The Erotic Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes

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Introduction

In recent years valuable commentary has emerged concerning Thomas Hobbes's view of human sexuality.[1] Scholars have offered varying interpretations of this hitherto neglected aspect of his thought. However, there is agreement on one central point: Hobbes said very little directly on the issue.[2] His reference to and exploration of sexuality is unsystematic and underdeveloped.[3] While it is certainly the case that Hobbes's circumvention of this issue is in keeping with much of Western political and philosophic thought which has generally "surrendered sex to the poets," in Hobbes's case it is a surprising omission given his ambition to have catalogued the entire scope of the human passions (Baker and Elliston, 1998: 17).[4] Indeed in his masterwork, *Leviathan* he proclaims that his all-encompassing picture of human beings may provide a sure guide for a sovereign to know people and to rule over them successfully. Moreover, he depicts human beings as fundamentally physical creatures driven by appetites and aversions (Hobbes, 2002: 9–11). Hence, these passionate drives must of necessity affect our attempts to form peaceful political communities. So, why did he sidestep this topic which figures so prominently in human life and is so emblematic of our corporeality?

Hobbes as Erotic Emancipator: Sreedhar and Blackburn

To make sense of Hobbes's approach to human sexuality and the realm of the erotic, scholars, then, must mine closely his intermittent remarks. This is

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the approach taken in two notable recent investigations by Susan Sreedhar and Simon Blackburn. Both view Hobbes as something of a sexual radical. Sreedhar argues this from an explicitly feminist point of view in her article, "Towards a Hobbesian Theory of Sexuality." She contends that Hobbes may be seen as "rejecting the naturalness and goodness of three of the structuring pillars of heteronormativity: (1) heterosexuality, (2) monogamy and (3) lifelong partnership. Homosexuality, multiple partners, and temporary arrangements are equally as valid as heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong partnership" (266–67).[5] Her conclusion is that

> Hobbes can be distinguished from the majority of those who write about sexual ethics in the philosophical tradition, because of his staunch resistance to notions of natural or divinely ordained sexual prohibitions, his consistent commitment to moral conventionalism and legal positivism, and his willingness to entertain visions of diverse sexual practices and mores, marriage contracts, and relationships of dominance—not to mention his distinct lack of alarm at portrayals of strong, commanding female sexuality (as evidenced in his discussion of the Amazons). (276)

Simon Blackburn, in his book *Lust,* similarly though rather more fulsomely praises Hobbes's view of sexuality. Indeed he claims that Hobbes depicts a vision of sexuality which entails "pure mutuality" or what he terms a "Hobbesian unity" in which "there are no cross-purposes, hidden agendas, mistakes or deceptions. Lust here is like making music together, a joint symphony of pleasure and response. There is a pure mutuality, or what I . . . call a Hobbesian unity" (2004: 87).[6] He continues:

> Pleasures here are not just bodily sensations, although the body will be playing its part. The "delights of the mind" are pleasures *at* doing something. These pleasures involve the idea of oneself, but they are not properly narcissistic. The subject is not centrally pleased at himself or herself, but at the excitement of the other. Admittedly, it is not just at that, but also the fact that the other is excited by the self; but this is to be secondary to the perceived state of the other. The mutual awarenesses increase as the body takes over, as it becomes flooded with desire. The involuntary nature of sexual arousal is her part of the pleasure, the signal that the other is beginning the process of involuntary surrender to desire. (88–89)

Sreedhar and Blackburn, then, posit something distinctly modern and innovative about Hobbes's view of sexuality. For both these commentators, Hobbes's modernity seems to open more fulfilling and expansive experiences of the erotic.

Abstract. In this article I engage with recent scholarly commentary concerning the realm of human sexuality in the work of Thomas Hobbes. This has, perhaps unsurprisingly, been a neglected area of enquiry given the paucity of Hobbes's analysis of this aspect of the human passions. I argue that this new field of enquiry is to be welcomed as it allows us to explore and understand Hobbes as a fully erotic philosopher. Moreover, his erotic philosophy is best understood through the prism of his thorough-going materialism.

Résumé. Cet article jette un regard sur les récents commentaires de spécialistes au sujet de la sexualité humaine dans l'œuvre de Thomas Hobbes. Il s'agit, sans surprise aucune, d'un domaine de recherche fort négligé étant donné la rareté des propos de Hobbes sur cet aspect des passions humaines. Je soutiens que ce nouveau champ de recherche mérite d'être exploré, car il nous permettra de comprendre pleinement la philosophie érotique de Hobbes, notamment à la lumière de son profond matérialisme.

Hobbes as Anti-Erotic: I. Patapan and Sikkenga

Haig Patapan and Jeffrey Sikkenga in their article, "Love and the Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes's Critique of Platonic Eros," share this notion of Hobbes as a philosopher concerned with the erotic.[7] However, their concern is more specifically to explore the distinction between ancient and modern political thought through the prism of Hobbes's theorization of the erotic. They may be seen to offer two distinct readings of Hobbes's attitude to the erotic. The first and more extensively explored one suggests that Hobbes is an important theorist of the erotic insofar as he narrows and domesticates its sway in human experience. Indeed, on this interpretation Hobbes may be seen to be anti-erotic or anti-Platonic. Patapan and Sikkenga do offer a second albeit more tentative reading in which they suggest that Hobbes's political vision may be viewed as suffused with eroticism to which I will turn later.

In their first interpretation, Patapan and Sikkenga attribute great significance to Hobbes's relative inattention to the issue of sexuality and the realm of erotic passion. In their view this is not an oversight but rather it signals Hobbes's reframing of the ancients' concern with the erotic and its connection to the political realm. As they state "the tradition of classical political philosophy with which Hobbes claims to break (whether in its sixteenth- through seventeenth-century scholastic or humanist strains) regarded love and *eros* as vitally important for political life" (2008: 804). They argue, "What Hobbes wants is to reduce the power and scope of *eros* in the world, returning it to the limited, private sphere of sex, pleasure, and perhaps the family. It is better, then to call his understanding of love "antierotic"—or perhaps even more precisely, anti-Platonic" (805). They continue, "While it is too strong to say that Hobbes founds his new political science on his critique of the Platonic understanding of love, it is fair to conclude that his reinterpretation of *eros* is an important (though too often neglected) piece of his broad philosophical rejection of an older political science rooted in a study of love" (805).

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Hobbes thus rejects Plato's claims concerning the political significance of eros, that it leads to the contemplation of the Forms, the right ordering of the soul and the consequent disposition towards justice. Hobbes, therefore, according to Patapan and Sikkenga domesticates eros, narrows its frame to the private, the family, the individual and so makes it politically insignificant in that "it is in reality a personal rather than political form of the desire for power" (820). In their view Hobbes's "turn to power is not possible without rejecting the "old" political science founded on understanding types of human beings and regimes based on what they love" (821). This view is characteristic of most modern political science that "thinks in the de-Platonized (indeed Hobbesian) language of power and its political conceptualizations such as autonomy, sovereignty, and the state" (821).

Central to Patapan's and Sikkenga's argument is an analysis of Hobbes's brief critique of the Socratic theory of love presented in Plato's dialogue, *The Symposium*. Hobbes's analysis, which is to be found in *Human Nature*, takes particular aim at the behaviour of Socrates. (1994: 56–57). In their view, Hobbes's sly ridicule of Socrates's pretensions to be an honourable and noble lover decisively reveals the difference in vision between ancient and modern thought. Plato's Socrates who seeks to draw his pupils to the glorious world of the Forms through the shared contemplation of beauty between beloved and lover becomes, on Hobbes's reading, an old man concealing his physical lust within obfuscatory philosophic rhetoric. For Patapan and Sikkenga this signals Hobbes's lowering the tone as well as the horizons of political excellence to which Plato/Socrates aspire. Instead, for Hobbes, "The 'platonic' desire to please the beloved, therefore, is really a sign of the desire to exhibit one's own power, not to give up oneself or one's power for something worthy of such sacrifice" (2008: 819). Hobbes, thus, debunks Platonic eros demonstrating that it is not a magnetic force drawing people to beauty and ultimately justice. Further, it has no positive political importance as it does not "foster an attachment to justice that defines fundamentally different human beings and regimes." Rather, in Hobbes's diminished view, "it is in reality a personal rather than political form of the desire for power" (820). The broad vista of Platonic eros elevating individual great men to the contemplation and practical application of the universal good has contracted to encompass merely the idiosyncratic personal predilections of modern, self-seeking individuals to amuse and benefit themselves.

Hobbes as Philosopher of the Erotic: II. Patapan and Sikkenga

In the concluding remarks of their article, Patapan and Sikkenga suggest that this first interpretation may overstate the completeness of Hobbes's

recasting of Plato's erotic politics and so offer a tentative second reading. They note indeed that there might be Platonic sentiments in Hobbes's work, for example, "*Leviathan* seems to show a scientist-sovereign with a deep—and what Plato's Socrates might call an erotic—attachment to teaching, persuading, and even inscribing people with his new 'Doctrine'" (821). Thus, they see Hobbes's philosophic approach as possibly steeped in an erotic energy consonant with commitments more Platonic than appear at first blush. They wonder that perhaps lurking beneath Hobbes's obsessive pursuit of an entirely novel *science* of politics is a powerfully Platonic/erotic drive impelled by a vision of the good. They write, "We cannot help but suspect, however, that all his endeavors to transform political science are not designed only to make such scientific speculation safer; that he is also deeply moved by a beautiful new vision—the prospect of an everlastingly peaceful society in which human beings are not tormented by the fear of violent death" (821). Patapan and Sikkenga, thereby invite the reader to re-evaluate and possibly re-envision Hobbes's politics through the prism of his view of the erotic.[8]

Hobbes as Erotic Political Philosopher

In what follows I wish to push the insights of Sreedhar, Blackburn, Patapan and Sikkenga further or rather shift the frame to engage with the question of Hobbes's approach to human sexuality and the erotic. I contend that it is Hobbes's uncompromising materialism that allows us to decipher his view of sexuality and the erotic most fruitfully.[9] From this vantage point, as regards Sreedhar's and Blackburn's insights, human sexuality is best understood as being of a piece with all of the rest of human experience. That is to say, for Hobbes, it is not simply human sexuality but every aspect of life that is infused with passion and erotic energy. Patapan and Sikkenga thus correctly draw attention to the broader eroticism at play in Hobbes's "beautiful new vision" but their view may be dramatically expanded when understood through the prism of Hobbes's materialism. From this perspective, the suspicion Patapan and Sikkenga raise in their second reading that Hobbes's philosophy is suffused with love and eros is accurate. For Hobbes, eroticism is not limited to sexual encounters and engagement impelled by a quest for beauty but rather one which expresses a more general and visceral interest, love and embrace of all of the range of experiences of human embodiment.

Hobbes's dispute with Plato is about the sheer breadth of the erotic as it infuses all of life. Humans are inescapably passionate, embodied creatures. All human activity is characterized by this ontological fact. Thus, Hobbes cannot separate out any individual aspect of human endeavour and particularly philosophic endeavour from the erotic. Consequently, Hobbes's depiction of the felicitous life, his "beautiful new vision" is one in which human

beings are able to enjoy myriad pleasures whose bases lie in our physical selves. Sexual pleasures are to be understood, then, in this materialist frame as but one aspect of the joys of corporeal existence as Hobbes's political philosophy comprehends all of human experience as erotic. It is to an elaboration of this argument that I now turn.

Hobbes's Philosophy as an Erotic Enterprise

One discussion which nicely illuminates Hobbes's erotic conception of political philosophy is to be found in his "Author's Epistle to the Reader" that introduces his *Elements of Philosophy: The First Section, Concerning Body*. Here, Hobbes displays a certain affinity with Platonic philosophy as he claims the quest for wisdom lies at the root of all human motivation. What is notable for our purposes is that this pursuit is described in distinctly *erotic* terms. Hobbes begins his comments with a declaration of the novelty of his philosophy and its distinction from that of the ancients in that it not is based on "metaphysic codes" but rather "the natural reason of man" (1996: xiii). Hobbes advises the reader that philosophy is "the child of the world and your own mind, is within yourself; perhaps not fashioned yet, but like the world its father, as it was in the beginning, a thing confused" (xiii). He proposes that his philosophical method uncovers immanent truths concerning the nature of all things and is like that of the sculptor who uncovers the true shape of a statue that is embedded in rough stone. He thus recommends to the reader, "Do . . . as statuaries do, who, by hewing off that which is superfluous, do not make but find the image" (xiii). Philosophy, then, is a revelatory process. It is an enterprise which links both bodily and intellectual endeavours akin to the manual and creative sculpting of stone. Consequently, unlike Plato's more restrictive vision, it is potentially accessible to all persons.

Indeed, he proudly compares his philosophical method to the biblical account of creation. He writes, "The order of the creation was, *light, distinction of day and night*, the *firmament*, the *luminaries, sensible creatures, man*; and after the creation, the *commandment.*" He follows this sequence in consideration of the topics in his book, as he notes, "Therefore the order of contemplation will be, *reason, definition, space*, the *stars, sensible quality, man*; and after man is grown up, *subjection to command*" (xiii, emphasis in original). Hobbes then states that the pursuit of philosophy necessarily entails the pursuit of peace and its neglect has resulted in the profound injuries of civil wars. He writes, "I would very fain commend philosophy to you, that is to say, the study of wisdom; for want of which we have all suffered much damage lately" (xiv). While its greatest social purpose, then, is to aid people to discern the way to civic peace, it also allows access to knowledge of the fundamental character of the natural

world. Also significant is that Hobbes sees echoes of the philosophical impulse in virtually all human enterprises from commercial and political activity to even overtly hedonistic pursuits. There is a drive for self-understanding as well as self-advertisement in all of these activities, "For even they, that study wealth, do it out of love to wisdom; for their treasures serve them but for a looking-glass, wherein to behold and contemplate their own wisdom. Nor do they, that love to be employed in public business, aim at anything but place wherein to show their wisdom" (xiv).

Philosophy is also recommended for seemingly prosaic reasons, "because the mind of man is no less impatient of empty time than nature is of empty place, to the end you be not forced for want of what to do, to be troublesome to men that have business, or take hurt by falling into idle company, but have somewhat of your own wherewith to fill up your time, I recommend unto you to study philosophy" (xiv). This advice may be seen as prompting men to pursue useful projects as idleness draws men to socially disruptive mischief.

For our purposes, Hobbes's next comment is the most striking. He declares, "neither do voluptuous men neglect philosophy, but only because they know not how great a pleasure it is to the mind of man to be ravished in the vigorous and perpetual embraces of the most beauteous world" (xiv). What is salient here is that, apart from the promise of civic peace that the pursuit of philosophy might deliver, its intellectual rewards meld with and enhance those of the physical world. The philosopher's mind is "ravished" or swept away by the beauteous world. What is so notable here is that the figure of the philosophical man that Hobbes posits is decidedly not the Platonic one of the fully rational, controlled, ascetic man (exemplified by Socrates) which has so dominated the Western philosophic tradition. For Hobbes, the philosopher is not a man who escapes all passion as reason governs his personality. Rather the philosopher is one who is subject to and fully enjoys the passions and fantastic rewards ensuing from this union of mind and body as the philosopher grasps the wonders of creation. So, the rewards of philosophy are simultaneously intellectual and sensual. Further, Hobbes depicts the experience of being ravished as being productive and creative. The philosopher is swept away and transported by love of the world. Yet he does not lose his intellectual mooring; he does not simply "receive" the world. He retains the ability to use his reason and is able productively to decode and decipher it much as the sculptor uncovers the essential meaning of what is within the stone through his labours. This is an enjoyable, intermingling of the intellectual and the physical. Hobbes, then, envisions philosophy as manifestly bound up with sensual pursuits and pleasures. Mind and body are inextricably bound together as "high" and "low" pursuits fuse with and have a share in the quest for wisdom.

In Hobbes's account, then, there is no sharp divide between "high" and "low" or "common" and "noble" pursuits as is found in Plato's system. This

may be seen as a result of Hobbes's notion of innate human equality as well as his materialism. For Hobbes, there is no need to leave the body behind to achieve wisdom. Indeed, this would be an incoherent proposition given that for him it is axiomatic that "the World . . . is Corporeall, that is to say, Body; and hath the dimensions of Magnitude, namely Length, Bredth, and Depth: also every part of Body is likewise Body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the Universe, is Body, and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe" (2002: 463). Desire inescapably defines our humanity because, for Hobbes, we are fundamentally corporeal beings. Physical sensation, originating in the external motions of material things, is the foundation of all human experience.[10]

A second general discussion of Hobbes's view of philosophy is to be found, interestingly, directly following his critique of *Symposium* in *Human Nature*. Once again we encounter Hobbes's insistence on the symbiotic relationship between the work of the body and the work of the mind. Hobbes here argues that "all knowledge beginneth from experience, therefore also new experience is the beginning of new knowledge, and the increase of experience is the beginning of the increase of knowledge" (1994: 57). All of our experiences, then, give us hope that we may increase our knowledge. This hope of new knowledge he refers to as admiration and when considered to be an appetite it "is called CURIOSITY, which is the appetite of knowledge" (57). Curiosity, then, is a passion common to all human beings and constitutive of human life. Curiosity, based on our physical experience of the world, distinguishes human beings from beasts. It leads us to name the things we encounter, thereby constructing language and to pursue explanation through the investigation of cause and effect. The reaction of beasts to physical experience is explained by Hobbes as follows: "For when a beast seeth anything new or strange to him, he considereth it so far only as to discern whether it be likely to serve his turn, or hurt him, and accordingly approacheth nearer it, or flieth from it" (57–58). In contrast, human beings, "who in most events remembereth in what manner they were caused and begun, looketh for the cause and beginning of everything that ariseth new unto him" (58). Beasts react to physical experience only in the immediate term. In contrast, human beings attempt to find general explanations for their experiences. They are future rather than simply present-oriented.[11] The passions of admiration and curiosity, he contends, lead people to "the invention of names, but also the supposition of such causes of all things as they thought might produce them" (58). That is to say, from these passions "is derived all philosophy" (58). He writes, "as astronomy from the admiration of the course of heaven; natural philosophy from the strange effects of the elements and other bodies" (58).

So, philosophy, then, emerges from our embodied experience of the world. Yet different people have different passions. All individuals share the same type of contact with the world which leads them endlessly to

engage in the proto-philosophic activity of attempting to make sense of their everyday experiences. However, some are possessed of a greater sense of curiosity than others. Presumably, it is those possessed of the greatest sense of curiosity and who have had the opportunity to acquire an education who will pursue the questions of cause and effect to the greatest possible heights in the practice of science and philosophy. However, Hobbes, (as in the passages cited from *Elements of Philosophy*) again indicates that the exercise of this passion, the quest to know is manifest in endless human pursuits. He writes, "From the degrees of curiosity proceed also the degrees of knowledge among men" (58). Thus, men who are focused on worldly accomplishments will have little desire to pursue curiosity to its fullest. He writes, "for to a man in the chase of riches or authority . . . it is a diversion of little pleasure to consider, whether it be the motion of the sun or the earth that maketh the day, or to enter into other contemplation of any strange accident than whether it conduce or not to the end he pursueth" (58). The passion, curiosity, then, propels human endeavour whose highest intellectual achievement is philosophy. But, once again, Hobbes is clear that this passion has its origins in human, embodied experiences. All people are capable of this quest and all have some share in it as they try to decipher cause and effect in their lives. Yet, based on personal disposition, the vagaries of fortune, opportunity and education, some follow wisdom to its fullest, others not.

In *Leviathan* Hobbes also emphasizes the corporeal roots of the quest for wisdom. Indeed, he directly refers to the desire to know as a species of lust. He writes,

> *Desire*, to know why, and how, CURIOSITY; such as is in no living creature but *Man*; so that Man is distinguished, not onely by his Reason; but also by this singular Passion from other *Animals*; in whom the appetite of food, and other pleasures of Sense, by praedominance, take away the care of knowing causes; which is a Lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continuall and indefatigable generation of Knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnall Pleasure. (2002: 42)

For Hobbes, all human beings share equally in the capacity to reason. The difference is to be found in individuals' unique temperaments and the direction of their specific passions. This determines the extent to which they develop their reason and engage in philosophic and scientific pursuits. As Hobbes states, "As for acquired Wit, (I mean acquired by method and instruction,) there is none but Reason; which is grounded on the right use of Speech; and produceth the Sciences . . . The causes of this difference of Witts, are in the Passions; and the difference of Passions, proceedeth partly from the different Constitution of the body and partly from Education" (53). However, most people will not avail themselves fully of

their capacity to reason, as they are not so inclined for they have no practical need for it. As Hobbes comments:

> The most part of men, though they have the use of Reasoning a little way, as in numbring to some degree; yet it serves them to little use in common life; in which they govern themselves, some better, some worse, according to their differences of experience, quicknesse of memory, and inclinations to severall ends . . . For as for *Science*, or certain rules of their actions, they are so farre from it, that they know not what it is. Geometry they have thought Conjuring: But for other Sciences, they who have not been taught the beginnings . . . are at this point like children, that having no thought of generation, are made believe by the women, that their brothers and sisters are not born, but found in the garden. (36)

Hobbes then argues that it is better *not* to develop one's capacity to reason fully if the alternative is to do so on an erroneous basis. Thus, he praises ordinary people for their use of simple, practical reason and criticizes the falsely learned. He writes, "But yet they that have no *Science*, are in better and nobler condition with their natural Prudence; then men, that by mis-reasoning, or by trusting them that reason wrong, fall upon false and absurd generall rules" (36). He continues, "The Light of humane minds is Perspicuous Words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; *Reason* is the *pace*; Encrease of *Science*, the *way*; and the Benefit of man-kind, the end. And on the contrary, Metaphors, and senselesse and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*; and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention, and sedition, or contempt" (36).

Consideration of these discussions by Hobbes concerning the roots and delights of philosophy, then, allows us to see how the broader frame of his materialism intersects with his account of the human. Indeed, Hobbes's definition of lust in *Human Nature* illuminates his focus on both the corporeal and intellectual thrill of lust and their inescapable unity. He writes:

> The appetite which men call LUST, and the fruition that appertaineth thereunto, is a sensual pleasure, but not only that, there is in it also a delight of the mind: for it consisteth of two appetites together, to please and to be pleased: and the delight men take in delighting, is not sensual, but a pleasure or joy of the mind, consisting in the imagination of the power they have so much to pleasure. But this name lust is used where it is condemned: otherwise it is called by the general word love: for the passion is one and the same indefinite desire of the different sex as natural as hunger. (1994: 55–56)

This connection between the quest for wisdom and bodily pleasures and drives is to be expected given the nature of Hobbes's materialist philosophy

given that, for Hobbes, bodily appetites and aversions originally and indifferently impel all of our feelings and actions. Our embodied humanity, then, renders us equal beings and is our most precious possession, as Hobbes claims, "Of things held in propriety, those that are dearest to a man (*sic*) are his own life, & limbs" (2002: 235–36). So complete is Hobbes's materialism that it pervades even his view of the afterlife and specifically the status of human sexuality in this realm:

> For seeing Adam, and Eve, if they had not sinned, had lived on Earth Eternally, in their individuall persons; it is manifest, they should not continually have procreated their kind. For if Immortals should have generated, as Mankind doth now; the Earth in a small time, would not have been able to afford them place to stand on. The Jews that asked our Saviour the question, whose wife the woman that had married many brothers, should be, in the resurrection, knew not what were the consequences of Life Eternall: and therefore our Saviour puts them in mind of this consequence of Immortality; that there shal be no Generation, and consequently no marriage, no more than there is Marriage, or generation among Angels. (2002: 308)

This vision of the afterlife is in keeping with his view that "every part of the Universe, is Body, and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe," and so he argues that the saved will receive the reward of immortal life. However, they will re-enter their actual physical bodies on Earth not in an immaterial heaven. One of the consequences of this view is that Hobbes contends that there will be neither sexual desire nor sexual activity in the afterlife. He reasons that if human beings engage in sex acts they inevitably procreate. Therefore, if they are sexual and procreate in the afterlife, given the condition of immortality, they would soon over-populate the planet. Thus, he jettisons sexual activity as a possibility in the hereafter (which incidentally also notably frames sexuality in functionalist, heterosexual and reproductive terms).

Hobbesian versus Platonic Erotic Philosophy

Reading these passages which illuminate the inescapable materialism of Hobbes's political philosophy, Patapan and Sikkenga's first reading that Hobbes rejects eros in favour of power, seems less convincing. While for Plato the ultimate rewards of philosophy involve a forgetting of the body, for Hobbes, they are an immersion in the body and a fusion with the mind. Perhaps, then, the difference Patapan and Sikkenga identify in Plato's and Hobbes's view of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades in *Symposium* lies not so much with Hobbes's emphasis on power, as they argue, as it does with Hobbes's materialism. Hobbes cannot countenance the view that the trajectory of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades (or any other of Socrates's beloved young men) is entirely

metaphysical. Yet this is not to say that Hobbes's view is unphilosophic, rather that it is philosophically materialist. As Frost neatly puts it, for Hobbes, "thinking is emphatically not an activity that occurs in a mind closed off from the body and material world . . . the thinking subject is a porous subject, one whose thoughts are derived from its ongoing engagement with others and with the world and whose thinking processes are provoked and modified by the passions and desires that arise from that engagement" (Frost, 2008: 67). In *Symposium* Socrates recounts the wise teachings of the seer Diotima concerning love (Plato, 1999, 201e-212a: 37–50). Centrally, it is a force which impels all of humanity in one guise or another to seek immortality. Yet there is a bifurcation in humanity. The mass of the population, common, ordinary lovers, express the pursuit of immortality in a drive to reproduce physically. The propagation of the human species is thus a consequence of the pull to immortality. Heterosexual men are of this kind. They are drawn to women in order to be able to produce children. However, the higher, nobler sorts of people (homosexual men in Diotima's account) strive for immortality through cerebral encounters which produce wisdom and virtue but, at the highest level, they produce the most perfect, beautiful children: (political) ideas of justice and moderation. Thus, the lovers—the beloved and lover—share an experience superior to the merely physical couplings of ordinary folk as they ascend the ladder of enlightenment together. Beauty, of course, must play its part in this erotic process. Initial love of individual beautiful boys' bodies is, however, only the starting point of the long educational journey to the full realization of the transcendent Form of Beauty which exists beyond any physical realm. This voyage is described in one version by Diotima/Socrates as follows, the man "pregnant in mind" seeks a partner and "because he's pregnant, he's attracted to beautiful bodies rather than ugly ones; and if he's also lucky enough to find a mind that is beautiful, noble and naturally gifted, he is strongly drawn to this combination. With someone like this, he immediately finds he has the resources to talk about virtue and about what a good man should be like and should do, and tries to educate him" (209-b-c: 46–47). Such relationships will yield "a much closer partnership . . . and a stronger bond of friendship than parents have, because the children of their partnership are more beautiful and more immortal" (47). Diotima/Socrates claim great poets (Homer and Hesiod are named) and law-givers such as Lycurgus and Solon are among the number of this exceptional type of lover of wisdom (209 d-e: 47).

Hobbes concisely reiterates the account of the erotic ascent of the two lovers of wisdom as follows, "that a man full and pregnant with wisdom, or other virtue, naturally seeketh out some beautiful person, of age and capacity to conceive, in whom he may, without sensual respects, engender and produce the like . . . in which love, is not sought the honour, but issue of his knowledge; contrary to common love, to which though issue sometimes

follow, yet men seek not that, but to be pleased. It should therefore be this charity, or desire to assist and advance others" (1994: 57). Hobbes emphasizes that Plato's account rests on the ostensible selflessness of the lover, who acts "without sensual respects" and whose motives are "his charity and desire to assist and advance others" throughout this erotic journey. Consequently, Hobbes does pose a penetrating question in his discussion. If Socrates's desire to teach his pupils such as Alcibiades is full of charitable and honourable motives why does he engage only with the most beautiful, young, and powerful men of Athens? Hobbes's question does seem entirely fair: "But why then should the wise seek the ignorant, or be more charitable to the beautiful than to others?" (57). Socrates's consistent choice of beautiful young men to seduce into the world of the Forms does seem rather odd. In this scenario, the one who enjoys the initial contact and contemplation of the (lower) order of physical beauty is the lover, not the beloved. But, the entire pedagogic enterprise is ostensibly designed for the benefit of the beloved. Hobbes's wry observation, then, seems fair. As he puts it, what does "maketh me suspect this platonic love for merely sensual; but with an honourable pretence for the old to haunt the company of the young and beautiful" (57). Thus, Hobbes may be seen to challenge the elitist pretensions of Plato's account. That is, Hobbes insists that Socrates is not a supremely detached philosopher. Rather, he is a man subject to the same passions as any other. Hobbes thus reveals Socrates to be a mere mortal whose motivations are as carnal and complex as that of any other person. This is not to condemn Socrates but to set him firmly in the ranks of the rest of humanity. In this sense, Hobbes democratizes Plato's account of eroticism and so democratizes his account of the philosopher. Philosophy is a practice open to all people willing to take part in its rigorous demands. Thus he takes aim at the advertisement of Socrates's virtue insofar as he fails to consummate physically his relationship with Alcibiades (which is the source of Alcibiades's amazement and complaint). Hobbes, though, detects the pride in the proclamation that Socrates is so otherworldly, so self-contained that he is able to resist the charms of Alcibiades (not to mention all manner of physical trials: cold, pain, lack of sleep, wine). Indeed, his resistance is precisely a great source of pleasure, "in which matter though Socrates be acknowledged for continent, yet continent men have the passion they contain, as much or more than they that satiate the appetite" (57). As Patapan and Sikkenga note, Hobbes is convinced that Socrates (as with every other man) cannot but seek to aggrandize his own reputation and power. For Hobbes, Socrates' self-effacing claims mask a self-serving desire to appear powerful through his (emotional and intellectual) erotic conquest of Alcibiades. Socrates discretely displays his power, according to Hobbes, but it is power, nonetheless that he is after.

However, this quest for reputation and power is not necessarily unphilosophical as it underpins a search for wisdom. What is at stake, though, is

its specific nature. For Hobbes, human beings are so inescapably embedded in the world, in the body, and Platonic high-flown rhetoric seems designed to obscure this simple fact. As noted above, Hobbes describes the drive for wisdom, culminating, at its highest point, in the practice of philosophy as shaping all human motivations. This coincides with the great theme of *Symposium* that eros shapes all human activity and, is at its most pure and perfect in its love and pursuit of the universal truth of the Forms. However, Hobbes and Plato diverge fundamentally in their understanding of the character of the world. For Plato and Socrates, the truth of the world is metaphysical whereas for Hobbes it is inescapably physical. Nonetheless, it is arguable that they do share the notion that erotic energies condition all of human interactions and existence. Hobbes, as much as Plato, propagates a philosophy of eros, of love. However, the difference is that for Hobbes this love can only be realized, understood and experienced in this world. Consequently, it may be the case that despite Hobbes's (in)famous contention that "there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum* (greatest good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers" (2002: 70), it does seem that he is recommending philosophy as the most rewarding endeavor available to human beings (apart from its utilitarian recommendations: to keep human beings busy and so on.) Though, for Hobbes these rewards can only be enunciated in physical terms: "how great a pleasure it is to the mind of man to be ravished in the vigorous and perpetual embraces of the most beauteous world" for there is no other world available to us. Hobbes, in all his ruminations, finds wisdom, beauty and love only in this world. It is this aspect of the narrative on which Hobbes casts doubt, not the notion that there is some sort of pull towards wisdom, towards philosophy in all human beings (as noted above.) However, the intoxicating quest for union with the truths of this world does intersect in some significant ways with Socrates's account (or, more accurately, his retelling and acceptance of Diotima's tale) of the nature of eros.

Concluding Remarks

I have attempted to illustrate the extent to which Hobbes's materialist embrace of this life constitutes a deeply erotic approach to life itself and the activity through which we contemplate life, philosophy. Investigating Hobbes's approach to human sexuality precisely uncovers that, for Hobbes, human beings are, in essence, desiring creatures whose passions suffuse every activity, including philosophy. This is not to denigrate philosophy, to taint it with the preoccupations of the "merely" physical but rather to recognize the embodied nature of our existence as the tie that binds all human beings in our temporary and fragile experience of mortality. The

political consequences of Hobbes's vision are momentous as they provide the basis on which he so urgently appeals to humanity to find its way to peace to protect our fragile lives. It may also connect closely to Plato's description of the eros-driven philosopher king. It may be precisely an erotic thrill that will perhaps draw one extraordinary individual to be sovereign. The initial contemplation of the text, *Leviathan* will offer the prospective sovereign a clear vision of wisdom in which he is immersed and "ravished in the vigorous and perpetual embraces of the most beauteous world." Further, the practical implementation of Hobbes's teachings will lead the sovereign to generalize its wise policies which draw him away from the strong temptations of kingship such as imperial adventures, the adulation of subjects and flatterers and hedonistic escape. The sovereign will ensure that the felicitous life which provides industry, material plenty, learning, and, that most precious political commodity, peace to all his subjects will be the fruit of Hobbes's erotic political dream.

Notes

1 See, for example Blackburn (2004: ch. 10); Hillyer (2009: 29–48); Sreedhar (2012: 260–79); Patapan and Sikkenga (2008: 803–26). See also Kahn (2001: 4–29). In this important article Kahn places the problem of the erotic and passion at the heart of his political theory as she argues, "The motive for contract is the pervasiveness of romance: all passions—including fear of violent death—are implicated in the romance plot" (2001: 8).

2 As Sreedhar notes, Hobbes "does not provide an explicit theory of human sexuality, and his writings contain very little discussion on the topic of sex" (2012: 260). There have been numerous biographies of Hobbes from his day to the present carefully documenting his intellectual development and his life-long employment and relationship with the noble Cavendish family. Yet there is remarkably little known about Hobbes's direct experiences of personal and intimate relationships apart from the fact that he was a life-long bachelor. In his contemporary biographical sketch, Hobbes's friend John Aubrey, reveals only that Hobbes "was, even in his youth (generally) temperate, both as to wine and women" (Aubrey, 1987: 234). Subsequent biographies have followed this pattern offering virtually no information about these matters. Arnold A. Rogow, though, does add some detail. He discusses the basis of the rumour that Hobbes had an illegitimate daughter and Hobbes's intimations (in a poem which Aubrey records) that he had sexual feelings well into old age. But the paucity of information available is captured in Rogow's remark that "we have no reason to believe that Hobbes eschewed women acquaintances or that he was wholly without heterosexual interests" (1986: 131).

3 In *Leviathan* the passions associated with erotic love are mentioned briefly. Definitions of key terms are offered. For example, Natural Lust is "Love of Persons for Pleasing the sense onely, NATURALL LUST." Love is, "*Love* of one singularly, with desire to be singularly beloved, THE PASSION OF LOVE. The same, with fear that the love is not mutuall, JEALOUSIE." Attractive appearance or beauty is defined as a type of power since "Forme of Power; because being a promise of Good, it recommendeth men to the favour of women and strangers" (2002: 63). Apart from these brief definitions Hobbes offers observations concerning the nature of sexual relations in the state of nature, the character of the family, male/female relations, the nature of reproduction, maternal, paternal and parental rights and obligations. However, his comments on

these matters are often underdeveloped. There is more discussion (which is dealt with later in this paper) in *Human Nature*.

4 Baker and Elliston further argue that "Except when planning utopias, the ancient philosophers tended to abandon sex to the poets because of the felt conflict between their commitment to reason and the inherent unreasonableness of sexual passion, because of a tendency to regard the sensual world as unworthy of philosophical contemplation, and—on a more personal level—because they tended to regard abnegation and the suppression of libido as intrinsically praiseworthy" (1998: 18). Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas discuss sexuality to the extent that it is connected to the biblical injunction to procreate. There is, then, a distinctly functionalist perspective in the early Christian era which is directed to defend monogamous marriage as the only legitimate site of sexual relationships. Baker and Elliston argue that Aquinas's project endorses a vision of sexuality which entails, "a monogamous, sexually inequitable, paternalistic patriarchy that proscribes divorce and alternative marital and sexual relationship, including recreational and nonprocreative sexual intercourse—for example, masturbation, contraception, oral intercourse, homosexual intercourse and sodomy" (19).

5 It must be noted that Sreedhar's favourable judgment concerning Hobbes's "rational, liberated form of sexuality" is tempered by her recognition that his conventionalism could potentially serve conservative and repressive sexual policies for women (2012: 270–77).

6 Richard Hillyer finds Blackburn's assessment "over-heated" and unpersuasive. Hillyer offers a nuanced view of Hobbes's "sexual theory" remarking on his discomfort and avoidance of the topic, on the one hand, combined with an openness and non-censoriousness when directly dealing with it on the other (2009: 36–40).

7 For a full and sweeping consideration of the connections between Platonic and Hobbesian political philosophy, see Craig (2010).

8 Patapan and Sikkenga then extend this invitation even further to encompass reconsideration of the putative divide between ancient and modern political thought. They write, "Hobbes's own "sociable" activity of writing may indicate an eros that his own political science cannot account for, or explain, especially if in reflecting on Hobbes we can read "not this, or that particular man, but Mankind. Perhaps, then, Hobbes does not so easily move beyond the political science of Plato's Socrates. If so, we need to reopen and reconsider the debate powerfully spurred by Hobbes between classical political philosophy rooted in the investigation of human opinions of the noble and good, and informed notions of love (and therefore of the science of regimes); and a modern political science based on the (Hobbesian) principles that politics can be understood on the basis of observable, reducible, and mathematically manipulable quanta of power instantiated in states and sovereignties" (2008: 821).

9 The centrality of Hobbes's materialism to his philosophical system has always been recognized and has been a source of great interest and controversy. See, for example, Samuel I Mintz's *The Hunting of Leviathan* (1996) which is devoted to the exploration of seventeenth-century responses to Hobbes's materialism. It should be noted, however, that Hobbes was not unique among his contemporaries in adopting a materialist and skeptical philosophical approach. His pursuit of their full implications and his brilliant rhetorical presentations and disputatiousness are what brought him great renown as well as infamy. For our purposes, it is worth noting that Hobbes was often held responsible for Restoration libertinism or as it was termed by contemporaries "Hobbism." On this point, see Mintz (1996). A recent analysis of Hobbes's materialism breaks new ground. In *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker*, Samantha Frost systematically follows what she views to be the implications of Hobbes's materialism. This involves not only a rethinking of presuppositions about Hobbes's ontology and epistemology but also a rethinking of Western conceptions of the individual which Frost argues are still

(albeit often unwittingly) steeped in Cartesian dualism. As she writes, "Hobbes's materialism compels us fundamentally to rethink our conceptions of self-consciousness, reasoning, desire, and action, of what an "individual" is, and of what collective ethical and political life might and should be." Further she states, "Hobbes articulates a distinctive materialism that not only refuses the possibility of the Cartesian incorporeal thinking self but also refuses the very terms under which matter is conceived as unthinking. Indeed, we can find in Hobbes's philosophy and political theory an account of what it is to conceive of subjects as "thinking-bodies" (2008: 4, 17).

10 As Hobbes elaborates, "Sense in all cases, is nothing els but originall fancy, caused . . . by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of externall things upon our Eyes, Eares, and other organs thereunto ordained." All thoughts, fantasies, desires, creative imaginings, science, and speech derive from sense since "whatsoever we conceive, has been perceived first by sense … a man can have no thought representing anything, not subject to sense " (2002: 23–24).

11 For a full discussion of the Hobbes's future-oriented conception of temporality see Michaelis (2007: 101–27).

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