civilian life, but as his comments about “men of feminine courage” and the need for soldiers to overcome their fear of death and wounds imply, Hobbes favors manliness in the army, or at least that type of manliness embodied by Sidney Godolphin. It is remarkable that *Leviathan* also opens and ends (in its English edition) with the image of Hobbes’s “most noble and honoured friend,” who did not fight and die out of fear of punishment, but from courage and love of country and who managed to combine the apparently contradictory traits of fearing punishment at home while being fearless in the face of the enemy (*Leviathan*, 484). This type of courage is necessary to the survival of the state. As Hobbes says in *De Homine*, “just as the state is not preserved save by the courage, prudence and temperance of good citizens, so is it not destroyed save by the courage, prudence and temperance of its enemies” (1998a, 69). Clearly, the egoistic explanation of why soldiers fight cannot account for this.

Nor can the egoistic description of soldiers explain Hobbes’s statements about the power of an able commander to motivate his troops. When discussing the character of the best military commander in *Leviathan*, Hobbes states that “He must . . . be Industrious, Valiant, Affable, Liberall and Fortunate, that he may gain an opinion both of sufficiency, and of loving his Souldiers. This is Popularity, and breeds in the Souldiers both the desire and courage, to recommend themselves to his favour” (*Leviathan*, 243). The courageous acts of

a soldier can only be acts that put him in mortal danger and therefore require him to overcome his fear of violent death. Johnson Bagby misses the mark when she claims that “Hobbes wishes to undermine any idea of heroism, because it contradicts so dramatically his insistence that fear of death should be the decisive factor in our political and religious choices” (2009, 6). The desire to impress one’s commander through courageous and heroic acts is a desire to be honored by him as well as one’s unit, army, and country more generally.

When Hobbes, seemingly incongruously, ends the paragraph in which he excuses men of feminine courage by proclaiming that when the commonwealth is in great danger, all those who are able must fight to defend the state, and must fight with courage, he indicates that in certain situations, the collective insanity Kateb brands patriotism will indeed overcome the scruples of the naturally timorous (*Leviathan*, 152). I am persuaded by Baumgold that Hobbes’s “political analysis discriminates between political elites and ordinary subjects, and it was the ambition of the former for power that occupied his attention” and that those he was most concerned about were potential Alexanders (1990, 75). Only some individuals are driven by a desire for honor that has the potential to threaten the state, and fewer still have the potential to be the next Caesar.²⁰ Hobbes hopes to tame the most dangerous excesses of the latter two groups but relies on a residual capacity both to act courageously and to inspire such actions on the part of others who are not naturally so disposed.²¹

Hobbes clearly recognizes that individuals are willing to risk their lives and die for the sake of fame after death:

Desire of Praise, disposeth to laudable actions such as please them whose judgement they value . . . Desire of Fame after death does the same. And though after death, there be no sense of the praise given us on Earth, as being joyes, that are either swallowed up in the unspeakable joyes of Heaven, or extinguished in the extreme torments of Hell: yet is not such fame vain; because men have a present delight therein, from the foresight of it, and of the benefit that may redound thereby to their posterity. (*Leviathan*, 71)

²⁰See, for example, *Elements*: “And thus the greatest part of men, upon no assurance of odds, do nevertheless, through vanity or comparison, or appetite, provoke the rest, that otherwise would be contented with equality” (78).

²¹This is not alien to modern warfare. Gray notes that inspirational commanders of the sort Hobbes recommends are “a perennial phenomenon in war, a cause of wonder and admiration . . . they have the capacity to inspire their troops to deeds of recklessness and self-sacrifice” (1998, 106).

Although Slomp claims that “Hobbes never thinks that honour can compensate for loss of life,” Hobbes here maintains that dying for the sake of such praise is indeed worthwhile, and at the very least not vain, and is something for which some people will naturally strive (2000, 41).²² Hobbes’s acknowledgment of the reasonableness of performing laudable actions, which must include giving one’s life for the sake of posterity or to please one’s commander, “whose judgement they value,” is in jarring contrast to his statements about the soldier’s right to defection in the face of mortal danger and to the entire tradition of interpreting him as a psychological egoist. This seeming contradiction is all the more striking because many of Hobbes’s strongest statements about the soldier’s right to pledge allegiance to a more powerful enemy, disregarding all considerations of tradition, national identity, and ignominy, come immediately after his claims that it is entirely possible to combine opposing sets of priorities in the same individual. As one epigraph to this article states, “Nor is there any repugnancy between fearing the Laws, and not fearing a publique Enemy,” and Hobbes himself attests that Godolphin did in fact embody this apparent contradiction (*Leviathan*, 484).²³ Moreover, Hobbes admits that in combining fear of the law at home and courage in the face of the enemy, he is doing something that many hold to be impossible: “There is therefore no such Inconsistency of Humane Nature, with Civill Duties, as some think” (*Leviathan*, 484). The prudential and sane calculations that keep individuals out of danger within society must be silenced in favor of this kind of honor in war. Civil duty requires that we fear death and corporal punishment from the state, while human nature urges many to risk their lives for the sake of honor.

There is, moreover, evidence that Hobbes differentiates between the kind of violent death a soldier might suffer, but which he saw coming and could prepare for, and the violent death of those who could not do so. To take one less well-known mention of death, Hobbes says in *Thomas White’s De Mundo Examined*, “Of the good things experienced by men, however, none can outweigh the greatest of the evil ones, namely sudden [praesentanae] death”

²²This passage also implies that both Slomp and Abizadeh (2011) are not telling the whole story when they maintain that for Hobbes, individuals are willing to fight to defend their honor, or avenge signs of contempt, but not to attain honor. On intellectual vainglory, see Kraynak (1982).

²³See Scott (2003) who argues that Hobbes’s friendship with Godolphin demonstrates Hobbes’s exaggerated dismissal of man’s natural sociability.

(1976, 408; 1973, 378). Notice that here the emphasis is on unexpected death rather than death simply, or even violent death. Phillipe Ariès, the historian of western attitudes towards death, notes that dying unexpectedly was for a time regarded as the worst kind of death. Hobbes appears to accept this distinction when he says that the desire for fame after death is not vain. Since the soldier can find joy in contemplating his future fame, his death, though violent, does not, in all cases, qualify as sudden death (1991, 587). This distinction between sudden death and death that we can prepare for may in part explain Hobbes’s sparing use of the phrase “violent death” in *Leviathan*. Despite the heavy reliance on this term by scholars, it only appears three times in *Leviathan*, and only two of these refer to the violent death of individuals. The first use appears in Hobbes’s discussion of the state of nature, in which there is “no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society” and thus no possibility of enjoying any contemplation of fame after death (89). The other use of the term with regard to individuals is in the “Review and Conclusion” when, as noted above, Hobbes urges the courageous to have contempt for violent death when defending their country (483).²⁴ Violent death, then, comes to light as death that will not be remembered and for which one cannot prepare.

This desire, though, can be harnessed for the benefit of the commonwealth. In the state of nature, glory seekers are the most dangerous types of person. In political society, Hobbes makes clear, these characters remain a potential source of trouble. Sedition requires a leader who can inspire others to overlook their own safety and become, as noted above, “insane” (*De Cive* 140). In a clear example of Hobbes revealing the more complex truth beneath his overt logical model of human nature with its compulsory fear of death, he says of such a rabble rouser that,

He must be a *leader* whom they willingly obey, not because they are obligated by having submitted to his command (for we have argued in this very chapter that men in this situation do not know that they are obligated beyond what seems right and good to themselves), but because they value his courage and military skill, or because they share his passions. (*De Cive* 139)

Hobbes, though, is clearly confident that those who have the potential to become Catalines and other individuals who are naturally disposed to courageous actions can be tamed through education. We find

²⁴The third use of “violent death” in *Leviathan* appears in chapter 21 and refers to the violent death of the commonwealth through external enemies (153).

evidence for this in *Behemoth*, where “B” says the following:

For if men know not their duty, what is there that can force them to obey the laws? An army, you will say. But what shall force the army?...I am therefore of your opinion, both that men may be brought to a love of obedience by preachers and gentlemen that imbibe good principles in their youth at the Universities, and also that we never shall have a lasting peace, till the Universities themselves be in such a manner, as you have said, reformed. (59)

Hobbes also discusses the possibility of combining courage, which he defines as “Contempt of Wounds, and Violent Death,” and “*Timorousnesse*,” through “Education and Discipline” (*Leviathan*, 483). Through education then, the individual can come to see violence in the service of honor within the commonwealth as irrational, and potentially insane, but risking his life in war as a potential source of everlasting fame for which it is worth dying.

Hobbes was acutely aware that individuals could be convinced to believe in inconsistent and even absurd ideas through education. A major part of his philosophical project involved overturning what he took to be the foolish teachings of Aristotle and his followers, “blockheads” such as Suarez and Duns Scotus, which had taken over the universities and propagated nonsensical doctrines for centuries (*Behemoth* 40–41). Hobbes’s own philosophy thus comes to appear at first as the attempt to replace scholastic nonsense with a coherent, systematic, and rational system. This impression is largely warranted. Hobbes’s political philosophy is an attempt to make both individuals and politics more rational, but, at least with respect to the continuing need for a military to fight external wars, he embraces a certain fundamental inconsistency.

Conclusion

Hobbes’s theory rests on an intentional incoherence between the priorities of the citizen and those of the soldier, who, of course, are often the same person. While the private citizen should ideally fear death above all else, the soldier must be able to overcome this fear for the sake of honor. The highest good thus alternates between two opposed poles for individuals and often differs in the same individual at different times. The contradiction so many scholars have seen, then, between Hobbes’s treatment of civilians and soldiers, rather than being a flaw in his theory, is in fact the result of Hobbes’s realization that individuals can and do in fact act on the basis of very different

motivators in different situations. What might seem like insane and dangerous behavior in political society is, in war, necessary and praiseworthy.

A citizen who fears death and avoids danger is a peaceful citizen. A soldier who fears death and avoids danger is useless. The burden of Hobbes’s education was to teach the former disposition, not the latter. Hobbes accomplished this not by arguing that human beings should fear death, but by describing a system of politics which would work perfectly given a fundamental fear of death. The egoistic and quasi-scientific system Hobbes presents is itself the most important part of Hobbes’s rhetorical educative strategy. The system seems to break down when compared to reality at points and especially when it comes to soldiers and war, but, Hobbes seems to have surmised that the more readers argued about the mechanics of this system, the more obvious the premises would become. The primacy of the fear of death would not be the subject of debate, it would be an assumption. This approach made it easier for Hobbes to recast those who contravened these assumptions as dangerous madmen. Again, these came to be seen as mad not primarily because of any specific arguments Hobbes levels against glory seekers, but through the premises, and even the tone of his description, of those who would kill for a smile.

The system Hobbes presents also has the virtue of constituting oblique advice to sovereigns who may be faced with the prospect of going to war with a risk-averse and longevity-obsessed populace. Vast military superiority, perhaps paradoxically, goes hand in hand with the type of citizen Hobbes tries to create. The less risky joining an army is, the more likely a risk-averse individual will both join and do what is required.

Establishing such superiority, though, as Hobbes acknowledges, is not enough to win battles or wars. Courageous soldiers will still be necessary, as will the sorts of leaders who can inspire their troops to perform acts of bravery and possibly self-sacrifice. As we have seen, individuals with the potential to be such leaders and such soldiers exist in the state of nature and remain a permanent phenomenon. Hobbes did not think these individuals needed much cultivation or encouragement: they would appear on their own despite his educational program. The difference, though, is that in political society, those whose violent acts appear pointless and destructive in the state of nature have the possibility of winning fame after death when their energies are directed in defense of the polity that can serve as a vehicle for this form of immortality. The key for Hobbes was ensuring that this valorous potential remained latent

and undisturbed as long as it was not needed. Part of Hobbes's education involves inculcating the sense that there would be no possibility of such immortal fame for violent acts within society.

Hobbes was not optimistic about the possibility of world peace. Given limited space and resources, even if human beings were as Hobbes's system assumes them to be, there would still be war (*Leviathan*, 239). Given the anarchic state of international affairs and the lack of a common power to keep nations in check, Hobbes seems to have thought, as the lawyer says in *A Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England*, "You are not to expect such a Peace between two Nations, because there is no Common Power in this World to punish their injustice: mutual fear may keep them quiet for a time, but upon every visible advantage they will invade one another" (1997, 57). There will, therefore, always be a place for honor seekers in the world. It seems fair to say, though, that Hobbes did hope for a more peaceful world and that by fostering more stable domestic politics, there would be fewer international wars (57). In a more peaceful world, Hobbes may have hoped that fewer individuals would be called to make the kind of self-sacrifice Sidney Godolphin made and that more would seek the kind of immortality that comes through great wisdom and learning (*Elements*, 31). This, after all, is the prospect Hobbes must have been savoring, when, in the last line of his *Autobiography*, he writes: "death approaching, prompts me not to fear" (1994b, lxiv).

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