

April 2016

# The Constellations of Empiricism, New Science, and Mind in Hobbes, Locke, and Hume

Lisa Pelot

*The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor

Robert Stainton


*The University of Western Ontario*

Graduate Program in Philosophy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

© Lisa Pelot 2016

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>

 Part of the [Epistemology Commons](#), [History of Philosophy Commons](#), [Metaphysics Commons](#), [Philosophy of Mind Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Science Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Pelot, Lisa, "The Constellations of Empiricism, New Science, and Mind in Hobbes, Locke, and Hume" (2016). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 3936.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/3936>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [tadam@uwo.ca](mailto:tadam@uwo.ca), [wlsadmin@uwo.ca](mailto:wlsadmin@uwo.ca).

## Abstract

In this thesis, positive and negative tensions among the “unit-ideas” of New Science and empiricism are explored as they relate to explanations of aspects of mind in the Modern period. Some constellations of ideas are mutually supporting, and provide fruitful discussion on how mind can fit into the natural world. This project aims to clarify the adequacy of this type of framework in accommodating and explaining mind, and aspects of mind. I proceed by analyzing key texts via the “unit-ideas” of New Science and empiricism. The three central chapters are case studies, looking at Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. In each chapter I analyse an aspect of the mental as it is explained within a version of the framework created by that thinker’s particular constellation of New Science and empiricism.

In evaluating the adequacy of these frameworks to handle the problem presented to them, new insights appear about the historical figures and the texts. For example, in analyzing Hobbes’ framework for explaining mind, the impact of Hobbes’ view of mind on his political philosophy comes into relief, creating space for new research avenues. Identifying underlying tensions within Locke’s explanatory framework, it becomes possible to put to bed an old debate about whether Locke was a libertarian, a compatibilist, or a necessitarian. And in understanding clearly the ways in which Hume’s version of this constellation of ideas leads to his view of volition, at least one interpretation of Hume as a metaphysician can be decisively rejected.

This project is intended partly as an illustration of the significance of the historical dimension to adequately understanding contemporary issues in Philosophy of Mind. It is important to recognize that there are certain conditions for possibility of the emergence of philosophical concepts and views, and that the way problems can be resolved depends very much on the way they are posed or articulated. This project straddles the sub-fields of Philosophy of Mind and History of Philosophy.

## Keywords

Empiricism, mental architecture, New Science, reason, passion, volition, free will, liberty, materialism, empiricist, Philosophy of Mind, mental phenomena, History of Philosophy of Mind, Modern empiricism, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, metaphysics, rationality, mind.

## Acknowledgments

I am very grateful for the guidance, feedback, and support that has been essential to this project. I thank my supervisor, Rob Stainton, who not only helped me bring this project to completion, but also encouraged and invited me back into graduate school. The impact of this man on my intellectual life and development cannot be overstated. Over the years, Rob has modeled for me personal and intellectual standards, and demonstrated how to be a heart-centered philosopher. Rob, my respect for you is profound, and I thank you for your support, and for helping me take this work to completion.

My thanks go also to Henrik Lagerlund for time and energy spent clarifying important aspects of this work, and the connections between Modern thinking and the Scholastics. I also thank Lorne Falkenstein, who inspired me to study this area and these thinkers, for guidance, and countless hours spent reading drafts and providing detailed and highly constructive feedback. I am grateful to my long-time trusted counselor and guide, Chris Viger, for providing constructive critique, for sharing knowledge, listening, being genuinely interested in my questions and concerns, and for numberless small acts of kindness. Thank you also to Dennis Klimchuk for invaluable insight in comments on various drafts. I am also grateful to Tracy Isaacs for her humanity in her work as an administrator, and for going above and beyond as Graduate Chair.

I thank the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program and Western University's Philosophy Department for financial support. I also gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, provided through a grant to Robert J. Stainton, and through a grant from the Ontario Government's Online Initiative to Chris Viger and David Bourget.

For your love and support, even in the face of what you thought a crazy dream, I thank my parents, Richard & Aila Pelot, my sisters, Veronica, Amanda, and my

brothers-in-law John, and Darcy. For inspiration I thank my late grandfather, Ivan Pelot. For diversion, I thank the little ones, Remy and Simone.

Special thanks to my friends who also supported me in innumerable ways: Allyson, Meghan, Mark, Simin, Deborah, Casee, Dianne, Liv, Cathy, Annette, Ian, Brian, Deborah, the Zarify family, Michelle & Richard, and Sarah & David.

Last, but not least, deep gratitude goes to D. Anthony Larivière—formidable interlocutor, indefatigable cheerleader, and true Friend—whose faith and vision was necessary to bring this doctor into being. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

*“Everything that is made beautiful and fair and lovely is made for the eye of the one who sees.” ~ Rumi.*

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>I</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	<b>III</b>
<b>FOREWARD: HOW I GOT HERE</b> .....	<b>VIII</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>V</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
WHAT MY PROJECT IS AND WHAT IT ISN'T .....	1
WHAT ARE UNIT-IDEAS? .....	5
BROADER PERSPECTIVE; ENRICHED CONCEPTUAL, RESOURCES & REVEALED ASSUMPTIONS .....	6
THE PARTICULARS OF MY STUDY .....	8
TWO KEY NOTIONS: EMPIRICISM & NEW SCIENCE .....	10
TABLE 1 .....	14
TABLE 2 .....	15
SUMMARY .....	15
A FINAL CAVEAT: ERRORS MAY LIE IN WAIT FOR WE NON-SPECIALISTS .....	15
WORKS CITED .....	18
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>19</b>
HOBBSIAN MENTAL ARCHITECTURE .....	19
THE GAME PLAN .....	22
BACKGROUND NOTIONS: INNATE HETEROGENEITY, INNATE HOMOGENEITY, DERIVED HETEROGENEITY .....	22
HOBBS' EMPIRICISM .....	23
HOBBS' NEW SCIENCE .....	26
HOBBS' MENTAL ARCHITECTURE: CONCEPTIONS, IMAGINATION, AND DREAMS .	27
MENTAL ARCHITECTURE: RATIOCINATION .....	29
MENTAL ARCHITECTURE: PASSIONS .....	30
THE INTEGRATION OF PASSION AND THOUGHT .....	33
A BRIEF ASIDE: IMPLICATIONS FOR HOBBS' POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY .....	36
MENTAL ARCHITECTURE: DELIBERATION .....	37
MENTAL ARCHITECTURE: VOLITION .....	38

CONCLUSION .....	41
WORKS CITED .....	44
<b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>	<b>46</b>
TENSIONS IN LOCKE ON FREE WILL .....	46
THE TROUBLE WITH LOCKE ON FREE WILL.....	46
FIGURE 1 .....	48
THE GAME PLAN.....	49
REMINDER: MY HIP APPROACH .....	50
BACKGROUND: THE THREE STANDARD POSITIONS ON FREEDOM AND VOLITION ..	50
BACKGROUND TO LOCKE ON FREE WILL: THE HOBBS-BRAMHALL DEBATE .....	53
LOCKE: THE GREAT ENGLISH EMPIRICIST .....	55
LOCKE THE NEW SCIENTIST .....	57
LOCKE’S FIRST ATTEMPT (1690): FITTING MIND INTO THE NATURAL WORLD.....	58
CRITICAL RECEPTION BY LOCKE’S CONTEMPORARIES.....	62
“SECOND THOUGHTS” (1694): FOCUS ON SELF-OBSERVATION .....	63
NEW PROBLEMS .....	67
FIFTH EDITION REVISIONS (1706) .....	69
PROBLEMS & INCONSISTENCIES .....	73
CRITICAL RECEPTION OF LATER EDITIONS FROM LOCKE’S CONTEMPORARIES .....	74
A LIBERTARIAN INTERPRETATION .....	75
A COMPATIBILIST INTERPRETATION .....	75
REAL TENSIONS .....	77
THE TROUBLE WITH THE SEARCH FOR A “FINAL POSITION” .....	80
CONCLUSION.....	82
WORKS CITED.....	84
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>86</b>
HUME THE METAPHYSICIAN? A RESPONSE TO BUCKLE .....	86
INTRODUCTION.....	86
REMINDER: POH AND HIP.....	88
HOBBS’ EMPIRICIST ACCOUNT OF MIND & VOLITION .....	88
HUME’S EMPIRICIST APPROACH TO MIND.....	94

IMPRESSIONS & IDEAS.....	95
HUME’S SEMANTIC EMPIRICISM .....	96
HUME, NEWTON & FORMULATING HYPOTHESES.....	97
HUME’S VIEW OF VOLITION.....	102
BUCKLE’S ARGUMENT .....	103
CONTRASTS BETWEEN HOBBS AND DESCARTES .....	103
THE FUNCTION OF EMPIRICISM IN HOBBS’ ACCOUNT .....	106
FINDING THE RIGHT CONTRASTS .....	108
PARALLELS BETWEEN HOBBS AND HUME.....	110
HUME’S METAPHYSICAL AGNOSTICISM.....	113
CONCLUSION.....	117
WORKS CITED.....	120
<b>CHAPTER 5.....</b>	<b>122</b>
CONCLUSION.....	122
UNIT-IDEAS - REVISITED.....	122
FOR HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY .....	122
FOR CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY.....	123
SPECIFICS: EMPIRICISM, NEW SCIENCE, AND ASPECTS OF MIND .....	124
TABLE 1 .....	124
TABLE 2 .....	125
THREE CASE STUDIES: HOBBS, LOCKE AND HUME .....	126
LIMITATIONS:.....	127
FINDINGS – EMPIRICISM & NEW SCIENCE .....	127
FITTING MIND INTO THE NATURAL WORLD.....	128
FUTURE DIRECTIONS.....	130
CONCLUSION.....	130
WORKS CITED.....	132
<b>CURRICULUM VITAE.....</b>	<b>133</b>



## Foreward: How I Got Here

*This book does not run a straight course from beginning to end. It hunts; and in the hunting...It drinks often from the same streams, and stumbles over some cruel country. And it counts not the kill but what it learned of the territory explored.*

~ Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking

When I first began to seriously approach issues of mind in graduate school, I felt very confused and out of place. I felt confused by the way I saw questions being posed and answered by my peers and colleagues, and didn't understand why they had the particular concerns that they did. I wasn't bothered by the same things others were. On the other hand, I *was* bothered by problems and assumptions that others took for granted. We lacked a shared foundation of background assumptions, and this not only took me some time to figure out, but it was also very disconcerting to me. The main difference, as I see it, is that while I do not deny the idea of philosophical progress, I tend to view philosophical problems and solutions as features of a very broad spectrum of circumstances. What I mean is that the way people think *about* problems depends very much on what is thinkable in the time and place in which they are working, as well as the social and political dimensions of life. It's not that my colleagues would *deny* these factors; it's that they tend to recede into the background. What appeared in the foreground for them, it seemed, was less these "textural" elements, and more the "scientific facts." This difference might be thought of as an expression of the analytic/continental distinction in Western philosophy. What I thought I was doing when I was doing philosophy, and what I thought philosophy was *for*, seemed to be very different from what those around me seemed to think.

In my very feminist-informed context, I decided this might be a gender issue. I was exposed to a lot of talk about the pernicious effect of implicit sexism, not only within philosophy departments, but also hidden deeply within philosophical questions and methodologies. I co-wrote a paper entitled, *What Would a Feminist Approach Add to the Philosophy of Mind?* and decided it was worthwhile to work in this area. The easy recognition that the context of a conversation *matters* allowed me to feel more understood in feminist circles. But this was really more an understanding of my plight as a woman philosopher than it was resonance about the problems of mind that concerned me. Frustrated with my experience, I decided on a whim to write the history of philosophy comprehensive exam rather than the philosophy of mind exam, in fulfillment of my program requirements. I passed that exam with distinction, and Lorne Falkenstein invited me to work with him to clarify Locke's final position on volition. The idea of working on mind from an angle that was self-reflective about the significance of context—time, space, politics, and social influences—appealed to me.

The Modern period is especially interesting and significant when it comes to the development of theories of mind. This is partly because with the advent of the Scientific Revolution people began to rethink what makes something explanatory, and to reconsider methods of gathering evidence, and testing it. The development of the scientific method, and the centrality of science to intellectual inquiry generally, as well as the “democratization” of knowledge, all bore significantly on both the methodology of studying mind, and on the nature of an adequate explanation of mind. There is an important connection between the knowledge-gathering enterprise of science, and studies into the nature of mind itself. This connection can be seen, for example, in Hume's *Treatise*. There, Hume describes human beings not only as the *scientists studying nature*, but also the *objects* of scientific scrutiny.

After exploring contemporary Philosophy of Mind, issues of gender and philosophy of mind, and historical explanations and models of mind, I began working to clarify my historiographical commitments and marrying them to my philosophical aims.

Turning toward historical philosophy of mind allowed me to exercise my “continental” commitments, perspective, and skill set. My approach tends toward continental philosophy in the sense that it is grounded in a robust appreciation for the literary elements of philosophical texts, as well as a healthy skepticism of the idea that the natural sciences are the only, or the most accurate, way to understand natural phenomena. At the same time, my approach is analytic in the sense that it employs the rigorous tools and methods of conceptual analysis and logical relations that are characteristic of the analytic tradition.

An important insight that arose during my academic development is that a telltale feature of my personal philosophical style is to innovate and deepen understanding by creating new combinations of seemingly disparate ideas, methods, and styles. Traditionally, it is characteristic of the masculine to create distinctions, while it is characteristic of the feminine to create connections. Both are valuable and necessary, and yet the socio-historical context we find ourselves in is not neutral about the value of the masculine and feminine principles. As a culture, philosophy still rewards what is traditionally masculine. Yet the more I tried to fit that mold, the worse I felt. In my lived experience, bringing seemingly disparate things together harmoniously and finding middle ground, is one exemplification of virtue, the middle path, and the golden mean. Hume advised, “Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be a man.” It’s not easy to separate what it is to be a man or woman and what it is to be a philosopher, and it seems that there’s very little known about how exactly this is done. Learning to be a woman amidst all of my philosophy has meant learning to stand for, and surrender to, my own deep desires and feelings, while still maintaining discipline, clarity, and rigor. So each of my forays into different disciplines and aspects of philosophy of mind were necessary for the development of my thinking—both on *what* I wanted to say, and *how* I wanted to say it.

Despite what I thought at more than one point on this journey, I love philosophy, and I can carry it out according to what makes sense to *me*. And that’s how I got here.

## Chapter One

*Philosophizing must, inevitably have a historical dimension if it is to count as philosophizing at all.* ~ Frederick Copleston

### What My Project Is and What It Isn't

Because I want to be clear about what my project is and what it isn't, first I'll describe some different approaches to history and clarify the approach I adopt here. Given that there are different approaches and methodologies to writing history, evaluating a historical work needs knowing which approach is taken and what its aims are. There was a time before I studied historiography that I was naively under the impression that histories are essentially "factual" accounts of what went on. My thought was that people, events, and circumstances were, for the most part, given or un-interpreted. I thought that anyone who sought out the *historical truth* about some person or time period would come to a very similar view as any other person, given the factual nature of these stories. This was after all, what makes the difference, I thought, between histories and fiction—the one adheres to the facts, while the other need not appeal to, or fit with the facts at all.

What I didn't realize was that this isn't at all the way history is created. My first mistake was in not realizing that interpretation takes place at almost every level. For example, it may be a *fact* that a certain ledger indicates that a transaction took place on a specified date. But the *meaning* of that document exists within a nexus of other facts and beliefs, within a perhaps implicit narrative going on in the mind of the researcher. So that *whether* this document is actually relevant or not depends on the larger story one is telling. For example, from the perspective of ancient Roman historians, Cleopatra VII Philopater did not fit into any of the appropriate positions for a female to occupy according to Roman culture. Perhaps because of this, she was described in almost wholly negative terms—they saw her as an exotic, ruthless

seductress and a murderer. But from the standpoint of 20<sup>th</sup> century North American feminist historian Stacy Schiff, what appears relevant and left out of such perspectives is that Cleopatra spoke seven languages, was a shrewd strategist, and an ingenious negotiator. The larger narrative that a historian has in mind bears heavily on which facts appear relevant and are included in support of that story. The data itself does not create a narrative. Narrative must go beyond data, including it and making the case for what goes beyond it. This is one sense in which historians are much more like constrained fiction-writers than they are cataloguers of what was the case. Historians have a *hypothesis* of sorts—a story or a view about what they think was going on, and there are varying degrees to which data supports that view, and doesn't.

What I also didn't realize was that historians also have a view about what history *is*. It wasn't obvious to me that there are a great many views about what history is, what it is for, and how best to engage in it. A historian might believe in grand-narratives. Some familiar grand-narratives include the grand-narratives of *progress* or of *enlightenment emancipation*. Others might believe in the “great man” story, according to which history is explained by appeal to highly influential individuals who had a historically decisive impact. When it comes to the history of philosophy, depending on the nature and purpose of the project, the skills of the historian and the skills of the philosopher are not always exercised in equal proportions.

In order to make clear what I mean, I draw a broad distinction between what I'll call “Historically Informed Philosophy” (HIP), and “Philosophically Oriented History” (POH). In order to get clear on the difference between the approaches of HIP and POH, I'd like to draw attention to the fact that there are a variety of *reasons* and motivations for taking up a project in the history of philosophy. One motivation for beginning a project in history of philosophy is to develop deeper understanding of certain historical figures and their thinking. For example, Ray Monk's (1991) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, is a story of Wittgenstein designed to bring insight into the man, and the philosopher. The story of Wittgenstein cannot be

told without some deep examination of his philosophical work. Because of this, the development of his thought has to be incorporated, explicated, and interpreted within the larger story of his life and intellectual development. Doing this work requires both historical, as well as philosophical skills. In this case, understanding, interpreting, and reconstructing Wittgenstein's texts in terms of the historical circumstances of its production, as well as its propagation and reception, is particularly important. The author of this kind of work looks for, among other things, sources, causes, or motives for what is said in the text. But in this example, the aim is to understand Wittgenstein, as opposed to reach for the truth about the nature of reality, or language, which were Wittgenstein's concerns. Usually in a work like this, the historian looks not for the arguments, as much as she looks for the sources, or causes, or extra-philosophical motives that might have moved the thinker for taking on the views that they did (Kenny, 2005, 22-23). In other words, in Philosophically Oriented History (POH) the interest is in the fact that such-and-such *was* or *was not* Wittgenstein's view, as well as the circumstances he was in such that he held those views.

By way of contrast, a historian of philosophy might also aim to develop a deeper understanding of a *philosophical problem*. In this case the researcher seeks out insight into a view or argument, as opposed to focusing on the details of a particular philosopher. I call work undertaken with this aim, Historically Informed Philosophy (HIP). Tom Lennon's (1993) *The Battle of the Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi, 1655-1715* is an illustrative example of this kind of approach. In this book, Lennon argues for a major reinterpretation of Early Modern history. Lennon's aim is to show that the contest between the Cartesians and the supporters of Gassendi was the most important philosophical debate of the latter half of the seventeenth century. He argues that the views of both sides of the debate proposed opposing views on space and the objects in it, and that these implied important moral and political differences. The conflict was typical of Plato's battle of the gods and giants –those who were friends of the forms, and the materialists. It's not that *who thought what* is unimportant for this study. Certainly the details of

who thought what are relevant. But the author emphasizes the arguments and positions themselves, and this approach does not emphasize the details of those who espoused the views. It is a matter of *historical* interest to discover which thinker took which position, but it is a matter of *philosophical* interest what a view actually is, or entails. In HIP, the larger aim is to establish a deeper understanding of the way that arguments may appear and be deployed within a particular context.

It's important to remember that the distinction that I've drawn is broad, and that in practice, a text may rely heavily on both philosophical and historical methods, and that it may aim at a variety of purposes. For example, in writing POH, the historian of philosophy interprets and paraphrases the views of those they write about, at the same time that they speculate and provide reasons why these thinkers might have held the views that they did. In order to interpret a view, the historian may make speculations about tacit premises left out of arguments, and evaluate the cogency and coherence of those arguments and of the inferences that were drawn. Likewise, HIP requires its author to interpret, explain, and describe historical factors that have bearing on the philosophical work in question. An important distinguishing feature between POH and HIP is the *extent to which* each makes use of context.

Understanding how certain thoughts became possible, and made sense in the minds of figures in question, depends very much on situating that person within their historical context. Because of this, a POH study must be *highly contextualized*. This is key for understanding what a thinker's view *meant to that person*, as opposed to what it means in the present context. The role of context remains important, though less so, in HIP. In either approach close reading, and interpretation of the text is essential. Exegesis is the kernel of history of philosophy.

What my project is *not* is philosophically oriented history (POH). In other words, my larger aim is *not* to make the case that a particular thinker did indeed hold a particular view, and I don't spend a lot of time giving reasons and evidence about an individual's life that might make that case more plausible. It is not the thinkers as individuals that are of ultimate importance to me. My project *is* Historically

Informed Philosophy (HIP). What this means is that my larger aim is to develop deeper understanding and clarification of philosophical positions, as opposed to those who held them. I am less interested in reasons why a philosopher might have held a view than I am in how a particular view has advanced philosophical understanding, *or* how the way a view has been received or *not* received has impacted the longer discussion on that issue.

To provide a preview, which I'll go into in more detail later: my interest is in coming to a deeper understanding of the ways that the unit-ideas of empiricism and the New Science influenced the way that aspects of mind were theorized in the Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are case studies: the first deals with Hobbes on mental architecture; the second is focused on Locke on free will; and the third clarifies a misinterpretation of Hume. Along with clarifying the role of these unit-ideas in explaining aspects of mind, this project seeks also thereby to develop deeper appreciation and understanding of each of these three thinkers.

### What Are Unit-Ideas?

I take the term 'unit-ideas' from Arthur O. Lovejoy's 1936 landmark work, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea*. In that work, Lovejoy expands on the concept of 'unit-ideas' as they pertain to a HIP-style historical study like mine. In working with unit-ideas, old arguments and views are broken up into their component parts. Those component parts can then be re-examined in a different organization. It divides material up in a different way, bringing the parts into new relations, and viewing it from the standpoint of a specific purpose (Lovejoy, 3). For example, in *The Great Chain of Being* Lovejoy analyzes the origins of the ideas of plenitude, continuity, and gradation in the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists. He traces the most significant of their ramifications in subsequent religious thinking, in ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics, as well as in astronomical and biological theories.



Unit-ideas can appear disguised in different regions of the intellectual world, and they can be traced through multiple phases of reflection. The aim is to trace them to their historical sources, and to observe their fusion. Through doing this, we may take note of some of the most significant influences, and to see how later generations may have derived conclusions from them that are very different from what their originators might have thought (21). This process can reveal the fact that theoretical systems that appear disparate are actually quite similar, and clarify the ways that similar systems are different. It can also show that the different logical combinations of elements of a philosophical doctrine are not always readily recognizable (4).<sup>1</sup>

## Broader Perspective, Enriched Conceptual Resources & Revealed Assumptions

Gaining broader perspective is an important outcome achieved by analyzing philosophical work through the lens of unit-ideas. What readers may achieve is a livelier sense of the fact that most philosophical systems are original or distinctive in their *patterns*, rather than in their *components*. In looking at the views of mind offered by Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, what I find is that, uncovering their similar presuppositions, we see that what might appear very disparate at the surface level is actually very similar at a deeper, more fundamental level. These thinkers accepted similar components, and what differed was the degree to which they were committed to a particular view, as well as the patterns in which the ideas appeared. Appreciation of the fact that most systems are not unique or new in terms of their components is very helpful when it comes to identifying and situating evolved iterations of those ideas. As a result, we gain broader perspective on the shape(s) of views of mind produced by the combination of empiricism and New Science. As a result, we're in a very good position to identify problems and benefits of new

---

<sup>1</sup> There has been some debate over Lovejoy's methodology, particularly over what constitutes a unit-idea, however, I leave those debates aside here.

iterations or patterns comprised of these units. The ability to recognize new patterns of familiar components is one way in which a broader perspective is gained.

Conceptual resources are enriched by the development of genuine understanding of the landmark positions that frame contemporary discussions. Oftentimes concepts are at play in contemporary discussions, but the genealogy of these concepts is not understood. This is important because the way that a concept or framework develops over time can point to an otherwise unseen aspect of a larger view. For example, Locke's account of liberty and volition involves tensions that are inherent to the marrying of an account of volition that has *power*—which is to say, an account of volition that is not passive—and a mechanistic-style framework. Locke's work on volition informs what might motivate a thinker to adopt a determinist, compatibilist, or libertarian view of volition, working from within a mechanical empiricist framework. Thinking of volition as having *power* in Locke's sense is important – but without looking at what this meant and why it was considered that way leaves parts of that notion opaque and not as easily handled. In uncovering the stages of evolution of certain concepts, we may attend more carefully to their philosophical significance. Changes in perspective may also engender doubt whether we are wholly immune from different but equally great confusions.

In addition to enriched conceptual resources and broader horizons, this approach also helps develop deeper understanding of underlying assumptions. Assumptions are often too familiar to be easily noticed; they may be deeply embedded, un-argued for, or un-avowed. Identifying these assumptions can help us to ask better questions, diagnose current ills, and attend more perceptively to the ways that philosophers have been “received.” For example, in my case study on Hobbes, I question assumptions around the way that Hobbes has been received – or more accurately, has *not* been received—as a bona fide philosopher of mind. Taking Hobbes seriously as a philosopher of mind helps to re-orient contemporary empiricist approaches to explaining mind within a long-standing tradition. From within that tradition, it is easier to evaluate the advances, as well as the problems still facing those views. In

considering *new ways* of receiving historical figures such as Hobbes, we may re-situate the way we think about how the story continues. This is just one example of how we may notice and question assumptions that may be implicit and unarticulated.

## The Particulars of My Study

Now that I have said what kind of study mine is and what it isn't, discussed the value of the approach of unit-ideas, and referred briefly to my study's specific focus, I can be more direct about the particulars of my study. The main question under discussion is *how mind can fit into the world as it was revealed by the New Science broadly construed, and within an empiricist approach?* There are two overarching aims to this exploration.

The aim of this study is to come to a fuller, deeper appreciation of these relationships amongst the unit-ideas of empiricism, the New Science, and aspects of mind in order to gain enriched conceptual resources, broader perspective, and deeper understanding of underlying assumptions. On the one hand, this involves highlighting how these connections among New Science, empiricism, and mind are mutually supporting, and why. On the other hand, there are also *tensions* that seem to be inherent to these constellations. In order to highlight both of these, I have chosen to explore these ideas in three case studies, looking at portions of the texts of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. This project is structured both chronologically and thematically, and each case study is presented in a separate article. I begin with the most distant thinker, and take them in chronological order: Hobbes, then Locke, and finally, Hume. This helps to clarify how some aspects of concepts and views evolved in response to objections that were raised to previous patterns and iterations.

In the first paper, I look at how Hobbes' particular conception of empiricism and his version of the New Science support one another in his account of mental architecture. While Hobbes has not been received as a philosopher of mind so much as a political philosopher, his theory of mind is surprisingly sophisticated. Even so,

it faces some very important problems and objections. Hobbes was Descartes' contemporary, and while both philosophers put primary importance on epistemology, with well-articulated theories of mind, the one has gone down in history as a highly significant thinker on mind, while the other has gone all but unnoticed in that area. This is unfortunate. One benefit of attending to Hobbes as a quintessential empiricist philosopher of mind is that the challenges and benefits of Descartes' theory of mind come into greater relief by comparison. The problems and advantages of characteristic rationalist and empiricist attempts at explaining mind create deeper understanding of both.

In the second paper my focus turns to Locke's ever-evolving account of volition and liberty. Locke's Chapter 13 entitled, *of Power* is the most vigorously revised and edited portions of his *Essay*. In that chapter, Locke works to produce an account of freedom and volition that squares with his New Scientific and empiricist commitments. As he moves deeper into the problem, his account of freedom becomes increasingly libertarian, and this creates increasing tension with his scientific worldview. The end result is a text that has troubled commentators since the time of its publication. While many commentators have sought to defend Locke's reputation by reading consistency into the text, my approach is different. I find value in the way that Locke laid bare some of the very *real* tensions inherent to the combination of features of the New Science, empiricism, and mind. For that reason, Locke ought to be considered an intellectual hero, struggling with genuine difficulties, rather than having produced a consistent text that he for some reason, neglected to make explicitly consistent.

In the third and final paper, I apply some of the lessons learned from the first two papers, about the way that different aspects and features of the New Science and empiricism interact in explanations of mind. In doing this, I take on Stephen Buckle's recent argument that Hume ought to be considered a covert materialist, given the similarity that his view of mind holds to Hobbes' view. The error Buckle makes is illustrative of the kind of mistake one might make without appreciating the

role of variation in a thinker's conception of the New Science and of empiricism. I argue that in fact, Hume should not be considered a covert materialist—at least not for the reasons Buckle provides.

## Two Key Notions: Empiricism & New Science

Both empiricism and the New Science are complex, imprecise notions that include a range of features, and that admit of a range of gradations. A thinker can be committed to each of these notions in varying degrees, as well as in varying aspects. I begin by providing background on empiricism as a general approach, and then describe some sub-varieties of empiricism. Following that, I provide some general remarks about the New Science, followed by some of its characteristic features.

Traditionally, empiricism is the idea that all knowledge rests on a foundation of sense experience<sup>2</sup>. Another formulation of empiricism is that there is nothing in the mind that is not first in the senses. It's important to be clear about the difference between *empiricism* and the *empirical*. Rationalists like Descartes value and make use of empirical information. At the same time, *empiricism* does not deny the possibility or significance of knowledge that comes from reflection or internal experiences. The important difference between empiricism and rationalism lies in their orientation toward sensation. The basic orientation of empiricism is *toward* sensation as foundational for knowledge. By way of contrast, the basic orientation of rationalism is *away from* sensation as a foundation of knowledge.

Some of the sub-varieties, or aspects, of empiricism derive from what one is empiricist *about*. For instance, one can be an empiricist about psychological development. As mentioned, one might be empiricist about the *source of mental*

---

<sup>2</sup> Empiricists may hold a variety of positions on metaphysical matters, since empiricism is a view about what knowledge is, and how it can be acquired. For example, one can be a materialist empiricist, as is Hobbes; an idealist empiricist, as is Berkeley, or metaphysically agnostic as is Hume. Empiricism itself remains silent about metaphysical matters.

*content*, believing that this derives from sensory experience. On this model, the mind is “empty” until the senses come into contact with the external environment. One might also be empiricist about *mental development*, whereby cognitive development takes place as the gradual acquisition of knowledge through experience. Both of these would be aspects of empiricism that apply to the psychological. That is, one could, for example, believe that to have any mental *contents* requires experience with the external world, while mental *processes* are innate. On the other hand, one could believe that *both* mental contents and mental processes are the result of contact of the sensory organs with the world. What all empiricist approaches have in common, however, is that they emphasize the importance, and the role of sensory experience in knowledge. Another sub-variety of empiricism pertains to *justification*. To be empiricist about justification is to think that the ground, or warrant for a belief has its foundation in sensory experience. Empiricism about justification may apply variously to philosophy of psychology, individual epistemology, and philosophy of science. In the case of individual epistemology, empiricism grounds the justification of individuals’ beliefs in experience. One way that this relates to science is that what it is that justifies what constitutes a legitimate scientific methodology relies on appeal to experience. This applies specifically in philosophy of psychology. In the case of philosophy of psychology, empiricism about justification means that claims about mental development are justified only on empirical grounds. In each of these varieties of empiricism, one might hold this view in varying degrees. For instance, it is possible to hold the position that empirical support from sensory experience is *necessary* but *not sufficient*, or that empirical support is both *necessary and sufficient* for justification.

The second key idea that requires some explication is the New Science. The New Science was a movement that was a rival and replacement for the Aristotelianism of the medieval period, and which dominated physical theory from the 1630’s to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Modern period was witness to a self-conscious move away from Scholastic models of explanation that were rooted in Aristotle’s “first

qualities.” On this model, “first qualities” were thought to be the *causes* of the properties and behaviour of bodies. For example, sensible warmth might be thought to be *caused by* heat. During the medieval period, this kind of explanation was considered both satisfactory, and complete. But by the late 17th century, this model of explanation had become the object of not only literary satire, but also philosophic critique (Nadler 1998, 517-18). This kind of explanation came to be considered outmoded, occult, and mystical (Boas and Hall, 1959, 168). Boyle, for one, thought that explaining white colouration by means of ‘whiteness,’ failed to make any progress in advancing our understanding of the phenomenon. It merely repeated the property or behaviour in a hypostasized form (Nadler, 527). Bacon thought this kind of explanation did nothing other than report on the fact that one type of change occurs in one kind of circumstance, while another type of change occurs in another sort of circumstance (Falkenstein, 1). An important problem with the Aristotelian view is that knowledge of the way substances work has to be discovered one by one, in experimentation. The task of finding out about the world by experimenting in various circumstances was an impossibly large research project. Cutting down on the amount of empirical work necessary to gain power over nature was an important reason for reconsidering this approach (Falkenstein, 2).

By way of contrast with the Scholastics, Modern thinkers sought simple, non-trivial explanations about the causes of phenomena by describing not only how and why the phenomenon happened as it did, but also why it did not happen otherwise (Nadler, 520). They shifted away from the view of active powers in nature, toward a view of nature that is passive and inert, which removed the mysterious, occult forces or qualities that would need to be discovered one by one by experience and experimentation. This movement toward an inert view of nature ushered in a strategy for explanation that hearkened back to the ancient atomists. Ease of explanation could be achieved by positing that nature was comprised of tiny homogenous particles in motion, governed by universal laws. Movement and change took place in a way that was modeled by macro objects, like billiard balls. Movement and change were thus explained in terms of *mechanism*. Mechanism is the view that

phenomena can be explained in terms of natural laws governing the motion and collision of matter. Macro-level properties were to be explained in terms of micro-level properties. Mechanisms were thought to show how things work, to reveal the activities by which phenomena are truly brought into being, and to show how things actually are in nature, not just in our understanding. It is contrasted with vitalism and teleology.

This view of the movement of homogenous particles governed by “laws” of nature was a significant part of the mechanization of the world-picture. It is important to note that such accounts were more or less hypothetical. This is because the structures employed in explanations were inaccessible to observation, given their minute size.<sup>3</sup> Another feature of the New Science is its move away from an authoritarian approach to knowledge (Aristotelianism) and a move toward an *anti-authoritarian* approach to knowledge. Knowledge was something that could be sought and attained by anyone, provided they used what were believed to be the proper method(s) to attain it. In addition to this, there was a movement away from explanations that made appeals to final causes, or teleological explanations (although many such accounts were entirely consistent with the notion of God). Only efficient causes were recognized or required for explanation. The mechanization of the world-picture also featured the introduction of geometrical concepts, as well as the mathematical concepts of classical mechanics, and a new emphasis on a central role of quantification in understanding nature.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mechanical explanations might be thought as somewhat occult for the reason that corpuscles are not observed, but instead are theoretical posits. While Seventeenth-century mechanists generally recognized the hypothetical nature of their explanations, this tended *not* to diminish their confidence, and their absolute certainty in their conclusions (Nadler, 521). This picture of the world was not derived from the phenomena (Boas and Hall, 168).



Sub-variety of Empiricism	What is approached empirically
Justification	Philosophy of psychology (The science of mental development) Individual epistemology (Grounding justification of individuals' beliefs) Philosophy of science (Scientific methodology)
Psychology	Source of mental contents Mental development over time The source of mental mechanisms

Table 1

New Science	Rival & replacement for Aristotelianism Anti-authoritarian in tenor
Nature	Natural world entirely passive Motion/change is not actualization of some power in the substance itself Elimination of powers from all natural substances
Mode of explanation	Macro-level properties explained in terms of lower level ones Removal of occult forces and powers
Mechanism	Mechanization of world-picture Nature described with mathematical/geometrical concepts
Particles	Simple, unified, deterministic, quantifiable
Causation	Only efficient causes recognized or required Rejection of teleology and final causes
Cartesian New Science (Rationalist)	Science is demonstrative as a series of valid deductions from self-evident truths, rather than as something rooted in observation and experiment.

	Starting point for science and physics is the existence of God (as described in <i>Discourse on Method</i> )
Newtonian New Science (Experimental Philosophy)	Self-conscious turn away from Cartesian scientific methodology Denies the metaphysics of essences Refrains from formulating hypotheses Admits no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances Whatever is not deduced from the phenomena is rejected Whether metaphysical, physical, based on occult qualities, or mechanical, hypotheses have no place in experimental philosophy

Table 2

Summary

I wish to remind my reader that my aim is to gain clarity around the ways in which empiricism, the New Science, and aspects of mind are mutually supporting, as well as the tensions that are inherent in this constellation of ideas. My approach to this historical work is what I've called Historically Informed Philosophy (HIP) as opposed to Philosophically Oriented History (POH), so while I recognize the significance of context, this is not a *highly* contextualized approach. Instead, it is a close look at specific unit-ideas as they are expressed in a few key texts from Hobbes, Locke, and Hume.

A Final Caveat: Errors May Lie in Wait

for We Non-Specialists

Because studies that look at unit-ideas tend to cut across multiple fields, they are written and designed for a mixed academic audience, not for specialists in a single

field. It's important to keep in mind that there certain kinds of errors that lie in wait for the non-specialist. For example, a non-specialist looking at historical figures is bound to exclude some of the nuance and subtlety that might appear in a specialized interpretation and analysis. This is necessary in order to achieve the right level of generality to make claims that are more generally applicable. In other words, detail gets lost as we move away from the highly specialized view. But there are also virtues that are involved with moving away from the highly specialized perspective. Certain problems can't be understood or resolved by looking too closely at a problem. The trick is to find the right level of generality that a problem requires. There are many valuable outcomes that can be achieved despite missing out on some detail and nuance.

In this study, there are several contributory outcomes I'm aiming at. In making a contribution to the history of philosophy, one aim is to find ways of re-imagining past thinkers. This involves releasing an old image of a thinker, and replacing it with something new and different. In the case of Hobbes, for example, I aim to bring new light to the value and importance of Hobbes' work in philosophy of mind. This can have important implications and influence on the way we read Hobbes' social and political work. Another example is the new image that I offer of Locke's work on liberty and the will. While this part of his corpus is usually seen as troubled, and perhaps even a source of embarrassment for Locke, I offer a celebratory view that focuses on the values that arise from the tensions created in Locke's account. When we re-imagine past figures we can mine their work for more value. Another consequence is that it becomes possible to put to bed old debates. In the case of Locke for example, I make the case that it's not necessary to seek out Locke's final position and trying to fit him into one of the three main categories in the free will debate. Instead, we can simply recognize that he doesn't fit into any of those categories, and move on to more useful questions.

In making a contribution to philosophy of mind, my aim is to help to reorient some issues of debate by focusing on its historical dimensions. If contemporary issues are

relevantly similar to the ones I discuss from the Modern period, then the potential is there to mine the past for more value, and to gain a greater understanding of what does, and does not work about a particular view. The historical dimension is an important and even necessary filter for analysis. Showing how exactly this is so often requires a close and detailed look at a relatively small issue, and drawing it out through to the contemporary context.

## Works Cited

- Boas, Marie, & Hall, Rupert. "Newton's 'Mechanical Principles' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 04/1959, 20. 2, pp. 167-178.
- Falkenstein, Lorne. "Modern Philosophy." *Philosophy eBook Collection*, 2010. <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/philosophyebooks/1> Web, 2016.
- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*. Ed. David Fate Norton, and Mary J. Norton. Oxford Clarendon Press, 2011. Print.
- Kenny, Anthony. "The Philosopher's History and the History of Philosophy." Eds. Tom Sorrell and G. A. J. Rogers. *Analytic Philosophy and History of Philosophy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005. 13-24. Print.
- Lennon, Tom. *The Battle of the Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi 1655-1715*, Princeton University Press, 1993. Print.
- Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936. Print.
- Nadler, Steven. "Doctrines of explanation in late scholasticism and in the mechanical Philosophy." *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Volume I*, Cambridge University Press: 2008. 512-552.
- Monk, Ray. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, New York: Penguin Books, 1991. Print.

## Chapter Two

### Hobbesian Mental Architecture

*The habits of an elementary particle of matter cannot change... the particle is itself an unchangeable thing* ~ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*

It is interesting to notice how some philosophers gain the adoration—or infamy—of posterity, while others lay by the wayside. And it might seem that there are always good reasons why this should be so—that one thinker’s view is superior to another’s, or that an idea resonates more during one time period versus another. For example, it might seem that there must be good reason why Hobbes is mostly passed over in favour of Descartes in the traditional history of the philosophy of mind. Twentieth and twenty-first century philosophers frequently recount this history beginning with Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Even when it had become fashionable to treat Descartes as the favoured whipping boy and to blame him for setting us off on the wrong footing, at least his view was well known, and at least reasonably well understood by contemporary philosophers of mind. Not so, for Hobbes.

Although Hobbes was Descartes’ contemporary, and despite the fact they had some very interesting and important exchanges on issues of mind, Hobbes’ theory of mind is seldom mentioned or given much attention. For example, in “Mind-body problems” by Daniel Garber and Margaret Wilson (2008), Hobbes is mentioned only as being an outlier to the more mainstream dualist views of people like Descartes. In this case, Hobbes is ignored because he is *not* typical or representative, and the view is that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, he can safely be ignored. And because he *is* typical or representative in the contemporary context, his view is pedestrian and can therefore be ignored. Perez Zagorin’s (1990) recent meta-analysis of the Hobbes literature shows that Hobbes is universally regarded as a quintessential political theorist, and a

prime moral philosopher (317). His view of mind, however, is almost completely absent from the meta-analysis.

One reason why it might seem reasonable that Hobbes is largely neglected in his views on mind is that the particulars of his view are out of step with modern concerns. But in fact, this seems less true for Hobbes than it does for Descartes. Cartesian substance dualism is largely out of fashion. At the same time, Hobbes' materialism and empiricism seem much more aligned with contemporary approaches to mind. Hobbes' theory of mind actually appears to fit quite nicely with modern approaches. On the other hand, it might be supposed that the reason why we tend to look to Descartes for epistemology and metaphysics, while on the other hand, looking to Hobbes for political and moral philosophy, is because of the predominance of epistemology in present-day concerns. This is Sadler's view (1990, 1099). But neither does this seem to be borne out by the facts. It is true that Descartes explicitly set out to "expound the basis" upon which "all human certainty can be founded," and this puts his epistemological agenda front and centre. And it is also true that Hobbes' project was to justify political principles by appeal to the agreement that suitably situated, rational, free, and equal persons would make. But Hobbes' moral and political theory is explicitly based on his view of the mind of man<sup>4</sup>. This includes, importantly, what can be known, and how it can be known. For example, Hobbes begins his treatise on *The Elements of Law* with the statement that the explication of the elements of laws depend in part on knowledge of what human nature is (1). *The Elements of Law*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan* each share a structure that begins with questions about mind and works towards questions in political philosophy. A scientific account of human nature and volition was the foundation of Hobbes' civil philosophy (Overhoff, 113). What appears front and

---

<sup>4</sup> A note on gendered language: Since Hobbes refers to human beings as "man" I maintain this language myself when referring to Hobbes' view. I adopt this practice to avoid anachronistically attributing to Hobbes a neutral position on gender, which I don't think is warranted. This should not be read as an implicit endorsement of the practice of referring to all humans as "man", but instead as an attempt to remain historically accurate.

centre in Hobbes' corpus is his political and moral philosophy, but Hobbes' approach to mind is neither more, nor less epistemologically driven than is Descartes', even if their ultimate agendas were rather different.

Another reason why it might seem justified to neglect Hobbes' view of mind is because his *physics* turned out to be terribly mistaken. It is true that in fact, motion does not take place at all in the way that Hobbes thinks it does. Hobbes has gained some notoriety for the weakness of his physics. But this is not a problem that is unique to Hobbes. For example, Descartes' physics turns out also to be very much mistaken, as was the physical view of many of the thinkers in this time period. A mistaken physics is not enough of a reason to fail to take Hobbes' view seriously.

If Hobbes' view of mind ought not to be neglected because it's out of step with modern concerns, perhaps it is neglected because it hasn't been considered very good, and isn't worthy of much consideration. Perhaps Hobbes' view of mind was just naïve and simplistic. Hobbes was a materialist who thought that everything could be explained in terms of matter and motion. At first glance, it looks as though Hobbes might face some serious difficulties in explaining the complexity of mind with such austere conceptual resources. How can something as complex and diverse as cognitive architecture be explained with only homogenous particles and movement?

In this paper, I take this last concern very seriously, and look at how well Hobbes is able to explain the complexity of mental architecture in terms only of matter and motion. I argue that, in fact, Hobbes accounts for the complexity of mind surprisingly well. Hobbes' view of mind is sophisticated, and worthy of more consideration. While he does face some important difficulties, these are difficulties that are not unique to his view.



## The Game Plan

With this in mind, my interest is in taking a closer look at the way empiricism and the New Science gave shape to mental architecture according to Hobbes. I begin first by covering some key background conceptions, including the heterogeneity of the mental and some standard approaches taken to account for it. I then explicate Hobbes' unique flavours of both empiricism and the New Science, and lay out the picture of mind that Hobbes offers, which stems out of these commitments. From there, I analyze the view, highlighting some of the surprising successes, as well as one very difficult problem that it faces.

### Background Notions: Innate Heterogeneity, Innate Homogeneity, Derived Heterogeneity

Mental life appears to be characterized by several different parts, functions, faculties, or modules. These different functions have been labeled differently, and have been taxonomized in different ways. In other words, there is a certain level of complexity, or *heterogeneity* to the mental. For example, mind is made up of functions like thought, imagination, memory, volition, and perception. There are various ways that a theorist might deal with the complexity of mental life, namely, innate heterogeneity, innate homogeneity, and derived heterogeneity. The first approach to the apparent complexity of the mind is to assert that the mind is fundamentally heterogeneous. This is to say that the mind is, by nature, made up of different parts. This possibility would not be available to a thinker, like Hobbes, who proposes that the micro-level is comprised of homogenous particles. The second approach, at the opposite end of the spectrum, is a complete denial of the heterogeneity of mind. On this view, mind is thought of as a *general purpose learning and reasoning machine*. The view that the mind is “completely homogenous” is a denial of any real distinction between parts of mind. A

philosopher like Hobbes, who acknowledges various parts of the mind working together does not have this option available. A final approach to this issue is *derived heterogeneity*. On this view, the mind is made up out of homogenous stuff, but at the higher level, it also has different parts that work together in the larger phenomena of mind. Given Hobbes' commitments to the heterogeneity of the mind, as well as to the kind of explanation that appeals to homogenous particles, he needs to tell a story of how we get *derived heterogeneity* of mind.<sup>5</sup>

### Hobbes' Empiricism

The specific nature of Hobbes' pre-theoretic commitments to both empiricism and the New Science is important for understanding how these commitments shape his theory of mind. One of the simplest and most general ways of thinking about empiricism is that it emphasizes the role of the sensory in the production of knowledge. While thinkers generally understood to belong to the rationalist tradition tend to acknowledge the *importance* of input from the sensory, they do not hold to the stronger view that empiricists do, namely that the sensory is *necessary* for knowledge, if there can be any knowledge. For rationalists, there are some kinds of knowledge—knowledge of mathematical concepts, for instance—which do not require sensory experience. Indeed, there are some kinds of knowledge that *can't* be obtained through sensory experience. Empiricists, on the other hand are characterized by the general view that the sensory *is* necessary for knowledge, although they may differ on the issue of whether the sensory is also *sufficient* for knowledge. In other words, empiricists come in varying degrees of strength, although they all emphasize the role of the sensory in knowledge.

---

<sup>5</sup> There are two senses in which heterogeneity might be 'derived.' The first is developmental. This is to say that psychological development involves the evolution of increasing complexity of internal mechanisms, abilities, and experiences. The other sense is metaphysical. This is to say that the stuff out of which mind is made is itself complex. While I recognize this distinction, I leave it aside here.

As an empiricist, Hobbes is an interesting case. Hobbes *is* an empiricist in the sense that he does clearly and explicitly emphasize the role of the sensory in the production of knowledge. Throughout his works, Hobbes consistently takes sensation as the starting point of his theory of mind. For example, in *Leviathan* (1651) he writes, “there is no conception in a man’s mind which hath not at first, totally, or by part, been begotten upon the organs of sense. The rest are derived from that original” (1). The senses are at the front and centre of his view. He is an empiricist particularly as it pertains to individual epistemology, and psychological development, including both content, and psychological processes. Sensory learning is king in terms of Hobbes’ view of psychological development. Thought requires sensory experience—there are no mental contents without sensory experience. Hobbes’ account of action, which I will briefly outline below, also requires the combination of thought and passion—both having originated in sensation. *Deliberate action* is, therefore, dependent on sensory experience. Because of this, the action required to enter, and engage in civil life, are all based on a foundation of sensation. Hobbes’ empiricist leanings also appear in his *political philosophy* in other ways, too. Hobbes asserts that the assumptions he uses in civil philosophy can be confirmed by experience. He also insists on civil histories – records of experience—to support the conclusions of civil philosophy (Sorell, 140). In many key and standard ways, Hobbes is a paradigm of an empiricist.

On the other hand, Hobbes exhibits *some* rationalist leanings in other areas of his work, particularly in his view of science. Hobbes’ differences with the Royal Society over scientific method raised the question to what extent he is an empiricist in philosophy of science. While Hobbes emphasizes the influence of experience on thought, imagination and passion, he also tended to think that it was necessary to correct and revise experience by reason, in order to benefit people (Sorell, 134). What’s more, for Hobbes, experiment is not essential to science. He believes, for example, that if doing so helped explain a natural phenomenon, it is perfectly legitimate to postulate types of motion beyond the reach of the senses (134). The impression that Hobbes had “anti-empiricist” leanings is supported by examination

of Hobbes' method of physics, which does not give observation an important role, as described in *Decameron Physiologicum* (1678). The way Hobbes emphasizes reason in the scientific method is also apparent in *Elements of Philosophy* (1656), Part 1, section 4:

[T]o those that search after Science indefinitely, which consists in the knowledge of the Causes of all things, as far forth as it may be attained, and the causes of Singular things are compounded by the Causes of Universal or Simple things, it is necessary that they know the Causes of Universal things, or of such Accidents as are common to all Bodies, that is, to all Matter, before they can know their Causes...Moreover, seeing Universal things are contained in the Nature of Singular things, the knowledge of them is to be acquired by Reason, that is, by Resolution (50).

Hobbes' unique position regarding empiricism and rationalism brings out an important point that warrants emphasizing. There is a variety of different ways in which one can adhere to empiricism and rationalism. As mentioned above, one might be an empiricist about justification, but a rationalist about psychological development. It is also possible, for example, to be rationalist about individual epistemology at the same time as being empiricist about justification. It might be thought that these categories of position are mutually exclusive, and it's not possible, without inconsistency, to hold both rationalist and empiricist positions at the same time. But it becomes clear that's not so once we recognize that there are a variety of *ways* in which these distinctions apply. What's more, these positions are *graded*. This is to say that one can be more, or less extreme in holding to rationalism or empiricism. For example, Hobbes certainly emphasized the role of sensation in important parts of his view, and yet he took a softer view in other areas. In terms of gradation, Hume is much more extreme in his empiricism than is Hobbes. At the same time, there isn't complete overlap between the two thinkers regarding what they are empiricist *about*. There is a variety of axes along which these positions can

be measured. Hume is more deeply empiricist in terms of what he thinks empiricism applies to, and the extent to which he is committed to empiricism in each case.

### Hobbes' New Science

In his allegiance to the New Science, Hobbes is much more a standard case. Hobbes' views about nature and science are heavily influenced by Galileo, and other scientific innovators (Sorell, 133), and he made great efforts to distance himself from the Aristotelian tradition. He eschews talk of formal and final causes and provides explanations in terms of efficient causation and mechanism. Carlin (2009) calls Hobbes an “unrelenting mechanist” (33). In essence, this means that for Hobbes, all natural change is explained in terms of the mathematical properties of matter in accordance with the laws of nature. He believes that motion, in the sense of change of place of bodies or their parts, is a single universal cause of all difference and change. In Hobbes' worldview, nature is passive and deterministic.

He is also a materialist, and thinks that, like the natural world, the mind is comprised of tiny particles—everything that exists for Hobbes is matter in motion. In the preface to the reader of *Dialogus Physicus* (1661), Hobbes writes, “Nature does all things by the conflict of bodies pressing each other mutually with their motions.” Hobbes thinks that no body can move itself, and that bodies are moved only by another body in motion that comes into contact with them. *Everything* that exists is extended, or is found together with extension. Thus, there are no “ghostly” substances to be appealed to in order to explain phenomena such as the mental. As a consequence, mind was also found with extension. This will be taken up in the following section.

## Hobbes' Mental Architecture:

### Conceptions, Imagination, and Dreams

Given that Hobbes allows himself *only* matter and motion, and that he is an empiricist in certain respects, as explained above, how well is he able to account for the heterogeneity of the mental? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to get a clear grasp of his conception of mind. That's what this section is about. Here, I will outline how Hobbes explained mind, and how he saw the varying parts of mind working together, yet all ultimately comprised of tiny moving homogenous particles.

The general picture of mind that Hobbes set forth is that tiny particles, or atoms, make contact with the sense organs. Hobbes thinks there are two kinds of motion: rectilinear and curvilinear. When a particle makes contact with a sense organ, its motion creates an impression, or a motion "inward" into the body. Conceptions can be *either* thoughts *or* passions, depending on where they are located in the body. If they are located in the head they are thoughts, and if they are located in the heart, they are passions. It is in the nature of Hobbes' conception of curvilinear motion that over time, this motion "winds down" or decays. What this means is that once the objects making contact with the sense organs are no longer present, the conceptions in the mind have a limited shelf life, and over time they begin to decay. Because of this, mental images begin to become more obscure. This "decaying sense" is what he calls imagination. He writes,

any object being removed from our eyes, though the impression it made in us remain, yet other objects more present succeeding and working on us, the imagination of the past is obscured, and made weak, as the voice of a man is in the noise of the day. From whence it followeth that the longer the time is, after the sight or sense of any

object, the weaker is the imagination. (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 88).

For Hobbes, when we signify that the sense is decaying, we call it “memory.” Imagination and memory are one and the same—namely, they are those things formerly perceived by the senses—understood by two different names. Hobbes thinks that a lot of memory is what we call “experience.” Imagination that is raised by words or signs is called “understanding.” Dreams are imagination that takes place while asleep. Since the brain and nerves—the organs of sense—are “benumbed” in sleep, dreams are the “agitation of the inward parts of man’s body” and these motions, which are imaginations made previously. Dreams are,

what proceeds from the agitation of the inward parts of man’s body; which inward parts, for the connection they have with the brain and other organs, when they be distempered, do keep the same in motion; whereby the imaginations there formerly made, appear as if a man were waking (ibid).

Because dreams are caused by “inward” parts of the body, different feelings in a person cause different kinds of dreams. Hobbes explains,

And hence it is that lying cold breedeth dreams of fear, and raiseth the thought and image of some fearful object, the motion from the brain to the inner parts and from the inner parts to the brain being reciprocal; and that, as anger causeth heat in some parts of the body when we are awake, so when we sleep the overheating of the same parts causeth anger, and raiseth up in the brain the imagination of an enemy...In sum, our dreams are the reverse of our waking imaginations, the motion when we are awake beginning at one end, and when we dream at another. (ibid)

The Hobbesian picture is one where motion and particles are sufficient to explain mental life, from memory to dreams, imagination, passions, and thoughts. The motion of particles that make contact with the sense organs creates pressure inwards, and this pressure constitutes the varieties of mental experiences that we have.

### Mental Architecture: Ratiocination

Hobbes took a *language of thought* view of cognition. Basically, his view is that conceptions are mental items that can be labeled, or “marked” with words. This marking allows for later recall, when the object, once pressed against the senses is no longer present. Hobbes writes that a mark is, “a sensible object which a man erecteth voluntarily to himself, to the end to remember thereby somewhat past, when the same is objected to his sense again” (*Elements of Law*, 17). Such marks may then be “recalled to our mind [and] as are like those thoughts for which we took them” (*Elements of Philosophy*, 13). We mark conceptions not only so that we can recall them, but because doing so also allows us to think, or *ratiocinate* with them. Ratiocination is computation—a way of manipulating mental symbols or words.

By RATIOCINATION, I mean *computation*. Now to compute, is either to collect the sum of many things that are added together, or to know what remains when one thing is taken out of another. *Ratiocination*, therefore, is the same with *addition* and *subtraction*; and if any man add *multiplication* and *division*, I will not be against it, seeing multiplication is nothing but addition of equals one to another, and division nothing but a subtraction of equals one from another, as often as is possible. So that all ratiocination is comprehended in these two operations of the mind, addition and subtraction. (*Elements of Philosophy*, 3)

In Hobbes’ view, thinking is a simple process of addition and subtraction over marks



that are attached onto conceptions. For Hobbes, “Reason...is nothing but reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying of our thoughts” (30).

### Mental Architecture: Passions

Hobbesian passions are particularly seldom studied, and are, in general, not very well understood. Very little has been written about the topic. Gary Herbert (1989) recognizes that the centrality of the passions in Hobbes’ account of human nature makes examining them carefully absolutely fundamental. And at the same time, this is exactly what is lacking in most Hobbes studies (87). The lack of attention to Hobbesian passions can be seen among non-specialists who incorrectly hold that, according to Hobbes, reason and passion war with one another, and that what we are after is the triumph of reason over passion. For instance, Arrigo Pacchi (1987) writes, “it is well known that the cornerstone of Hobbes’ political philosophy is the opposition between reason and the emotions” (111). For Pacchi, passions are to blame for the ills of humanity:

[the state’s] stability is threatened not only by ignorance but also by the disrupting influence of the passions...Passions such as “Hope, Fear, Anger, Pitty”, when deliberately aroused by orators and demagogues (who themselves are moved by ill-directed emotions arising from a thirst for power) turn men “out of fools into madmen”... “[Reason] will only attain results comparable to those of geometry if it is free from the interference of passion”. (111)

Pacchi argues that Hobbes is best read as arguing for the “*devastating, pernicious influence of the passions* on the attainment of the chief desire of men, the preservation of life and welfare” [italics mine] (112). Kim Sungmoon (2011) takes a similar view, writing, “in the Hobbesian man, passion (that is reduced to power) overwhelms reason, instead of being controlled by it...one’s inner-world...is

nothing but a bundle of self-moving passions, driving civil society into the state of “civil war” (293-294). Slomp (1998) also sees the passions, and glory in particular, as “crucial destabilizing forces that bring about human conflict” (553). The idea that the passions stand in opposition to reason, create conflict, and must be overcome in the development of civil society, also shows up in Ian Tregenza’s (2003) presentation of Michael Oakeshott’s view. Tregenza argues that for Oakeshott, pride is a “volatile and dangerous passion” that is central to man’s makeup (172), and “a dangerous emotion that must be tamed before civil society can be effectively established” (173). On Oakeshott’s view the “promise” of reason is peace, and it is man’s “rational” powers that makes it possible for the human race to be emancipated from the “frustrations of natural appetite” (92).

The view that the passions stand in opposition to reason can only be maintained by focussing on Hobbes’ political writing, without the context of his broader view of the nature of mind. In fact, for Hobbes passions are just particles in motion, as are thoughts. They are not inherently normative one way or the other, and they are not in themselves something to be overcome.

Susan James (1997) is much more accurate in her interpretation of Hobbes, which is that conceptions and passions are *identified*. James writes, “emotions are...conscious thoughts, which are our experience of bodily motions” (129). Passions and thoughts are differentiated by their *location* in the body – in the head for thoughts, and in the heart for passions. This can be seen in the following passage, where Hobbes is explicit that conceptions are motions that can move from the head to the heart and can be experienced, for example, as pleasure. Hobbes writes,

[C]onceptions or apparitions are nothing really, but motion in some internal substance of the head; which motion not stopping there, but proceeding to the heart, of necessity must there either help or hinder that motion which is called vital; when it helpeth, it is called DELIGHT, contentment, or pleasure, which is nothing really but

motion about the heart, as conception is nothing but motion within the head; and the objects that cause it are called pleasant or delightful, or by some name equivalent. (*Elements of Law*, 28)

The *precise* relationship between thought and passion is somewhat elusive and open to interpretation. With regards to Hobbes' theory, Leo Strauss (1956) also interprets thoughts and passions as being singular, comparing them together as corresponding to what Descartes and Locke called "ideas" (178). For Hobbes, everything that is "internal" is mind. The limit of the body is the factor that determines what is mind, and what is not mind. This is why Strauss sees that the internal life of man is unified by the boundary of the body. Passions are best understood therefore, as mind, combining with thoughts in various ways to create even more mental complexity. Passions and thoughts integrate with one another in the process of deliberation, which is what immediately precedes deliberate action.

I remind my reader at this point that my aim is to analyze the extent to which Hobbes is able to account for the heterogeneity of the mental. This is in search of a justified reason why Hobbes' view of mind receives so little attention. While I have already rejected other possible reasons for the neglect of Hobbes' view, I look now to diagnose whether this is because his view is just too simple, and can't account for the complexity of mind. To this end, I have explicated a good portion of Hobbesian mental architecture, including conceptions, imagination, dreams, and ratiocination. The purpose of this is to show the details of how Hobbes achieves complexity from simple parts. This is to support my position that Hobbes deserves more recognition as a philosopher of mind. I've also illustrated the way Hobbesian passions are sometimes misinterpreted, and how this impacts interpretations of Hobbes' political philosophy. From here, I focus on a more accurate view of the passions, and how Hobbesian passions and thought integrate to account for the rich variety of experiences. I briefly discuss some of the influence of this on his political philosophy, before moving on to evaluate the success as well as the challenges to Hobbes' view.

## The Integration of Passion and Thought

Hobbes categorizes the passions at the most basic level according to whether they elicit a movement toward or away from a stimulus, calling them either “appetitive” or “aversive” respectively. When the object that draws us near is pleasing, the internal motion is called “appetite” and when it is displeasing, the internal motion away is called “aversion” (*Elements of Law*, 28). Emotions are a solicitation, or provocations to come near to something that is pleasing, or to withdraw from something that is displeasing.

Hobbes’ identification and classification of the passions appear in *The Elements of Law*, *De Cive*, *Leviathan*, *De Corpore*, and *De Homine*. Hobbes’ view of the way passions relate to thoughts can be considered a precursor to what in modern times is called a cognitivist, or appraisal view of emotion. On such views, emotions are understood as associated with cognitions. In his discussion of the passions, Hobbes described how various complex feelings require thought in order to exist, and carefully explicated how feeling is the result of the way one thinks about and understands a situation. For example, Hobbes’ explanation of fear involves a solicitation to move *away* from something. But it also involves and requires the thought of some particular, undesirable event that takes place in the future. Fear then, requires thought. This is so for any number of passions as explicated by Hobbes. For example, courage is described as the experience of being in the presence of evil, but not feeling fear. This experience requires a conception of evil in the imagination, and a feeling response to that conception. Similarly, he describes anger, or “sudden courage,” as overcoming a present opposition. This experience also requires a conception of the self, the other, and the situation, in response to which feeling is experienced. In Hobbes’ words,

COURAGE, in a large signification, is the absence of fear in the presence of any evil whatsoever; but in a stricter and more common meaning, it is contempt of wounds and death, when they oppose a

man in the way to his end. ANGER (or sudden courage) is nothing but the appetite or desire of overcoming present opposition...(*Elements of Law*, 38)

Hobbes' extensive explanations of various passions show that a feeling response requires conceptions in the imagination. Hope and trust are both construed in terms of the conceptions of expectations. In the case of hope, it involves conceptions of the future: "HOPE is expectation of good to come, as fear is the expectation of evil" (39). Trust is construed as a passion arising from expectations of another person: "TRUST is a passion proceeding from belief of him from whom we expect or hope for good, so free from doubt that upon the same we pursue no other way" (40).

There are myriad examples of passions that Hobbes explains in relation to conceptions. For example, Hobbes explains feelings of repentance as arising from an understanding of the purpose of some particular action. He writes, "REPENTANCE is the passion that proceedeth from opinion or knowledge that the action they have done is out of the way to the end they would attain" (39). Similarly, humility results from an understanding of our own infirmity: "The passion contrary to glory, proceeding from apprehension of our own infirmity, is called HUMILITY by those by whom it is approved" (*Elements of Law*, 38). Pity involves imagining a negative future situation: "PITY is imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense of another man's present calamity" (40). Shame, a complicated emotion, involves the "remembrance" of defect or infirmity in oneself. Hobbes writes,

It happeneth sometimes, that he that hath a good opinion of himself, and upon good ground, may nevertheless, by reason of the forwardness which that passion begetteth, discover in himself some defect or infirmity, the remembrance whereof dejecteth him; and this passion is called SHAME. (38)

Hobbes provides a complex explanation of the experience of *indignation*, once again deriving empirically observed heterogeneity consistent with empiricism about contents, and a simple materialism. This experience requires both a feeling – grief— and the conception of good coming to those considered unworthy. Hobbes writes,

INDIGNATION is that grief which consisteth in the conception of good success happening to them whom they think unworthy thereof. Seeing therefore men think all those unworthy whom they hate, they think them not only unworthy of the good fortune they have, but also of their own virtues. (*Elements of Law*, 40)

The passion of glory, for instance, is a passionate response to imagination and conceptions. The same is true for vainglory. Of these, Hobbes writes,

Glory, or internal gloriation or triumph of the mind, is that passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us... as when a man imagineth himself to do the actions whereof he readeth in some romant, or to be like unto some other man whose acts he admireth. And this is called VAIN GLORY...(36)

Hobbes' account of how thoughts combine with passions to create the richness of human experience is, then, an excellent example of how he establishes complexity out of simple parts. It is in the combinations and arrangement of the simples that this is achieved. With conceptions, along with appetite and aversion, Hobbes provides a plausible account of the most nuanced and familiar experiences such as repentance, humility, shame, indignation, and vainglory.

## A Brief Aside: Implications for Hobbes' Political Philosophy

An interesting upshot of these reflections on mental architecture is that interpretations of Hobbes' political philosophy that involve a war between reason and passion are essentially in opposition to his empiricist, mechanist picture of the nature of man. Working up from the movement of particles, the psychological view and the view of action that Hobbes presents does not make a firm distinction between thought and passion, both of which are conceptions. It is clear that both are required for action.

The development of commonwealth *requires* passion, as well as thinking, or ratiocination. The possibility of coming out of the state of nature consists for man, "*partly in the Passions, partly in his Reason*" (*Leviathan*, Chapter 13). There are particular passions that induce man toward peaceful living, in particular the fear of death. This is "necessary to commodious living." As well, there is the *hope* of attaining a better life. Chapter 13 of *Leviathan* has an entire section subtitled, *The Passions That Incline Men To Peace*.

Not only are passions necessary for peace, it's also Hobbes' view that reason plays an important role in the causes of the state of war. For example, Hobbes describes how other animals, such as bees and ants, live successfully together socially precisely because they *do not reason*. It is the ability to reason that causes men to see fault in one another, particularly in the administration of their common business. Everyone seems to think himself or herself wiser than the next person, and more able to govern, and this creates both distraction and civil war. By way of contrast, creatures without the use of reason, like bees and ants, don't consider the way business is administered, and so they don't have a reason for warring with one another. In other words, *lacking reason*, we would lack civil war (*Leviathan*, 156).

## Mental Architecture: Deliberation

For many empiricists, thought and feeling work together in a much more streamlined way than they do for many rationalists. This is because of the foundational role of sensation in the production of knowledge. Remember that for empiricists, the basic orientation is *toward* sensation as the foundation for knowledge, whereas for the rationalist the basic orientation is *away from* sensation as the foundation for knowledge. This means that for empiricists, sensation must be appropriately and relevantly related to reason in an account of knowledge. In Hobbes' case, there is an *intimate and important connection* between thought and feeling. This close relationship between conceptions and passions is crucial for understanding and appreciating his view of action, which involves both deliberation and volition.

Reasoned action is the end result of a process of deliberation. Hobbes describes deliberation as the arising of various passions when considering the consequences of a given action. A back and forth takes place, where various outcomes are envisioned.

When in the mind of man, Appetites, and Aversions, Hopes, and Feares, concerning one and the same thing, arise alternately...the whole summe of Desires, Aversions, Hopes and Fears, continued till the thing be either done, or thought impossible, is that we call Deliberation. (*Leviathan*, 126)

This view of deliberation as the alternating passions of appetite and fear also appears in various other texts, including *Elements of Law*. There Hobbes reiterates the process of deliberation as originating in the impact of external objects on the senses; from there conceptions arise, and thoughts give rise to passions. The succession of various imagined outcomes requires both the thought of something to take place in



the future, and of the possibility of various outcomes. Hobbes writes,

It hath been declared already, how external objects cause conceptions, and conceptions appetite and fear, which are the first unperceived beginnings of our actions: for either the action immediately followeth the first appetite, as when we do any thing upon a sudden; or else to our first appetite there succeedeth some conception of evil to happen unto us by such actions, which is fear, and withholdeth us from proceeding...This alternate succession of appetite and fear, during all the time the action is in our power to do, or not to do, is that we call DELIBERATION. (61)

Deliberation is an internal activity that takes place directly before action.

### Mental Architecture: Volition

I want to mention one more example—volition. In Hobbesian mental architecture volition, or the will, is *identified* with passion. The will is not a separate power or faculty, but is rather the last desire in a chain of inner motions that lead to outer motions. Hobbes clearly says that the will is “the last appetite” in deliberation: “In deliberation the last appetite, as also the last fear, is called WILL (viz.) the last appetite will to do; the last fear will not to do, or will to omit” (*Elements of Law*, 61). This idea is echoed in a later passage where he says that the passions *are* the will: “Appetite, fear, hope, and the rest of the passions are not called voluntary; for they proceed not from, but are the will; and the will is not voluntary” (62). Volition is more or less a matter of one’s sensory history:

Forasmuch as will to do is appetite, and will to omit, fear; the causes of appetite and of fear are the causes also of our will. But the propounding of benefits and of harms, that is to say, of reward and punishment, is the cause of our appetite and of our fears, and

therefore also of our wills...(63)

As in Hobbes' entire system, volition operates mechanistically, which is to say that it is determined. Freedom of volition means freedom from *constraint*. For example, if a man is locked in a room, then he is not free to leave that room should he desire to; the freedom of his volition is constrained. But for Hobbes, there is no such thing as freedom in the sense of volition intervening on a thought process in order to redirect it to some alternate end.<sup>6</sup>

The general picture that Hobbes presents is that the human being is a machine set in motion by external impulses. Tiny particles make contact with the sense organs, and create motion by *pressing* inwards. These external impulses thereby set up *internal* impulses. The entire internal life continues to operate in terms of determinate, lawful motion. Hobbes' psychology is an overtly materialist one, based on mechanical physiology. All psychological phenomena are explained by reference to physiological causes.

We are now in a position to appreciate that Hobbes creates complexity out of simples by putting them together in various *arrangements*. This is to say that Hobbes establishes variation in terms of *derived heterogeneity*. While each of the basic components out of which mind is made are simple, they combine in various ways to create heterogeneity. Differing combinations of thoughts and feelings<sup>7</sup> create different internal experiences. In the same way that an infinite quantity of numbers can be created by the various combinations of digits 0-9, likewise the whole array of mental elements and operations can be accounted for by different

---

<sup>6</sup> Given that Hobbes thinks that the will, or *volition* is just a *name* for the last thing that happens before action, it is also possible to interpret him as arguing for the *elimination* of volition as a real part of mental life. Either of these interpretations will do.

<sup>7</sup> While a distinction is sometimes drawn between "passion" and "feeling," I use these terms interchangeably here.

combinations of simple elements.<sup>8</sup>

Hobbes' psychology does indeed provide for the combination of thoughts, which includes imagination and dreams, with feelings, which includes volition, to produce every imaginable internal experience. Reason and passion are not two different things, as some commentators take them to be. Thought and passion are just one thing that functions differently. Volition is also the same thing as passion, so one way of putting this is that the will is "reduced" to passion. Hobbes establishes the heterogeneity of the mind via the simple particles that combine and recombine in various ways, establishing complexity not within different *kinds* of things, but within complex *arrangements*. And this solution, in its broad approach, if not in its details, works. Particles are homogenous, but perform different functions.

Notice that this is not very dissimilar from modern explanations of mind that appeal to various organized patterns of homogenous particles, whether they are atoms, or neurons. In contemporary discussions, it is not uncommonly held that the mind is identical with the brain, *or* realized somehow or other via the physical structure of the brain. And the brain is comprised of about 100 billion nerve cells—neurons—that share the same characteristics as other cells, as well as the ability to transmit certain kinds of messages. Variation is explained in terms of structural and

---

<sup>8</sup> Locke also articulates the sufficiency of a few simples to account for all the "fancies and opinions" of mankind, comparing it to the variety that can be achieved with the composition of only 24 letters. In Locke's words,

Nor will it be so strange, to think these few simple *Ideas* sufficient to employ the quickest Thought, or largest Capacity; and to furnish the Materials of all that various Knowledge, and more various Fancies and Opinions of all Mankind, if we consider how many Words may be made out of the various composition of 24 Letters; or if going one step farther, we will but reflect on the variety of combinations may be made, with barely one of the above-mentioned *Ideas*, *viz.* Number, whose stock is inexhaustible, and truly infinite: And what a large and immense field, doth Extension alone afford the Mathematicians? (Essay Bk.2, chpt.7, section 10)

functional properties. To draw on a familiar modern-day example, Patricia Churchland argues for a brain-based understanding of the mind, based on a computational model of cognition and perception. In Churchland's view, groups of neurons interact to enable an organism to see, decide, and move. Networks of neurons represent and compute. Physical properties are understood to code information (Churchland, 1992). The modern-day view of the brain—and the mind as it relates to the brain—is somewhat more sophisticated than the view that Hobbes held, but in its basic *form*, it is very similar. If this basic strategy of explanation that is so common in modern discussions is taken to be more or less acceptable, then insofar as it bears the right resemblances, the Hobbesian view of mind ought also to be considered more or less acceptable—at least in terms of its broad structure. This is not to say that there are no problems with such a view. It is to say, however, that the problem of explaining the complexity of mind on this model is not a decisive problem. This is a problem that Hobbes took a sophisticated stab at.

Hobbes accounts for the complexity of mind adequately according to his empiricist, mechanistic, materialistic view. What's more, Hobbes' view aligns quite naturally with some important modern-day explanations of mind as it relates to brain and body. His view of mind ought not to be ignored on the grounds that it fails to account for the heterogeneity of mind.

## Conclusion

The Hobbesian view of mind is, in many ways, a sophisticated view of mind according to the principles of the New Science and a certain sort of empiricism. Explaining the various parts of the mind in a plausible way without appealing to a diverse range of occult internal powers is no easy task, and Hobbes' view is surprisingly sophisticated. This is not to say that the view does not face some serious problems.

One problem is the important moral and ethical repercussions that arise out of

determinism. This very issue was the subject of a famous debate between Hobbes and Bishop Bramhall, with Bramhall arguing passionately for the ability of man to *choose otherwise*. One might take the view, as Hobbes does, that it's necessary to accept this truth, since it falls out of what's true about the world: mechanical, determinate nature precludes the intervention of a power of volition. The universe is determined, and that means that the psychological processes, as well as the behaviour of human beings, is also determined. Our illusions about moral and ethical dimensions will have to be faced for what they are. The determinate worldview might be unpalatable for these reasons, but it is not *incoherent*. This problem might be considered a matter of *taste*, rather than a decisive objection to the cogency of the system.

There are, however, other important problems with Hobbes' view. First, it makes no reference to the phenomenon of consciousness. Hobbes did not account for consciousness, since he did not even articulate any problem of consciousness at all. In this respect, Hobbes' view of mind is incomplete, although we might be forgiving about this, since the lack of articulation about consciousness was fairly standard during Hobbes' time. There is, however, another serious problem with the view as Hobbes expresses it. Even though he is able to explain the sophistication of the structure of mind, he gives absolutely no explanation of *content*. What I mean by this is that the properties of the physical world are very different from the properties of the informational world, or of content. How does a particle *turn into* an image? For Hobbes, particles make "contact" with the sense organs, and their rectilinear motion turns to curvilinear motion as they move "internally." But why should the change in direction of motion amount to a complete change in the semantic properties of that particle? And *how* exactly does this take place? It's not just that Hobbes lacks a sophisticated account of content, but he lacks an account of content *at all*. The universe may be made of tiny particles in motion, but internal life doesn't *seem* like tiny particles in motion. What is required is at least a possible explanation of how this is so. And yet this is just what is lacking in Hobbes' account. Even so, the Hobbesian view of mind can be seen as anticipating modern-day explanations of

mind in terms of brain; Hobbes' view of passion certainly anticipated modern-day appraisal theories of emotion. His view is interesting and worthwhile to examine, and the failure to pay sufficient attention to Hobbes' view of mind is unfortunate for several reasons.

First, by failing to accord Hobbes equivalent examination to Descartes, it is easier to develop a skewed or inaccurate view of the state of philosophy of mind in the Modern period. Without looking closely at empiricist explanations of mind, and Hobbes' in particular, the work of that time can appear more unscientific and naïve than it was, and we may mistakenly believe that contemporary theorizing on mind has progressed much more than it actually has.

Another reason for reconsidering Hobbes' philosophy of mind is the fact that without it, our understanding of Hobbes' political theory is diminished. Hobbes modeled his political philosophy on the idea that the state is a man, "writ large." For this reason, he began *Leviathan*, as well as several of his other works, with an account of man. Hobbes' empirical approach to understanding the "inner workings" of humankind has thus made its way in to his understanding of political life in a deep way that is often overlooked. Failure to appreciate the impact of Hobbes' empiricism has eventuated in some important misinterpretations of Hobbes' political writings. For example, it is sometimes suggested that the Hobbesian state of war is the result of a conflict between reason and passion (e.g. Pacchi, 1987). This view is clearly at odds with what Hobbes wrote about the relationship between reason and passion in his view of the human being; indeed, it is at odds with empiricist explanations more generally of the relation between thought and feeling. Further, as a result of this widespread, mistaken view about reason and passion, we may be limited in our understanding of other important aspects of Hobbes' view, such as how his commonwealth was to be formed, and what moves the Sovereign.

## Works Cited

- Carlin, Laurence. *The Empiricists: A Guide For The Perplexed*. London, Continuum, 2009. Print.
- Churchland, Patricia. *The Computational Brain*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992. Print.
- Garber, Daniel, and Wilson, Margaret. "Mind-Body Problems." *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Vol. 1, 833-867. Web, March 2008.
- James, Susan. "The Passions And The Good Life." *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Philosophy*. Ed. Donald Rutherford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 198-220.
- Hebert, Gary. *Thomas Hobbes: The Unity of Scientific and Moral Wisdom*. UBC Press, 1989. Print.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *De Cive*. Hobbes: English Works. Comp. and Ed. by Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. Web. Oct. 21, 2014.
- . *De Corpore*. Hobbes: English Works. Comp. and ed. Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. Web. Nov. 27, 2014.
- . *Leviathan*. Hobbes: English Works. Comp and ed. by Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. Web. Dec. 11, 2014.
- . *The Elements of Law*. Hobbes: English Works. Comp. and ed. by Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. Web. Oct. 21, 2014.
- . *The Elements of Philosophy*. Hobbes: English Works. Comp and ed. Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. Web. Oct. 21, 2014.
- Oakshott, Michael. *Hobbes on Civil Association*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1975.
- Overhoff, Jurgen. *Hobbes' Theory of the Will: Ideological Reasons and Historical Circumstances*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000. Print.
- Pacchi, Arrigo. "Hobbes and the Passions." *Topoi*. 6.2, 1987. 111-119.
- Sadler, Gregory B. "Reason As Danger and Remedy For The Modern Subject in Hobbes' *Leviathan*." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*. 35.9, 2009. 1099-

1118.

Slomp, G. "From Genus To Species: The Unravelling of Hobbesian Glory." *History of Political Thought*. 19.4, 1998. 552-569.

Sorrell, Tom. "Hobbes Thomas." *Encyclopedia of Empiricism*. Eds. Garrett & Barbanell. Greenwood Press, 1997. Print.

Strauss, Leo. *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952. Print.

Sungmoon, Kim. "From Desire to Civility: Is Xunzi a Hobbesian?" *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*. 10 (3), 2011. 291-309.

Tregenza, Ian. *Michael Oakshott on Hobbes: A Study in the Renewal of Philosophical Ideas*. Charlottesville: Imprint Academic, 2003. Print.

Zagorin, Perez. "Hobbes On Our Minds." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51.2, 1990. 317-335.



## Chapter Three

### Tensions in Locke on Free Will

*The concept of freedom is the stone of stumbling for all empiricists, but at the same time the key to the loftiest practical principles for critical moralists, who perceive by its means that they must necessarily proceed by a rational method.*

-- Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, Preface

### The Trouble With Locke on Free Will

Despite his reputation as a Western philosopher of the highest caliber, Locke's work on free will suffers from a rather different reputation. This portion of Locke's corpus, the ever-evolving chapter, "Of Power" of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, is often regarded as a dark spot on what is otherwise a delicious, deep, intricate, and in many ways plausible, work. Locke's work on free will is infamous for its difficulty of interpretation, its tensions, and its inconsistencies, and the text has been a source of frustration for commentators since the time of its publication.

There are five editions of Locke's *Essay*, and in each edition the chapter *Of Power* gets longer and longer. This portion of the *Essay* is the most heavily revised piece of his entire work. It's as though once Locke opened a can of worms, he could only fit them back into a bigger can. And most intriguingly, the revisions Locke made in later versions created inconsistencies with his initial statements which he left, for the most part, intact. That is to say, Locke made statements that don't cohere with his more general, foundational view, and did not make attempts to create consistency out of them. At least so it appears. Having established a general framework that affirmed both the New Science and empiricism, Locke's initial work on volition was very Hobbesian in tone and tenor. Locke put forth a deterministic view of volition that fit well with his other theoretical commitments. But having had "second

thoughts,” presumably about the impact of determinism on the moral dimension of volition, he makes changes that present a more libertarian conception of the will. These changes were made, however, without making the corresponding changes to his views of the New Science. The later versions then—the ones that Locke had put *more* time and thought into—are more inconsistent and filled with tensions than his first attempts. How to handle and interpret these revisions has been the subject of both confusion and controversy since the time of their publication (see, e.g., Harris, 2007, Chappell, 1994; Yaffe, 2001).

One of the significant disappointments of the chapter is that Locke never gives a straight answer to the question of whether the will is left at liberty by the influence of the motives. His account does nothing to allow us to answer the question whether a person who does action *A* *could have done* action *B* in that situation, without any change in the antecedent mental or physical circumstances (O’Connor, 116-17). As a result, the text leaves open the question whether Locke was a determinist, a libertarian, or a compatibilist. There is evidence that supports each interpretation. Both libertarians and determinists consider him part of their party. During his own time, libertarians thought Locke gave too much to the necessitarian cause, while necessitarians thought he muddied a question that Hobbes had put clearly (Harris, 21). Given its inconsistencies, it’s all too easy to fit the text to a particular doctrine, and excuse those parts of the text that don’t fit. This is just what many commentators do, charging Locke with “unfortunate phraseology” when he agrees with the opposing side (39).

Rather than attempting to fit Locke’s text into one or another of the standard positions, we gain a deeper understanding of the underlying issues by looking at the tensions among the unit-ideas that create the inconsistencies. Exposing these inconsistencies is one of the most valuable contributions of his work, and so it is very important not to read them out of the text. These are *real* inconsistencies among the commitments to the New Science, empiricism, and free will. The relationships among these unit-ideas can be captured in part by the following

triangle diagram. At each corner of the triangle is one of the concepts, and they are each connected to one another via lines of tension. These lines, which provide tension, combine with the concepts to give the constellation of ideas shape.

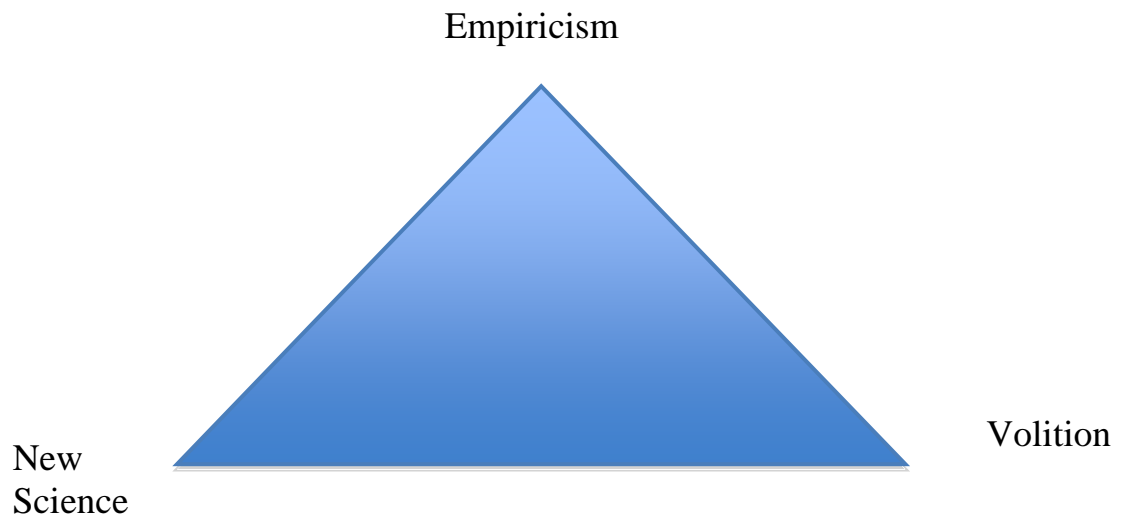


Figure 1. The mutually-supporting tensions

Understood as connected to one another via a positive, shape-giving tension, we learn more about the way these notions are mutually supportive of one another. Depending on how each of these terms is defined and deployed, balance and stability are achieved. But there is also a negative side to the tensions that hold these concepts together. In some ways these unit-ideas are mutually supporting, but in other ways, they seem to undermine one another. With too much pressure placed on any one of the three points, the entire structure will become unstable, and collapse.

In the case of Locke's work on volition, the increasing importance he places on maintaining libertarian freedom of the will places unsustainable pressure on the New Science corner of his triangle. Correspondingly, his initial framework that adheres to the tenets of the New Science creates too much tension with the notion of

libertarian free will at the right hand of the triangle. The structure of the triangle falls apart with too-stringent requirements for freedom within a conception of the universe that doesn't support that view. Locke's empiricism supports both his conceptions of the New Science, and his conception of volition. But inconsistencies in Locke's work take place along the bottom line of the triangle that connects the New Science with his account of volition.

Looking for Locke's final position is to speculate on how Locke *might* have made changes to one of the corners of the diagram, and thereby created a more stable, self-supporting structure. But this goes too far. Locke *didn't* make a different triangle. In this paper I give up the search for Locke's final position, and instead analyze the *source* of the tensions in the work in terms of his competing commitments to these three. Discovering the reasons why the pieces of his puzzle just don't fit together (it seems), no matter how much tinkering Locke does, reveals important insights into each of these presuppositions, and by extension, it provides insight into the model of mind operating in Locke's thought. Locke's seemingly troubled text ought not to be seen as the expression of a confused thinker; neither should it be seen as the result of an undisciplined editorial process, as some have argued. Instead it should be seen as the exposure of the *real* tensions inherent in this combination of ideas.

## The Game Plan

The game plan for this chapter is as follows. First, I briefly explicate the three standard positions on freedom and responsibility. This is intended to help orient my reader within the critical commentary that fits Locke into one of each of these standard positions. From there, I reach back in history to the period just prior to Locke's work on free will, specifically to the critical reception that Hobbes' view of free will received. Locke's initial approach to free will is in many ways very Hobbesian, and he was very likely responding to the problems created by the Hobbesian picture. With this background in mind we are prepared to look more deeply at Locke's work and what likely motivated its various evolutions. Having

explored the terrain of Locke's view(s), I then analyze the text in terms of the inherent tensions among Locke's commitments to New Science, empiricism, and free will. I highlight two conclusions that do not follow from this: the first is that Locke is a compatibilist; the second is that he failed to articulate the changes necessary to make his view consistent.

### Reminder: My HIP Approach

I remind my reader that my approach to this analysis is historically informed philosophy (HIP), and so I focus primarily on analysis of the concepts as defined and structured by Locke. I respect and appreciate the fact that context plays an important role in Locke's work. I take it into consideration, especially regarding the impact of the critical reception of Hobbes' work on Locke's thinking. Even so, my general approach is *not* philosophically oriented history (POH), which would involve a far greater focus on the details of Locke's life and context in order to draw conclusions about what he might have thought. My HIP approach is less concerned with discovering what Locke *in fact* believed about liberty and volition. It seems to me clear that Locke changed his mind and was unsettled about the matter. My interest is the meaning of the ideas that he put forth, their strength, viability, weaknesses, and usefulness.

### Background: The Three Standard Positions on Freedom and Volition

The free will debate is typically understood to admit of three standard positions. Each of these positions stakes a claim about the capacity that a person has to choose his or her behaviour, regardless of an antecedent causal chain of events. The three standard positions are determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Just as it is in most philosophical debates, the free will debate is replete with subtle distinctions and nuance, and these subtleties and nuances extend into the three standard positions. This is to say that what follows is a "quick and dirty" summary

Determinism is commonly characterized as the view that every event is causally necessitated by antecedent events. As a metaphysical thesis, this is the view that the facts about the past, and the laws of nature necessitate events in the future. What this means is that given past events, combined with the fixed laws of nature, only one future is possible. This position is essentially a denial that there is a kind of freedom that allows one to intervene on events by *choosing* differently. If determinism is true, then events that took place in the past are sufficient conditions for one's action. On this view, the only kind of freedom there can be is freedom from constraint. For example, the flow of a river can be constrained by a dam, and hence, is not free. In the same way a person who is locked in a room from the outside is not free to leave—that person is constrained, and hence, not free. For determinists, there is no other sense of freedom than this. For “hard” determinists, this position is associated with a removal of the moral dimension to human action—since human action operates in just the same way as a wind-up toy, praiseworthiness and blameworthiness fall out of the picture.

By way of contrast, the libertarian position is at the opposite end of the spectrum of standard positions. Libertarianism and determinism are mutually exclusive; libertarianism is the denial of determinism. According to libertarians, what comes in between past and future events is one's will; one *can* and *does* change the course of events by virtue of one's will to do so. On this view our choices are free from both the determination of past events, and our ability to choose is free also from our nature. This means that not only do antecedent causes not “force our hand, so to speak, but neither does our conditioning, or predispositions. In other words, we always have a choice about what to do, except in conditions of constraint. On this view, freedom is the freedom to act contrary to one's nature, predisposition, desires, and antecedent events. No matter what a person does, it is possible that he or she

---

that shall suffice for the present purposes, and it is not meant to represent an exhaustive or rigorous explanation of these positions.

could have done otherwise. This position is a natural fit for our commonsense notions of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. A person is praiseworthy or blameworthy *because* they are responsible for their choices.

The third standard position, which should *not* be understood as a compromise, or “mid-way” position between determinism and libertarianism, is compatibilism. Compatibilism is essentially the denial of the claim that determinism is inconsistent with moral responsibility. This position affirms that determinism and moral responsibility are *compatible*. Compatibilism is not the conjunction of libertarianism and determinism, nor is it a position affirming a kind of “limited free will.” Instead it is the view that determinism is true, and at the same time, that humans can still be held accountable for their actions.

Determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism are mutually exclusive, meaning that it is not possible to hold more than one of them at the same time without inconsistency.<sup>10</sup> If Locke were a determinist, then he was not a libertarian or a compatibilist. Likewise, if he were a libertarian he were not a compatibilist or a determinist. And if he were a compatibilist, then he was neither a determinist nor a libertarian. On the other hand, he could inconsistently hold elements of each of these positions simultaneously.

An important part of the free will debate rests on presuppositions about the nature of the universe we live in, and given a determinist universe, a determinist conception of volition seems to follow, barring an *ad hoc* justification that leaves space for freedom of the will. What this means for analyzing Locke’s work is that if Locke were a determinist, then he could not consistently provide a libertarian account of volition. At least, we would expect him to provide a justification for the libertarian elements of his system.

---

<sup>10</sup> Compatibilism and determinism are consistent in the sense that it is impossible for the will to intervene on a causal chain. But they are mutually exclusive on the issue of what falls out of that view in terms of morality.

## Background to Locke on Free Will: The Hobbes-Bramhall

### Debate

Before diving in to the details of Locke's writings on free will it's important to get a grasp of the issues of the free will debate that he was likely responding to. Hobbes had made a splash with his view of hard determinism that was published just prior to Locke's time. Coming on the heels of Hobbes, Locke's first edition of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was published in 1690—just 36 years after the unauthorized publication of Hobbes' *Of Liberty and Necessity*, published in 1654. Hobbes' determinist view of liberty had stirred up quite a fuss among critical commentators and moralists. Hobbes had developed an explanation of how mind could fit into the natural world according to the principles of the New Science. While the scientific picture of man was in many ways an advancement, the consequences for the way that subjectivity and morality fit into that picture—or failed to—were, at least to some, disquieting, or even disturbing.

Recall from Chapter 1 that Hobbes is a staunch materialist and a mechanist, and that he understands man on the model of a machine. In his view, everything is matter in motion. This means that tiny particles or atoms move according to universal laws, whether internal to the agent, or external to the agent. Agents are themselves matter in motion. When particles make contact with the sense organs, they exert a pressure into the interior of the human being. This is how they become the stuff of subjectivity. The explanation of this process is mechanical; the change works by contact and pressure. External objects *press* upon the sense organ, and cause internal experiences by way of that pressure, just as the pressure of one billiard ball striking another creates change in the struck ball. Hobbes writes that in all cases sense is caused, “by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of external things upon our eyes, ears, and other organs thereunto ordained” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85).



Thoughts and feelings are the same sort of stuff—particles in motion—that function in somewhat different ways. When it comes to actions thoughts present various alternatives while passion provides the motivation for action. *Volition*, or the will, is identical with passion for Hobbes. And since the movement of particles, and the trajectories they take, are determined by universal laws, all thoughts, passions, and volition are determined: “Appetite, fear, hope, and the rest of the passions are not called voluntary; for they proceed not from, but are the will; and the will is not voluntary” (Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 62). It’s upfront in Hobbes’ view that the determination of the will depends on antecedent factors, and these are both its necessary and sufficient causes (Van den Enden, 188). For Hobbes, freedom means freedom from constraint. An important consequence of Hobbes’ determinist view is that social institutions, including the legal system, turn out to be not only *useless*, but also *unjust*. Of this, Bramhall writes, in *A Defense of True Liberty* (1655),

For if that law be unjust and tyrannical which commands a man to do that which is impossible for him to do, then that law is likewise unjust and tyrannical which commands him to will that which is impossible for him to will. (51)

Hobbes’ determinism met with some harsh criticism, the most famous of which might have come from Bishop Bramhall. John Bramhall, Anglican Archbishop of Armagh, had argued vociferously against Hobbes on the grounds that such a view would relieve individuals of moral responsibility. Bramhall does not deal directly with Hobbes’ reasons for determinism, but instead denies the position all together. Bramhall strongly asserts that inclinations and fears may be *necessary* causes for the will, but they are not *sufficient*. Actions are free in their causes. What comes in between feelings and action, says Bramhall, is a thinking or meditational process of rational deliberation and election. From there we can choose which action we wish to take. We do not *have to* give in to our proclivities (52). For this reason punishment by law remains just and appropriate, even if for no other end than

vindication:

The truth is, the punishing of delinquents by law respects both the evil act past and the good to come...It is not lawful to do evil that good may come of it, nor to punish an innocent person for the admonition of others; that is to fall into a certain crime for fear of an uncertain. Again, though there were no other end of penalties inflicted, neither probatory nor castigatory nor exemplary, but only vindicatory, to satisfy the law out of a zeal of justice, by giving every one his own, yet the action is just and warrantable. (Ibid)

Bramhall's argument begged the question against Hobbes' determinism. But while his defense of moral responsibility and the justice of punishment did not actually engage with Hobbes' argument, it does represent the strong disapprobation that Hobbes' view received. Hobbes' view of the workings of mind was very theoretically consistent, and followed straightforwardly from his empiricism coupled with the mechanistic element of New Science. At the same time that it remained "philosophically sound," Hobbes' determinism did have the consequence of threatening the moral dimension associated with the ability to choose freely. And in so doing, it seemed to threaten the justice of punishment. These are strong countervailing influences against a determinist view of volition.

### Locke: The Great English Empiricist

Like Hobbes, Locke too was an empiricist; his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is considered one of the first great defenses of empiricism. Although Locke is received as one of the founders of empiricism, like Hobbes, his is not an extreme form of empiricism. Locke is a "conservative empiricist," and recognizes that reason has a fundamental role in human knowledge (Rogers, 214). He is also comfortable with admitting entities that are not observable. Locke's frequent strategy is to start from experience as his basic datum, and then to call upon

evidence to substantiate his claims (211). All the same, he emphasizes the role of sense experience in knowledge, writing that man first begins to think, “When he first has any sensation.” In Locke’s view, sensation is the most fundamental source of ideas. When Locke asks himself how men came to have ideas in their minds, he appeals to “everyones own Observation and Experience” [sic] (Locke, *Essay*, first edition, 37).

There is a strong tie between experience and ideas for Locke. Supposing that the mind is like a sheet of white paper, he affirms that knowledge is founded on experience:

First, our senses, conversant about particular, sensible objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways, wherein those objects do affect them...This great source, of most of the ideas we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to our understanding, I call SENSATION. (37)

It is because there are no ideas in the mind before the senses have “conveyed any in,” that ideas are coeval with sensation. Locke makes a distinction between ideas from sensation and ideas of reflection. Ideas of reflection are those that come from perceiving the operations of our own minds, such as thought, perception, doubt, belief, and volition. These are ideas that differ from the ideas that we have from our senses—the source of these ideas is man himself. While the distinction between ideas of sensation and ideas of reflection might seem to suggest more of a rationalist leaning in Locke, it should be noted that ideas of reflection are logically dependent upon ideas of sensation. In fact, Locke affirms that ideas of reflection might as well be called “internal sense” because without something for the mind to reflect upon from sensation, there would be no such ideas. Thus Locke’s paradigmatically empiricist answer to the question as to where man gets the materials of reason and knowledge is “in one word, from EXPERIENCE” (37).

## Locke the New Scientist

Like Hobbes, Locke is also strongly influenced by the development of the New Science. His allegiance to it can be seen in the *Epistle to the Reader* in his *Essay*, where Locke famously describes himself as, “clearing the ground of rubbish” so that work done by the great scientists—Newton, Boyle, and Huygens—could proceed more effectively. The significance of Boyle for Locke is well accepted, especially in regard to the emphasis on empiricism in the natural sciences (Rogers, 1966, 205; Lennon 1993, 162). Rogers argues that Locke’s thinking is extremely close to Boyle’s on a number of topics. It is universally acknowledged that Locke accepts a prominent place for corpuscularian mechanism (Downing, 381). Margaret Atherton notes that, “it is close to becoming a contemporary orthodoxy than Locke’s motive in writing the *Essay* was to provide a foundation or defense for corpuscular mechanism” (Atherton, 33). Lisa Downing writes,

Locke’s discussions of the primary/secondary quality distinction and of real essences cannot be understood without reference to the corpuscularian science of his day, which held that all macroscopic bodily phenomena should be explained in terms of the motions and impacts of submicroscopic particles. (Downing, 381)

Peter Alexander reads Locke’s *Essay* as an attempt to help confirm the theory of Boylean mechanism by drawing out its implications (382). Locke is explicit in his belief that the fundamental particles of matter have the properties of solidity, extension, figure and mobility.

While Locke tries to avoid talking of metaphysical matters, like Hobbes, he does say that ideas are produced by motion: “all sensation being produced in us, only by different degrees and modes of Motion”. Locke argues that bodies operate on one another by impulse. He also thinks that it is inconceivable that they should operate on that which they don’t touch, because they cannot operate at a distance. Because

external objects are not united to our minds when they produce ideas in us, he reasons, then some motion must continue by our nerves, or “animal spirits”<sup>11</sup>. Locke writes, “Bodies must come from [the objects] to the eyes, and thereby convey to the brain some motion, which produces these ideas we have of them in us” (56).<sup>12</sup> The mechanical principle is clear and at work in Locke’s explanation of the way external objects create internal experiences.<sup>13</sup>

## Locke’s First Attempt (1690): Fitting Mind into the Natural World

Locke’s adherence to both empiricism and corpuscularian mechanism aligns well with the Hobbesian view. Sharing these similar presuppositions, it come as no surprise that the view of mind, and particularly the view of volition Locke articulates, is very similar to the view produced by Hobbes. Like Hobbes, in his first attempt, Locke seems to think that the problem of free will can be cleared away once we get clear on the nature of power. In Locke’s initial attempt at free will it appears that he views the issue as a pseudo-problem, or as a sort of category mistake. The basic problem, thinks Locke, is that people mistakenly believe that the *will* can be free when in fact, it is the *person* who is free. Freedom is a “power” and so is the will. Powers don’t apply to other powers, but instead they apply to agents. The way to make clear the source of this error is by recourse to careful definitions.

The general strategy in Locke’s first pass at the problem is to be clear about the fact that there are no *faculties* of the mind. There are dangers to thinking this way. For

---

<sup>11</sup> “Animal Spirits” here means a very subtle fluid.

<sup>12</sup> See also Bk.4, chpt.3, sections 26-28: “’Tis evident that the bulk, figure, and motion of several Bodies about us, produce in us several Sensations, as of Colours, Sounds, Tastes, Smells, Pleasure, and Pain, *etc.* These mechanical Affections of Bodies, having no affinity at all with those *Ideas*, they produce in us...we can have no distinct knowledge of such Operations beyond our Experience.”

<sup>13</sup> The qualities appealed to are those qualities that are required for thinking of bodies as interacting according to mechanical principles alone.

instance, doing so can allow us to conceive of faculties as distinct agents with their “several Provinces and Authorities” (Locke, *Essay*, 117). In this case thinking of volition as a faculty could lead to thinking that a faculty can have a power, such as freedom. It can also give the impression of being explanatory without doing the kind of explanatory work demanded by the mechanistic worldview. Explaining mental phenomena in terms of faculties is akin to saying that the “digestive faculty” is responsible for digestion, the “motive faculty” is responsible for motion, and the “expulsive faculty” is responsible for making things come out of the body (121). In just the same way Locke argues, we might say that the “Understanding, understood; and the *elective Faculty*, or the Will, willed or commanded” (ibid). Thinking of the mind in terms of faculties is the result of the common use of language, not fitting for careful philosophical thought<sup>14</sup>.

Clear in his conviction that mistaken talk of faculties is at the root of the non-problem of free will, Locke then provides a definition of volition:

*Volition*, ‘tis plain, is nothing but the actual choosing or preferring forbearance to the doing, or doing to the forbearance, of any particular Action in our power, that we think on. And what is the *Will*, but the Faculty to do this? And is that Faculty anything more in effect, than a Power, the power of preferring any Action to its Forbearance, or *vice versa*, as far as it appears to depend on us? For can it be denied, that whatever Agent has a power to think on its own Actions, and to prefer their doing or omission either to other, has that Faculty call’d *Will*. *Will* then is nothing but such a power; *Liberty*, on the other side, is the power a Man has to do or forbear doing any particular Action, according as its doing or forbearance

---

<sup>14</sup> Despite having said this, in the first edition, Locke presents the will as “that Faculty” that is the power of the mind to prefer any particular action to its forbearance, or vice versa (117). He goes on further to discuss the will in its relationship to “commands” from the understanding.

has the actual preference in the Mind, which is the same thing as to say, according as he himself wills it. (119)

On his first pass, Locke, like Hobbes, advances a view of the will that is consequent to his mechanistic empiricism. The account is empiricist because of the empiricist dogma that all knowledge originates in the senses, combined with the basic orientation *toward* the senses as the source of knowledge. Given the corpuscularian universe—mechanistic and lawful—the movement of particles including those that comprise mental phenomena such as willing is determined. The will is thus determined. What this amounts to is that once the will has “spoken,” a person has no choice to intervene or redirect it. This is evident when Locke writes,

*A Man in respect of willing any Action in his power once proposed to this Thoughts, cannot be free...for it being unavoidable that the Action depending on his Will, should exist, or not exist; and its existence, or not existence, following perfectly the determination, and preference of his Will, he cannot avoid willing the existence, or not existence, of that Action; it is absolutely necessary that he will the one, or the other, i.e., prefer the one to the other: since one of them must necessarily follow; and that which does follow, follows by the choice and determination of his Mind; that is, by his willing it: for if he did not will it, it would not be. (122)*

A man cannot “will what he wills” – in other words, we do not have the capacity to change what it is that the will does or prefers—it moves according to antecedent factors. Locke rejects the very idea that we could will what we will, on the grounds that this would invoke an antecedent will, and the very same question could then be posed regarding *that* will, and so on, *ad infinitum*. He affirms: “where-ever one stops [in the regress], the Actions of the last Will cannot be free” (122).

Rejecting the infinite regress consequence in the first edition, Locke’s alternatives

are either that our preferences are the product of chance, or that they are necessitated. And if an initial preference was necessitated, then it must also have been involuntary. Given that, then it appears that all of our actions spring from what is initially outside of our control. Notice that as a consequence of the definitions of Locke's terms, this would not make all of the actions that were to follow involuntary or unfree; they could still be said to be in accord with, or contrary to our preference, and as a result they would be voluntary. But because freedom and volition have been defined by reference to preference, it would follow that preference itself is not something that could be properly said to be free. This may have been why Locke maintained that the notions of freedom and volition could not be applied to the will itself. Since voluntary acts and free acts are defined in terms of preference, preference itself cannot be voluntary or free without circularity.

Locke offers a justification for his view on empirical grounds. He argues that it is manifest in "every one's experience" that people don't have the power to change what it is that they prefer. We are "indifferent" to what it is that pleases us. He writes:

*... Volition or Willing...is nothing but the preferring the doing of any thing, to the not doing of it; Action to Rest, & contra. Well, but what is this Preferring? It is nothing but the being pleased more with the one, than the other. Is then a Man indifferent to be pleased, or not pleased, more with the one than the other? Is it in his choice, whether he will, or will not be better pleased with one thing than another? And to this, I think, every one's Experience is ready to make answer, No. (123)*

It follows as a matter of Locke's definitions that an individual's will aims at what they understand to be the good for them. Problems arise, Locke explains, because we are apt to choose a present happiness over a long-range happiness (126). "[W]hen we compare present Pleasure or Pain with future, we often make wrong Judgments



of them, taking our measures of them in different positions of distance” (127). The remedy is to look beyond this world and consider the happiness that will attend us in eternal life. Considering that “God the righteous Judge will render to every Man according to his Deeds” we would be wiser to look to the long-range happiness produced by genuinely good action” (ibid).

### Critical Reception by Locke’s Contemporaries

Locke’s first pass at the issue of free will was not well received by his contemporaries. Joseph Priestley wrote that Locke’s chapter was “remarkably confused.” He recognized the reason for this being that the *general maxims* were consistent with, and even implies the doctrine of necessity, which is inconsistent with liberty, which Locke attributes to man (Harris, 38). Famously, in a letter from Dublin, dated December 22, 1692, Molyneux remarked that Locke’s initial treatment of free will “seems so wonderfully fine spun...that at least the Great Question of Liberty and Necessity seems to Vanish.” Molyneux identified the problem of intellectualism, making man’s wrongs spring from faulty understanding, and thereby undermining moral responsibility. He wrote that the view,

seem[s] to make all Sins to proceed from our Understandings, or to be against Conscience, and not at all from the Depravity of our Wills. Now it seems harsh to say, that a Man shall be Damn’d, because he understands no better than he does. (Locke, 1978, 600-601)

This picture removed praiseworthiness and blameworthiness from human behaviour, and removed the moral dimension to acts of willing. Given these and other problems, Locke, too, was unhappy with his first pass and decided to rethink his account. His second pass would see Locke entrench more deeply into his empiricist leanings, focusing even more on what is true in one’s experience. This

entrenchment into the subjective would butt up even more strongly against the principles of the New Science.

### “Second Thoughts” (1694): Focus on Self-Observation

The second edition of the *Essay* came out in 1694, four years after the first edition. This version presents a longer, more complex view of volition. Locke made important changes to his view of mind that is at least partly, an attempt to deal with the critical reception of his first attempt. In this version there is a greater focus on accounting for the empirical evidence that, people as a matter of fact, often do not choose to act according to the good. This reaffirmation of the important role of empirical evidence—subjective though it is in this case—makes clearer Locke’s commitment to empiricist principles. Yet at the same time, Locke also reaffirms and makes stronger his commitment to the moral dimension of conscious human action. The struggle of making these two consistent comes out clearly in the text. The changes to the model of mind Locke presents include changes to the relationship between willing and preference, what motivates an agent, as well the *suspension* of the will.

Firstly, the definition of volition Locke offers in the second edition changes significantly. In the first edition will was identified with *preference*. In the revised edition, volition is defined as an *act* of the mind, “knowingly exerting that Dominion it takes it self to have over any part of the man by imploying it in, or withholding it from any particular Action” (128). The will is no longer *preference*, which would be akin to feeling, but instead it is an *act of the mind*. In the new conception the mind has the ability to direct both thought and preferences. Locke writes, “[T]he Mind...continues the Action or puts an end to it: Whereby it is manifest it orders and directs one in preference to, or neglect of the other, and thereby either the continuation, or change becomes unavoidably voluntary” (131). This change is significant because it works to remove the brute emotionality or impulsive nature of the will. The will is an act of the mind, where the mind is like a miniature agent that

makes choices and directs activity. Responsibility for action falls naturally out of this conception. Since this change in definition is stipulative, it doesn't require argument or justification, nor is any provided. This is just what Locke thinks in his "second thoughts." And yet this change has important consequences for his broader model of mind.

When the mind is modeled such that it directs preference, an important move away from the Hobbesian picture has taken place. On that model, feeling and thought work in tandem with one another to produce action: the thoughts conceive of possibilities while passion or feeling produces motivation and movement. Each of these elements is necessary for action, and neither is more significant than the other; they do not exist in a hierarchy of importance or leadership. But when the mind directs preference an important change in the role of feeling takes place. Feeling loses its former significance as the motivator for action. Consequently what we see in the 1694 version is additional changes to the account of motivation.

In the first edition, Locke affirms that it is the "Good" that determines the will: "*Good then, the greater Good is that alone which determines the Will*". But in the second edition, and under "stricter enquiry," Locke decides that, "*good, the greater good*" (135) is not what determines the will, until our desire is "raised proportionably to it, [and] makes us uneasie in the want of it". This is very likely the result of Locke's meditation on what experience shows. In fact, experience shows clearly that people don't actually often pursue the greatest good or act in accordance with it. In fact the "infinitely greatest confessed good [is] often neglected to satisfie the successive uneasiness of our desires pursuing trifles" (135). Locke's strategy here is to take the empirical phenomena as his starting point and work to explain and justify it. Since the good is also neglected because of the desire for something trifling, this requires a new role for desire in Locke's account.

In the first edition the will is moved by the desire for the good. But since action does not necessarily point at the good, it doesn't seem to make sense that a

privation—or something that is absent—could be motivational in the right sort of way. In the second edition therefore, it is not desire for the good that moves the will, but instead it is something present: the *uneasiness* of our desires. Locke’s thinking seems to be that a person is moved by some *thing*, as opposed to being moved by the absence of something. What’s more, the will cannot be identical with desire, because we know from experience that the will and desire often run counter; action runs one way, while desire may run the other way. This is a significant change that helps to clear the way for a justification for the restoration of blameworthiness and the moral dimension more generally. When it was the good that moved the will, people could only be blamed for not understanding what it is that the good consists in—and this is hardly ground for punishment. Such a person ought rather to be the recipient of education. But when it is the uneasiness of our own desires that determines the will, coupled with the claim that the mind directs preferences, then the groundwork has been laid for praise or blame to accrue to an agent based on how well one orders one’s preferences. And this in fact, is exactly what Locke argues for.

The third significant change Locke makes in the second edition is to claim that it is within a man’s power to change the pleasantness and unpleasantness of something by considering the consequences of that action. Agents are responsible for conditioning themselves such that they desire the right sorts of things, and feel uneasy about the right sorts of things by directing the mind accordingly. “Men may and should correct their palates” (149). We go against what our natural impulses are when it is in our best interest to do so. For example, thinking of the health and strength that will result in taking an “ill relish’d potion” moves us to take our medicine. The consideration of outcomes changes the way we feel about various actions. Locke argues that it is our responsibility, and we ought to take pains to rectify, the wrong ideas we have as a result of bad habits. Doing so helps us to take delight in it, and thereby create motivation, for something we would otherwise rather not do. In other words, by considering the end of any given action, with use and practice, we may come to feel differently about it. Locke writes, “Habits have powerful charms, and put to strong attractions of easiness and pleasure into what we

accustom our selves to, that we cannot forbear to do” (149). In other words, by considering *long-range* outcomes versus *short-range* outcomes, man can choose a better action.

This claim seems to imply an ability to intervene on action that has all the requisite antecedent causes behind it. And indeed, this is what Locke has in mind. He writes that the mind has a “power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires.” This is a significant departure from Locke’s original straightforwardly determinist position, whereby antecedent causes are sufficient for action. But without changing any of his previous statements about his commitment to New Science principles that are at the heart of his determinism, he simply affirms that ability to suspend the will. Because of the significance of this claim, it is worthwhile to quote Locke in full on this point:

For the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires; and so all one after another is at liberty to consider the objects in them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty Man has; and from the not using of it right comes all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults, we run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness; whilst we precipitate the determination of our *wills*, and engage too soon before due Examination. To prevent this we have a power to suspend the prosecution of this or that desire, as every one daily may Experiment in himself...For during this suspension of any desire, before the *will* be determined to action, and the action (which follow that determination) done, we have the opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; and when, upon due Examination, we have judg’d, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do. (141)

Locke affirms that it is the great privilege of finite intellectual beings that we can suspend desires and stop ourselves from determining our wills to any action until we have had the opportunity to examine the “good and evil of it” (143). What this means is that agents are responsible for considering outcomes, and for ordering themselves accordingly. We mistakenly judge what is in our long-range interest because of what Locke calls “*the weak and narrow Constitution of our Minds*” (147).<sup>15</sup>

By reverse-engineering these changes in his text, it is clear that they are designed at least in part, to account for the phenomenon of people making poor choices. Crucially for my themes, Locke takes this as *empirical* data and creates a place for it in his larger view. But the changes also serve to affirm the moral dimension, and to justify punishment and blame. Locke doesn’t simply account for the phenomenon of poor choices—he also makes significant changes to the structure of mind such that action arises as it does. Without making changes to the New Science framework within which he works, Locke simply affirms that the agent has the ability to suspend the will—something that should not be possible on a deterministic view. Yet he gives no indication that he has abandoned the determinism that is part and parcel of his corpuscularian mechanism. Affirming that individuals can suspend their will, and that they can and should correct their palettes or condition themselves to want the right sorts of things, lends itself to a libertarian view of volition.

### New Problems

The changes in the second edition created problems of interpretation, but they also created additional problems. More specifically, these are the problems of intellectualism, not being explanatory, methodological problems, and theoretical problems. I’ll take each of these in turn.

---

<sup>15</sup> Of course, the charge of intellectualism raises its head again here. If our minds are weak, can we be blamed for that? If an agent fails to properly understand what is in his or her interest and thereby to act accordingly, they ought to be the recipient of education, not punishment.

In response to the first edition, Molyneux for one, identified the problem of intellectualism. By making wrong action spring from failures of the understanding it becomes unjust to punish wrong action. In the second edition, Locke runs into this problem in a different way. By putting the mind or the understanding in the position of guiding and directing the preferences and the will, it is the intellect that is ultimately responsible for action. The problem is that if the *understanding* is responsible for right action, then failure to act rightly represents a failure of the understanding, and failures of understanding are not the kind of failures that warrant punishment. Instead, they warrant compassion, education, and/or rehabilitation. By putting the mind in the position of guide, Locke falls back into the problem of intellectualism.

The second problem is that Locke's account is not explanatory in the appropriate way. Even if we accept that the mind can suspend or interrupt the will, Locke doesn't provide any explanation as to *how* this can be so. Within Locke's explanatory framework, what is required is an account of *by what mechanism* this might take place. And given Locke's acceptance of the corpuscular theory, there is an especially important need to say something about how the antecedent causes that give rise to feelings and thoughts might be interrupted in a way that is consistent with that theory. And yet, Locke provides no guidance on this matter. His account lacks appropriate explanatory accountability.

In addition to falling back into intellectualism, and not being explanatory, there is also a theoretical problem internal to this account. In particular, when Locke separates the passions or feelings from the understanding to allow the understanding the right kind of dominion over the person, his account of action falls apart. Like Hobbes, Locke thinks that passion is necessary for action, because it is motivational, while reason is, in itself, inert. In separating passion and understanding there is no longer any explanation as to how action *can* arise. Without passion to create

movement, it isn't clear how it works together with thought to create action. It is unclear how or why passion should be involved at all.

Finally, the account suffers from a methodological problem. The issue is this: it's difficult to understand how observation of the behaviour of the mind *could* provide evidence for a *non-deterministic* conception of willing. In other words, no matter what is observed in the mind, it is difficult to see what could, in principle, constitute evidence that the mind's behaviour is not necessitated. The issue of the necessity of behaviour or action is justified on extra-empirical grounds, so to speak. It is a consequence of one's theoretical commitments that have been made prior to internal observation. Observation cannot provide evidence of a deterministic, or a non-deterministic universe. There is nothing in the phenomena that could be sufficient to warrant changing from a view that the will is determined to a view that it is free in the libertarian sense. Even if there was something that could provide this evidence in principle, Locke does not offer any such evidence.

Whether or not Locke was aware of all of the difficulties, it's clear that he remained unsatisfied with his own account. He continued to rework the text up until the time of his death, revising it in a third, fourth, and fifth edition. The changes are relatively minor in the third and fourth editions, and so I skip over those here and move directly to the fifth edition. In this posthumously published edition, Locke entrenches his empiricism focusing even more on what self-observation shows. He also asserts even more strongly the responsibility that an agent has in acting rightly.

### Fifth Edition Revisions (1706)

In the fifth edition, Locke again changes what it is that determines the will. This time, the will is determined by *desire*, and is *guided by judgment*. In addition to this, Locke makes even more explicit his view that agents have the ability to suspend the determination of choice. It is as though Locke is making theoretical space for contemplation as a wedge into what would otherwise be determined. Because of the



significance of this passage, and because of its openness to interpretation, I quote it here in full:

But yet there is a case wherein a Man is at Liberty in respect of *Willing*, and that is the chusing of a remote Good as an end to be pursued. Here a Man may suspend the act of his choice from being determined for or against the thing proposed, 'till he has examined, whether it be really of a nature in its self, and consequences to make him happy or no. For when he has once chosen it, and thereby it is become a part of his Happiness, it raises desire, and that proportionably gives him *uneasiness*, which determines his *Will*, and sets him at work in pursuit of his choice on all occasions that offer. (Locke, 270)<sup>16</sup>

The passage suggests that an agent can knowingly choose to condition his or her own desires through contemplation, and thereby causes their will to be determined to provide more considered, long-range happiness. Once again, it seems plausible that this is something that Locke finds when he looks to his experience. So his empiricism, in one sense of that term, is playing a part. But this change brings along with it some important theoretical consequences that don't sit well with his commitment to the New Science.

Firstly, the question arises why and how the ability to suspend should be possible only in certain cases? To be more accurate, only in *a* particular case? It is as though the freedom to suspend volitional determinism is meant to apply in the case where a person really wants to gain a long-term benefit, even if that means suffering or pain in the short term. And on a certain view of the phenomenon of choosing, this makes sense. It *does* seem as though people sometimes act on impulse, even though it is not to their benefit. At the same time, there are many cases where individuals delay gratification, and don't indulge their impulses. But hasn't Locke gone too far in

---

<sup>16</sup> Fifth edition revisions are found in the Nidditch edition.

accommodating the phenomenon here? This exception appears *ad hoc*, out of line with most of the rest of his view, and without any theoretical explanation or justification.

There are several other places where Locke makes changes to his wording to reflect the ability of individuals to suspend short-term gratification. For example, in earlier versions the text read, “This then is evident, *A Man is not at liberty to will, or not to will any thing in his power, that he once considers of*: Liberty consisting in a power to act, or not to act, and in that only.” In the fifth edition the same section reads,

This then is evident, That in all proposals of present Action, *a Man is not at liberty to will, or not to will, because he [can] forbear willing*: Liberty consisting in a power to act, or to forbear acting, and in that only. (246)

The change indicates a shift in emphasis to proposals of *present* action. Once again, Locke is making a new distinction between the kind of choice a person makes that requires action in the present moment, and the kind of choice that allows for time spent in contemplation of outcomes. Re-establishing the moral dimension of volition may have been the very purpose behind this change. In support of this interpretation, Locke alludes to the ways in which a person may “justly incur punishment.” Locke acknowledges that a man wills what he thinks is the best action, and that action is judged to be good by the understanding. And yet, this doesn’t excuse a man, because in choosing poorly, he conditions himself to be more likely to make a similar poor choice in the future. He has thereby “vitiating his own palate.” It is as though there is desire that creates various impulses to action on the one hand, and on the other hand, there is judgment that takes a look at those options and chooses wisely, after careful consideration. The more poor choices are made, the more likely they will be made in the future, because we become conditioned from past experience. Just in the way that a bad habit is easier to stick with than to change, and a good habit is easier to stick with through practice, aiming at the good

is the agent's moral responsibility because of the fact that we can think and choose accordingly. That is to say, we have freedom of choice in the libertarian sense. And this is why we can, and ought to be blamed, and punished, for bad actions. Since one has the power to, "suspend his determination" in order that he might take care of his happiness and make choices that lead to happiness, punishment is just:

And here we may see how it comes to pass, that a Man may justly incur punishment, though it be certain that in all the particular actions that he *wills*, he does, and necessarily does will that which he then judges to be good. For though his *will* be always determined by that which is judg'd good by his Understanding, yet it excuses him not: Because, by a too hasty choice of his own making, he has imposed on himself wrong measures of good and evil; which however false and fallacious, have the same influence on all his future conduct as if they were true and right. He has vitiated his own Palate, and must be answerable to himself for the sickness and death that follows from it...He had a Power to suspend his determination: It was given him, that he might examine, and take care of his own Happiness, and look that he were not deceived. And he could never judge, that it was better to be deceived, than not in a matter of so great and near concernment. (270-271)

Close to the conclusion of the chapter, Locke writes that not only is there *a case* in which a man may suspend his choice, but even further, that he has the ability to suspend the satisfaction of *any* particular desire. Locke thinks that the will can be suspended from any action until the good that might come out of it has been "maturely" examined. Locke affirms that if we were determined by anything other than desire guided by judgment, we would not be free. "The result of our judgment upon that Examination, is what ultimately determines the Man, who could not be *free*, if his *will* were determin'd by any thing, but his own *desire* guided by his own

*Judgment*” (283). This appears to be full blown libertarian conception of free will. This is a *complete reversal* of Locke’s original view.

## Problems & Inconsistencies

Over the course of the revisions to *Of Power* a number of internal inconsistencies and problems arise. One of the most glaring inconsistencies is Locke’s adherence to both the corpuscular mechanistic framework that is married to a deterministic world picture, and a libertarian sense of freedom. Locke doesn’t make any clear attempt to modify his commitment to the former. Neither does he acknowledge the inconsistency. This makes it unclear and open to interpretation whether he is in fact, a determinist *or* a libertarian. One might think that given his apparent adherence to both views, the best interpretation is that Locke is a compatibilist. But this doesn’t follow. Recall that compatibilism is the view that determinism is *compatible* with moral responsibility. Locke never argues for this. What’s more, his view doesn’t amount to that claim—on Locke’s view moral responsibility derives from the fact that the individual *can* suspend the act of choice.

Another problem that remains from the second edition through the fifth is that the charge of intellectualism *still stands*. If desire is to be guided by judgment, then it is the understanding that is at fault for not correcting desire, and guiding it appropriately. What’s more, the question also arises as to whether judgment is itself determined. If so, then we still do not have the freedom requisite to dole out just punishment. And if not, then our failures of judgment are failures of the intellect, not moral ones. If we fail to understand *what* is the good, then we ought to be the objects of pity and compassion, not blame and retribution. *Judgment* functions normatively in Locke’s account. But how the normative dimension enters into the account in a way that leaves judgment neither completely intellectual, and thereby inert, nor completely emotional, and thereby beyond the agent’s control, is not at all clear.

Finally, there is the problem of accounting for action. If the intellectual, judging, part of the mind can intervene on impulses, then the motivational part of volition is suspended, and cannot do its work. Providing the understanding with the ability to intervene on the passions removes the important role that passions are meant to have as motivators for action. If agents are not *moved* by pleasures or uneasiness, then it's not clear how they are moved at all.

## Critical Reception of Later Editions

### From Locke's Contemporaries

Since Locke's time, commentators have spilled much ink attempting to find Locke's "final position" on liberty and volition. The inconsistent text provides evidence that supports the interpretation of Locke as a hard determinist, a libertarian and a compatibilist, although these positions are mutually exclusive. Harris recites some interpretations of Locke's contemporaries. Anthony Collins interprets Locke as supporting Hobbesian necessitarianism on the grounds that the essence of freedom, for Locke, is liberty from outward impediments, and not liberty from necessity (Harris, 36). Supporting this is the fact that Locke expresses the absurdity in the question as to whether we are free in our choices. For Collins, Locke simply confuses things by talking about the power of suspension. Jonathan Edwards and Joseph Priestley also consider Locke a necessitarian who unnecessarily created confusion in his later attempts to accommodate elements of libertarianism (38). Joseph Berington and James Gregory argue that Locke was a libertarian. A libertarian reading is encouraged by the fact that the doctrine of suspension implies the power of self-determination (39).

Just as Locke's contemporaries argued that he belonged to one or another camp, many modern interpretations of Locke argue in this manner also. Such arguments often include the proviso that while Locke did hold such and such a position he did so not in the "usual" way.

## A Libertarian Interpretation

Chappell (1994) argues that Locke is a certain kind of libertarian, on the grounds that Locke believes in “human freedom” (101). For Chappell, Locke’s conception of freedom is different from many libertarian philosophers because Locke argues that all actions have causes, including free ones. Despite the fact that Locke argues at times that free action is impossible, he agrees with the usual libertarian that free actions depend on volitions (86). Chappell concludes that Locke’s “final position” is that the idea of suspension is incompatible with volitional determinism. Since there is suspension, then volitional determinism must be false. Indeed, there are free volitions—occasions where a man is free with respect to his willing (103). Chappell deals with the inconsistencies in Locke’s text by claiming that Locke simply “did not make all the adjustments that a full change of view would have called for” (87). Despite arguing for a libertarian Locke, Chappell concludes, “Nothing that I have said in this chapter, however, should be taken to imply that...I even understand the general theory of will and volition that underlies Locke’s view of freedom” (104).

This is, in my view, a good reason for dismissing this interpretation. But another reason is that, given the extensive time and attention that Locke clearly spent in revising this work, it is strange to suggest that he simply failed to make all the necessary revisions to clean up the Hobbesian sections. If Locke really did change his view wholesale, *and* he bothered to make extensive revisions to the text, it is mysterious why he would not indicate that in his revisions, which he clearly spent much time and attention on.

## A Compatibilist Interpretation

Prolific Locke scholar, Gideon Yaffe (2000) argues for a compatibilist Locke. This is on the grounds that it is “possible for Locke” to arrange the connection between our choices and the good even if man is “under necessity” (373). Yaffe admits that there is an interpretive problem of how to reconcile the “seeming Hobbesianisms” of

the first thirty sections of the chapter together with the “seeming incompatibilism” of the later sections of the chapter (387). Yaffe deals with the inconsistencies by arguing for a “philosophically radical” conclusion. He argues that, “when we talk about free will...we are not talking about an ability to choose or refrain from choice” (373). He writes,

When we use the term ‘free will’ the word ‘free’ doesn’t mean what we naturally think it means. This doesn’t tell us what we really mean by the term, but it does open the door to a particular strategy for answering the question: perhaps a proper account of freedom of will tells us what we need to be like if we are to exemplify the ideal of agency after which we strive. (387)

Yaffe’s interpretation also faces some important problems. The first is that his view is, as Chappell rightly puts it, “sometimes so intricate and subtle as to be hard to follow” (Chappell, 422). It also seems strained, and incompatible with what Locke says in his text. Locke never says that there is something more to genuine free agency than freedom of action. On the other hand, in one passage, Locke seems to say that this is all the freedom that there is (Chappell 423). Even if such an interpretation could be defended, it still doesn’t answer the question as to what it is, for Locke, that confers upon human action what Yaffe calls “the Elusive Something” that makes out the difference between action that is fully morally accountable and that which is not (Lowe 2005, 130). Another problem is that nowhere does Locke make an explicit argument to the effect that he understands freedom to be compatible with necessitarianism. Neither does Locke make any argument *against* Hobbesian necessity, nor does he make a case for its *incompatibility* with freedom and moral responsibility (Harris 2007, 20-21). In other words, Locke *never argues for compatibilism*.

Given that Locke’s initial formulation reads as straightforwardly determinist, and there is no reason to think that Locke gave up on the view of the workings of the

universe that leads to determinism, one might think that his apparent defense of freedom in later editions *amounts* to compatibilism. Given that Locke seems to argue *both* for a universe comprised of tiny particles operating according to universal laws, *and* for freedom of choice, compatibilism seems like a natural interpretation. But what's missing is an account of *how* both can be true. Harris (2007) emphasizes there is no indication as to how experience might be made consistent with the mechanistic worldview. Unlike Locke, for example, Hume does provide such an explanation in his compatibilist account of volition.

### Real Tensions

There are some real and important tensions underlying Locke's position on liberty and volition that are the result of the constellation of unit-ideas of the New Science and empiricism, as they are deployed to explain a libertarian sense of free volition. There are three broad tensions that I discuss here. The first is the tension between the New Science view that the natural world is *passive*, and Locke's formulation of volition as being a *power*. The second is the tension between the New Science tenet that efficient causation is necessary and *sufficient* for explanation, combined with Locke's appeal to final causes for at least some human behaviour. And the third is between Locke's adherence to the mechanical world picture and the priority and importance that he gives to the *experience* of freedom and suspension. Without an adequate explanation of how content gets into this framework, the experiential aspect of Locke's empiricism appears to be smuggled in.<sup>17</sup> This is a tension between New Science and Locke's empiricism.

---

<sup>17</sup> To see this clearly, contrast this view with Descartes'. The experiential or phenomenal aspects of experience need not be derived from the mechanical picture for Descartes, since mind is made of a different kind of stuff than the natural world. Descartes runs into the problem of interaction—explaining how the material and immaterial worlds interact. But this is a different problem from explaining how subjectivity fits into a mechanical picture.



It is a tenet of the New Science that the natural world is entirely passive. In contrast to the Aristotelian view, motion or change is not an actualization of some power in the substance itself—there is a global elimination of powers from all natural substances according to the New Science. There is a mechanization of the world picture. Explanations of macro-level properties are explained in terms of particles operating according to universal laws. These laws are deterministic. Efficient causation is necessary and sufficient for explanations—appeal to final causes is eschewed. Having been reminded of this, it begins to get clearer in what ways this conflicts with Locke’s libertarian leanings. In his formulation of mind, Locke defines volition as a *power*. Recall that this was at the heart of his initial rejection of the idea of free will in the first edition. Locke argued that powers don’t have powers—agents do. So in construing volition having power, Locke is either stepping away from a consistent view of the natural world as *passive*, or he is setting at least some aspects of mind apart from the natural world. Neither of these is consistent with the idea that the mind is part of the natural world, and that the natural world is passive.

Secondly, while efficient causation is supposed to be both necessary and sufficient for explanations of the natural world, Locke appeals to a final cause in his explanation of volition. Locke affirms, for example, that the will is determined by *the good*. We could interpret him as saying that agents act as they do, that volition acts in the manner in which it does, *because* they aim at the good. True enough, Locke abandons this view in the fifth edition. In the fifth edition Locke argues that agents choose as they do to avoid some uneasiness or desires. But this is just as suggestive of final causation as is the good. The final cause is the end, or the sake for which a thing is done. For example, the end of walking might be losing weight. Just so, the end of free will is to relieve the uneasiness of desires. In this case, the result of the relief of uneasiness is not just a coincidence—it is the sake for which the action is done. Contrast this with the kind of explanation offered in terms of efficient causation: the cause of behaviour is the movement of particles. Final causes refer to teleological explanations, which make reference to the *telos* or the end of a

process. Locke's later position appears to be a psychological teleological model. In other words, this move represents the psychologizing of at least some aspect of the natural world. The virtue of appealing to final causes is that they explain the regularity of the connection between phenomena. Why does human action regularly take place the way that it does? This is because of the urge to avoid uneasiness. The final cause enters into the explanation as something that is *good* for the person—the person is better off for it<sup>18</sup>.

It is understandable why Locke appeals to the desire to be relieved of uneasiness. We need only look to the reasons he provides, namely that it is manifest that this is so, from *experience*. As mentioned, the later evolutions of Chapter 13 rely increasingly on fidelity to what Locke observes about internal experience. Harris (2007) rightly focuses on the emphasis of the role of experimental philosophy Locke's revisions. Harris reminds us that Locke is interested in more than the *concept* of freedom, but that he also intends to be true to the *experience* of freedom. Locke seeks to be true to the experience of what choice making and deliberation are actually like (20). Harris sees Locke's changes as designed to capture the "phenomenology" of freedom that seems to disappear in his first edition (27). Harris sees Locke as self-consciously turning away from metaphysical issues (derived from the New Science), and *toward* an accurate account of the experience of freedom (41). Locke's desire to be true to the experience of choosing—which is an expression of his empiricism—butts up against the mechanical world picture that he also endorses. Taking seriously the internal experience of freedom and treating it unproblematically—in other words, taking it as what it *seems*—creates a real tension with the other theoretical commitments Locke has. One might maintain consistency by claiming that the experiences of freedom and of "suspension" are illusory, but this is not the option Locke takes.

---

18 At least, what the person takes to be good motivates their action.

## The Trouble With the Search for a “Final Position”

While I understand and sympathize with the search for a “final position” for Locke on liberty and volition, I think it is wrongheaded. Firstly, because the text just *is* inconsistent, it legitimately admits of more than one interpretation. Each interpretation, though supported by evidence, also suffers from serious problems given inconsistent remarks from Locke. It can’t be decisive, therefore, to point to evidence supporting one or another interpretation. What is needed is an argument that one interpretation or another is supported by the text *exclusively*, or that there are countervailing reasons for rejecting alternate interpretations. The claim that Locke simply didn’t bother to make his revisions in later editions invites a view of Locke as lazy and undisciplined—a strange view given how much time, attention, and effort he clearly put into revising “Of Power.” What’s more, it is possible that Locke did not make the adjustments necessary to make his text consistent for the reason that he did not give up his commitment to those parts of his view that would have called for adjusting.

For Locke to give up the Hobbesian portions of his work, Locke would have been giving up on something that was apparently very important and fundamental to his system. The view of the universe as passive, lawful, mechanistic, and deterministic as articulated by the New Science was something held by almost all significant thinkers of the Modern period, and Locke particularly. It’s not that the New Science is incompatible with libertarianism. After all, Descartes adhered to the New Science, and held a libertarian view of volition. But this option was available to Descartes as a dualist—it is only the *material* world that operates according to the principles of the New Science. That which is immaterial operates differently. And as a rationalist, Descartes could avail himself of the intervention of rationality on impulse. In a rationalist’s model like Descartes’, reason is higher than the bodily, animalistic side of the human being, and it is *meant* to intervene on that side. But for the empiricist, knowledge, and thus reason, is intimately tied to the body. Since there is no knowledge without sense experience, the entire internal system of the

human being rests on a foundation of a kind of trust in the body. This makes it very difficult to consistently and plausibly make the case for a view of volition that intervenes on impulses. The first question for the empiricist who claims this is: why should one part of the mind intervene on another? The second is: *how* could such a thing happen?

What the textual evidence makes clear, I think, is the fact that Locke remained troubled by the issues of free will until the time of his death. His posthumously published revisions reflect that he moved *even further* from the position he took in the first edition. Each time he published revisions, Locke continued to struggle, making Chapter 13 longer and longer. For Locke to have had a “final” position implies that the matter was settled for him. It also seems to imply a *consistent* position—or at least one position that uniquely fits the text and excludes other possible positions. But there is no reason to think that this is so. The text admits of multiple possible positions, and this is evidence of the fact that Locke remained *unsettled*. Rather than give up on theoretical commitments that were clearly important to him and fail to indicate that, what’s more likely is that Locke *did* hold both positions. In other words, Locke was both an adherent to the New Science and Empiricism, *and* he believed in justly punishing those who acted badly. It doesn’t follow from that that Locke was a compatibilist. He certainly didn’t argue *for* a compatibilist position or gesture consciously that this was his aim. What follows from this was that he did not immediately see how to make these two go together.

It’s not that Locke was entirely unconscious of the inconsistency—on the contrary, it appears that he was working hard to perfect his views on liberty and volition. It often happens in human psychology that disparate views are held simultaneously. Reasoning through how to create consistency, or else drop one of the views, is a process that takes time. So, the fact that these two don’t seem to go together is not evidence that he didn’t hold both of them. It is entirely plausible that he held inconsistent views. It appears that Locke was looking for a way to theorize how

both *could* be true, but thought that he just hadn't articulated that yet. It is inconsistency that is the impetus for belief revision, belief merging, and negotiation.

What the search for a final position reflects is a kind of philosophical bias toward completion, decidability, and consistency. The demand for theoretical consistency is only appropriate insofar as the theory is accurate—this is to say that if the universe cannot be theorized within the confines of a consistent model, then inconsistency is appropriate. The universe may not lend itself to description within one consistent scheme. Empirical science teaches us, perhaps, that there is a fundamental inconsistency in the features of the world (Cartwright, 2006). If this is indeed what the empirical data show, then we might conclude that the world itself is inconsistent. We might also conclude that an empiricist approach will not provide the kind of theory that we desire, or that the combination of New Science and empiricism produced the tensions in Locke's account.

## Conclusion

Given the realness of the tensions among the New Science, empiricism, and volition, we ought not condemn Locke for changing his mind and being inconsistent. And given the real tensions among the different versions of Locke's text, each interpretation of a standard position requires selectively ignoring other important elements. It is fairly standard in a certain approach to philosophy to think of consistency as an overriding virtue. But consistency for its own sake surely ought not be considered this way. It's important to remember what we want consistency *for*, as well as to remember the virtues of *in*consistency. We ought not try to salvage Locke's reputation by forcing him into one position or another. The difficulty of interpretation arises from the fact that the text allows for multiple interpretations. It is, in effect, "undecidable" because support can be found for a number of positions. What we ought to do in this case is concede that there is no settled, consistent, well-defined position. What's important from my HIP perspective is not what Locke the man thought, understood as his psychology.

Instead, what is important is what follows from the ideas that are in his text, how they work, or don't work in combination with one another. Just as much, if not more value might be had by understanding tensions and problems as might be had from over-emphasizing consistency. For example, Hobbes' work on volition is remarkably consistent—and yet it leaves the image of the human being as a clockwork entity. It leaves out some important elements that are important to not only our conception of us, but also to making sense of our behaviour. True, we might affirm that freedom of choice is a kind of illusion, and thereby also affirm that the moral dimension is a kind of illusion. But we would still be left in need of an explanation as to how such an illusion could be possible.<sup>19</sup>

I suggest that we ought to appreciate the fact that Locke was willing to work out his ideas publicly, making clear and exposing the problems inherent to that particular constellation of ideas. From the vantage point of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it may appear obvious that these notions don't go together. It is at least partly because of the work that Locke and others like him did, that this may appear obvious. Certainly what was entailed by the mechanistic worldview was not obvious during the time in which Locke wrote. Newton, for example, had argued against advancing mechanistic *explanations*, although he did adhere for the most part, to the tenets of the New Science. How exactly to apply the New Science to philosophical problems was an open question. There is a great deal of value in witnessing how problems are created and arise, not just in coming up with a resolution (which are also, almost without fail, subject to their own corresponding objections and problems). Locke ought to be considered an intellectual hero for his drive to resolve the problem, and to "show his work" publicly.

---

<sup>19</sup> We might affirm an empiricist standard of semantics, and claim as Hume does, that such talk is meaningless, and thus needs no explanation. But there are countervailing reasons why this might not be an attractive option over all. There are, after all, few empiricists as extreme as Hume for good reason.

## Works Cited

- Atherton, Margaret. "Corpuscles, Mechanism, and Essentialism in Locke," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29 (1991): 33.
- Bramhall, John. "Selections From Bramhall, A Defense of True Liberty," *Hobbes and Bramhall: On Liberty and Necessity*. Ed. Vere Chappell. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Print.
- Chappell, Vere. "Liberty Worth the Name: Locke on Free Agency by Gideon Yaffe" (Review). *Mind*, 113.450, 2004. 420-424.
- . "Locke on Freedom of the Will." *Locke*. Ed. Vere Chappell, Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.
- . "Locke on the Freedom of the Will." *Locke's Philosophy: Content and Context*. Ed. G.A.J. Rogers. Clarendon Press, 1994. Print.
- Downing, Lisa. "The Status of Mechanism in Locke's *Essay*." *The Philosophical Review*, 107.3 (July 1998), 381-414.
- Garrett, Don. "Liberty and Suspension in Locke's Theory of the Will," *A Companion to Locke*, Ed. Matthew Stuart. Wiley-Blackwell, 2016. 260-178. Print.
- Harris, James. *Of Liberty and Necessity*. Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Lennon, Tom. *The Battle of The Gods and Giants*. Princeton University Press, 1993. Print.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1<sup>st</sup> edition), London, 1690. Early English Books Online. Web, 2014.
- . (2nd edition) London, 1694. Early English Books Online. Web, 2014.
- . (5th edition) Ed. Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. Print.
- . *The Correspondence of John Locke, vol. 4*. (Ed.) E.S. De Beer. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978. Print.
- Lowe, E.J. *Locke*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Rogers, G. A. J. "Boyle, Locke, and Reason." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27. 2 (April – June, 1966), pp. 205-216.
- . *Locke's Philosophy: Content and Context*. Oxford University Press, 1994. Print.
- Salter, Alan, and Wolfe, Charles T. "Empiricism contra Experiment: Harvey, Locke

and the Revisionist View of Experimental Philosophy.” *Bull. Hist. Epistem. Sci. Vie*, 2009, 16.2, 113-140.

Yaffe, Gideon. “Locke on Refraining, Suspending, and the Freedom to Will.”

*History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Oct. 2001, 18.4, 373-91.

---. *Liberty Worth the Name: Locke on Free Agency*. Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.



## Chapter Four

### Hume the Metaphysician? A Response to Buckle

*We are to admit not more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances ~ Isaac Newton*

#### Introduction

In the previous two chapters, the works of both Hobbes and Locke have served as examples of the range of possible constellations of empiricism and the New Science available to a philosopher in the Modern period, as they attempt to explain aspects of mind. In the second chapter we saw the surprisingly strong model of mind that Hobbes produced out of austere conceptual resources. These resources were constrained by Hobbes' doctrine that everything which is in the mind was first in the senses, coupled with the constraints imposed by the New Science, particularly the view that mind be explained with the properties that were attributed to the natural world. In the third chapter, we saw that Locke's subsequent attempt to explain a libertarian kind of volition within the confines of the properties of the natural world created important problems. These problems are particular to the empiricist, who opts to explain phenomena fundamentally by reference to sensation and sensory experience. What these examples show is how some aspects of mind can be explained within the space allowed by these conceptual constraints, and how the conceptual tools afforded by empiricism and the New Science work together to produce a certain kind of view. Like any framework however, there are problems that arise as well. The adequacy of the framework and conceptual tools depends in part on the particular way that they are deployed. The *kind* of empiricism, and the degree of it are important factors in developing a relatively stable and plausible model of mind. So too, as we will see in the present paper, are the parts of the New Science that a thinker takes on, and which ones are left out. Understanding this is important for correctly identifying the sources of tension within a system or model of mind. Without having this understanding, it becomes possible to get our lines

crossed about which theoretical commitment is the source of a particular problem that appears on the surface of the model.

In this paper I expose just this kind of mistake. More particularly, I look at Stephen Buckle's recent misinterpretation of Hume on volition. Based on the striking resemblance Hume's account of volition bears to Hobbes', Buckle argues that Hume's view is implicitly materialist. Here I show that it is not any implicitly shared materialism between Hume and Hobbes that accounts for their similar views of volition. Instead, what accounts for the similarity is the similar constellation of ideas that combine in each thinker's commitment to both empiricism and the New Science. Given that Hume's refrain is that he is not engaged in metaphysics, all other things being equal, the interpretation that respects those assertions is the better one. What Buckle's mistake illustrates and emphasizes is how important the analysis of unit-ideas is to accurately understanding and interpreting the relationships among empiricism, New Science, and aspects of mind.

The game plan for this chapter is as follows. First, I provide an overview of Hobbes' account of volition as it is grounded in his understanding of both empiricism and the New Science. Following that, I provide exegesis on Hume's version of both empiricism and the New Science, paying particular attention to how it is similar to, though distinct from, Hobbes'. Finally, I analyze Buckle's case. I argue that while he gets both Hume and Hobbes mostly right on volition, it is his failure to recognize and appreciate the way that the constellation of concepts is involved in both empiricism and the New Science that produces the broad similarity between Hume and Hobbes, while at the same time the small but relevant differences and nuances between them account for their differing metaphysical positions.

## Reminder: POH and HIP

Before getting to that, I wish to remind my reader one last time of my historiographical approach. Once again, my approach to historical philosophy is *not* the approach that I have termed philosophically oriented history (POH). In POH, the focus is more heavily on the impact and influence of the historical context in order to understand and reconstruct what a thinker might have thought, and why. I opt instead for the approach I have called historically informed philosophy (HIP). With this approach my focus lies more heavily on analysis of the concepts at play within a given system. I recognize and respect the importance of historical context on adequately analyzing historical work, and this dimension comes to the fore more strongly in this paper than it does in the other two, because understanding how Hume conceived of, and implemented, changes in the New Science, depends on historical circumstances. On balance, however, my approach is to focus more squarely on the role and evolution of unit-ideas than it is to focus on the way elements of texture from the time period bear on what was said.

## Hobbes' Empiricist Account of Mind & Volition

It is helpful in understanding Hobbes' account of volition that it be examined within the context of his general economy of the mind. There are three broad concepts that act as tools and constraints giving shape to Hobbes' picture of mind, and thereby, of volition: materialism, empiricism, and the New Science. From within this framework, a model of mind emerges that exhibits telltale features that are shared with other Modern empiricist, New Scientist accounts.

Recall that Hobbes believes that everything is matter in motion. For Hobbes, the particles out of which everything is comprised behave according to deterministic and universal laws of nature. Hobbes' commitment to materialism is an expression of a metaphysical commitment that is logically separate, though consistent with, his commitment to empiricism. Hobbes' materialism gels cleanly with his commitment

to the New Science. He affirms that motion operates in a mechanical fashion based on contact, and this is consistent with the empiricist orientation *toward* the senses as the source of knowledge.

Hobbes' empiricism is expressed in his foundational belief that everything that is in the mind was first in the senses. Unlike Descartes, Hobbes orients himself *toward* sensory experience as a source for, and foundation of a theory of knowledge. Because the sensory is fundamental for knowledge for Hobbes, the sensory organs and by extension the body, are directly implicated in the development of knowledge. This contrasts sharply with the rationalist orientation *away from* the senses as a source and foundation for a theory of knowledge. This difference can be seen very clearly by looking at Descartes as a relevant foil to the empiricist position. Descartes is "struck by the large number of falsehoods" he had accepted as true based on data from the senses; "I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once" (Descartes, 12). The distrust Descartes feels toward the senses as a foundation for knowledge motivates him, according to his *Meditations*, to look for another source and foundation for knowledge. In search of this, he orients himself inward, asking himself if there is anything in his experience that cannot be doubted. This method of "radical doubt" is a step in Descartes' search for knowledge in the ability to grasp truths through the understanding:

I now know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being understood; and in view of this I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else. (22)

Because of his initial move away from the body to establish knowledge, Descartes must eventually re-establish the connection between the “internal” and the “external” worlds in a different way.

This difference in orientation toward the senses between Hobbes and Descartes deeply impacts the way each explains the relationship between mind and body, or corporeality. Descartes affirms a strong distinction between mind and body on the grounds that such a distinction can be “clearly and distinctly” perceived by the mind. In other words, he appeals to what *can be thought* to ground his account of the relationship between mind and body. Because it is the mind’s powers that ground knowledge, what the mind can clearly and distinctly perceive can be trusted. But because Hobbes orients himself toward sensation as the foundation for knowledge, this appeal to what can be “clearly and distinctly perceived” by the mind is not justifiable, from his perspective. This important difference about what one can appeal to in order to justify a knowledge claim comes out in Hobbes’ Fourth Objection to Descartes’ *Meditations on the nature of the human mind*. In this objection, Hobbes again takes issue with Descartes on the matter of his distinction between mind and body. Descartes had presented the argument that, because he has a clear and distinct idea of the mind, and a clear and distinct idea of the body, it follows that the two are distinct. This is because anything that can be clearly and distinctly conceived of, God can create. Hobbes writes,

There is a great difference between imagining, that is, having an idea, and conceiving in the mind, that is, using a process of reasoning to infer that something is, or exists. But M. Descartes has not explained how they differ...Now, what shall we say if it turns out that reasoning is simply the joining together and linking of names or labels by means of the verb ‘is’? It would follow that the inferences in our reasoning tell us nothing at all about the nature of things, but merely tell us about the labels applied to them; that is, all we can infer is whether or not we are combining the names of things

in accordance with the arbitrary conventions which we have laid down in respect of their meaning. If this is so, as may well be the case, reasoning will depend on names, names will depend on the imagination, and imagination will depend (as I believe it does) merely on the motions of our bodily organs; and so the mind will be nothing more than motion occurring in various parts of an organic body (Descartes, 125-126).

In response, Descartes directs his reader to the proof of the “real distinction” in the Sixth Meditation. There, Descartes argues that the “real distinction” between mind and corporeality is “clearly and distinctly” perceived. In Descartes’ second reply he admits that metaphysically, if not conceptually, it is possible that there is no real distinction between mind and body when he writes,

[Hobbes] is quite right in saying that ‘we cannot conceive of an act without its subject’. We cannot conceive of thought without a thinking thing, since that which thinks is not nothing. But then he goes on to say, quite without reason, and in violation of all usage and all logic: ‘It seems to follow from this that a thinking thing is something corporeal.’ It may be that the subject of any act can be understood only in terms of a substance (or even, if he insists, in terms of ‘matter’, i.e. metaphysical matter); but it does not follow that it must be understood in terms of a body. (123-124)

The contrast between Hobbes and Descartes highlights the differences that arise in their accounts of mind on the basis of their orientation toward sensation. Rather than mistrust the senses, Hobbes turns *toward* them in giving his account of mind. In order to expose how his empiricism, materialism, and New Science commitments eventuate in a very particular view of volition, I present Hobbes’ theory of psychology.

According to Hobbes, tiny particles make contact with the sense organs, and these motions work on the nerves and the brain to produce internal experience. They can be experienced variously—as conceptions, if they are thoughts in the head, or passions if they are in the heart. Passions and conceptions have different properties, and they function in distinct ways. Thoughts are images, and these images can be “marked” internally with symbols or words, and this is how they can be organized and recalled for later deliberation or reasoning. Hobbes thinks reasoning is essentially syllogistic. He calls reasoning *ratiocination* or *computation*. Thoughts are objective in the sense that the symbols they represent can be made available for inter-personal evaluation. For instance, two men can argue between themselves over inferences made in an argument, and so long as they both follow correct rules of reasoning, they can come to agree on the same view. This is one way thoughts differ from passions. Because they are inherently *subjective*, passions are not similarly available for evaluation by others. For this reason feelings are not moral objects. Hobbes calls passion an internal “endeavour”, which means that passion solicits movement. They are essentially provocations to draw near something that is pleasing, or away from something displeasing. When the movement is toward what is pleasing it is *appetite*; when the movement is away from that which is displeasing, it is *aversion*. At the experiential level, feelings are pleasures and pains. Passions create movement in the body, and supply the motivation necessary for action. In combination with thoughts, they create the full range of subtle and diverse human experiences, including glory, fear, dread, and hope.

According to Hobbes, many of the problems that we have in thinking about volition come from the mistaken idea that volition, or the will, is a *faculty*. In fact, volition is nothing more than the motion of particles. Perhaps because it motivates action, in Hobbes’ view volition is identified with passion, namely the last appetite or aversion that occurs before action takes place. Hobbes writes, “In deliberation the last appetite, as also the last fear is called WILL (viz.) the last appetite will to do; the last fear will not to do, or will to omit. It is all one therefore to say will and last will” (*Elements of Law*, 61). The causes of appetites and fears are also the causes of our

wills. Hobbes writes,

Forasmuch as will to do is appetite, and will to omit, fear; the causes of appetite and of fear are the causes also of our will. But the propounding of benefits and of harms, that is to say, of reward and punishment, is the cause of our appetite and of our fears, and therefore also of our wills [...] (*Elements of Law*, 63)

Passions are not voluntary: “Appetite, fear, hope, and the rest of the passions are not called voluntary; for they proceed not from, but *are* the will; and the will is not voluntary” [italics mine] (*Elements of Law*, 62). Volition cannot be free from the universal laws of nature, and thus cannot be free from the consequences of previous events or actions. It can be free only in the sense of being unencumbered or unconstrained. For example, a person in a locked room cannot voluntarily leave that room, constrained as they are by the lock. In this sense, the person’s will is not free. By way of contrast, a person in an unlocked room is “free” to leave, being unconstrained. But there is no sense of freedom over and above this one; Hobbes is clear that volition, as well as everything else, occurs as the result of antecedent causes.<sup>20</sup>

To summarize: mind is particles in motion. Thoughts and passions interact to produce inner experience; they also work together to create deliberate action. Volition *is* passion, more particularly, the last appetite or aversion that takes place before action. Because the universe is lawful, everything moves according to these laws in combination with antecedent events or causes. Hobbes’ account of volition fits squarely and consistently within his general view of mind as it is informed and constrained by materialism, empiricism, and the New Science.

---

<sup>20</sup> Hobbes is often understood to be a compatibilist in contemporary terms.



## Hume's Empiricist Approach to Mind

Before we can see the reason why Hume's account of volition aligns so neatly with Hobbes', it's important to understand the nature of Hume's version of empiricism and his understanding of the New Science. Hume is empiricist in the sense that has been discussed already—he believes that sense experience is fundamental to knowledge, and he orients himself *toward* the senses as a foundation for knowledge, as opposed to away from it. Hume is a New Scientist in the sense that he affirms the new paradigm that replaces Aristotelianism, and is anti-authoritarian in tenor. He does not offer teleological explanations, nor refer to occult forces and powers as explanatory. However, Hume's empiricism is distinct from Hobbes' and Locke's in important and relevant ways. Hume's conception of the New Science *also* differed in important ways, in particular on the matter of efficient causation.

Hume is sometimes thought to have endeavoured to more fully develop the consequences of Locke's more cautious empiricism. Like Locke, Hume thinks that the mind is a blank slate at birth. He affirms that there are no innate ideas within the mind; everything is acquired through experience. Hume aims to establish a science upon cautious and judicious observation of human life, and he thinks that understanding the workings of mind is key to understanding everything else. This is because while humans are the scientists studying nature, we cannot know for certain what the external world is like without turning our inquiries inward, toward the human being. Understanding human nature promises to provide a foundation for the rest of the sciences. Getting clear on the nature of human understanding is a crucial first task in developing an understanding of the natural world. Thus, human beings are also the objects of scientific scrutiny. Hume opines,

'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even *Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion*, are in

some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judg'd of by their powers and faculties. (4)

Hume writes,

'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and cou'd explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings...we ourselves are not only the beings, that reason, but also one of the objects, concerning which we reason. (4)

According to Hume, the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, and the bedrock of the science of man is *experience and observation*. Legitimate science—and all knowledge—rests on a foundation of empiricism.

### Impressions & Ideas

Hume's view of mind begins with a distinction he makes between *impressions* and *ideas*. These differ in the degree of force and liveliness that they strike the mind with and make their way into consciousness. Forceful perceptions are impressions, and these include sensations, passions, and emotions. Impressions are immediate sensations as they are taking place. By way of contrast, ideas are "faint images" or copies of impressions that are derivative of sense experience. Hume explains,

An impression first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst, or hunger, pleasure or pain of some kind or other. Of this impression there is a copy taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases; and this we call an idea. This idea of pleasure or pain, when it returns upon the soul, produces the

new impressions of desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be called impressions of reflection, because derived from it. These again are copied by the memory and imagination, and become ideas; which perhaps in their turn give rise to other impressions and ideas. So that the impressions of reflection are only antecedent to their correspondent ideas; but posterior to those of sensation, and derived from them.<sup>21</sup> (11)

All simple ideas are derived from impressions which are correspondent to them, and which they represent exactly. Impressions and ideas are constantly conjoined, and experience shows that simple impressions always precede their correspondent ideas. On the other hand, the contrary never appears. Impressions have a position of priority, and thus Hume concludes that *they* are the causes of our ideas, and not the reverse (9).

Hume confirms this empirically with the observation that when sense organs are obstructed in their operations, not only are the impressions lost, but so are the corresponding ideas. No trace of them ever arises in the mind. This is true not only when the sense organs are destroyed, but also where they have never been put into action to produce a sensation. Without having actually tasted a pineapple, for example, we cannot formulate to ourselves an idea of it.

### Hume's Semantic Empiricism

Hume employs a standard of *semantic empiricism* to determine whether or not a statement or term has meaning. For example, Hume argues that the idea of *substance*, if it has any meaning at all, must be derived from some impression of sensation or reflection. When we closely examine the idea of substance, we find that

---

<sup>21</sup> Hume goes on to say that the examination of sensation is an area that belongs better to anatomists than to natural and moral philosophers, and so he puts the subject aside.

it is neither a colour, nor a taste, nor a sound. In fact, “substance” isn’t anything that is directly sensed. Because we don’t have any idea of substance distinct from a collection of particular qualities, we don’t have anything else in our minds when we talk about it. The idea of substance turns out to be nothing but a collection of simple ideas united by the imagination. Hume writes,

[...] I believe none will assert, that substance is either a colour, or a sound, or a taste. The idea of substance must therefore be deriv’d from an impression of reflection, if it really exist. But the impressions of reflection resolve themselves into our passions and emotions; none of which can possibly represent a substance. We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it. (16)

Insofar as our idea of substance goes beyond those impressions of particular qualities that are derived from the senses, it is “chimerical.” We can’t come to a satisfactory notion of substance either by considering the first origin of ideas, nor by means of definition. For Hume, this is a sufficient reason for “abandoning utterly that dispute concerning the materiality and immateriality of the soul,” and it makes him, “absolutely condemn even the question itself”<sup>22</sup> (153).

### Hume, Newton & Formulating Hypotheses

Hume rejects metaphysical hypotheses, on the grounds that they are not directly grounded in experience. Such hypotheses may be *true*, but because we can’t establish any empirical foundation for them, we are not warranted in drawing them.

---

<sup>22</sup> Hume argues that since we have no perfect idea of anything but a perception, and a perception is different from a substance, we have no idea of substance. The question, therefore, *Whether perceptions inhere in a material or immaterial substance?* cannot be answered because we do not have an understanding of the question.

Hume's "radical" version of empiricism demands that, "we cannot go beyond experience"<sup>23</sup> (5). Hume was influenced by Newton's view of the way science is properly done. Contemporary historians agree that Newton's empiricism involves a career-long rejection of "hypotheses" in natural philosophy. Newton's version of the New Science differs from the Cartesians' and others who had no compunction about positing causal explanations and metaphysical suppositions. Rather, Newton strives strenuously to sever all ties between his investigations and a commitment to metaphysical "first principles" (Domski, 525). Newton railed against hypotheses, which are conjectural causal explanations, in fulfillment of his aim to preserve the certainty of scientific principles. He believes that a more certain science involves formulating theories in terms of observed properties, without any causal explanations. Newton's famous dictum, *hypothesis non fingo* is an expression of his commitment to the kind of empiricism that does not go beyond the phenomena. He writes,

Hitherto we have explained the phaenomena of the heavens and of our sea by the power of gravity, but have not yet assigned the cause of this power...But hitherto I have not been able to discover the cause of those properties of gravity from phaenomena, and I frame no hypotheses;<sup>24</sup> for whatever is not deduced from the phaenomena, is to be called an hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy. In this philosophy particular propositions are inferred from the phaenomena, and afterwards rendered general by induction. Thus

---

<sup>23</sup> To drive this point even further, Hume offers the following maxim that is "condemn'd by several metaphysicians" to the effect that "*an object may exist, and yet be no where*" (154). This is the case with all our perceptions and objects, except those of sight and feeling. Not only do objects and perceptions like moral reflections not require any particular place, but they are "absolutely incompatible with it" (155).

<sup>24</sup> Newton's "*hypotheses non fingo*" is variously interpreted as, "I do not feign hypotheses".

it was that the impenetrability, the mobility, and the impulsive force of bodies, and the laws of motion and of gravitation, were discovered. And to us it is enough that gravity does really exist, and act according to the laws which we have explained, and abundantly serves to account for all the motions of the celestial bodies, and of our sun [sic]”. (Newton, 1159)

While the “mechanical philosophy” was popular in the late seventeenth century, by the mid eighteenth century it had become a narrower term used by Leibniz and the Cartesians to specify a position in *opposition* to Newton (Sapadin, 341).

Hume follows Newton in his rejection of the practice of formulating hypotheses beyond deductions from phenomena. When Hume speaks of the “experimental method” he is referring to Newton (337). In *The History of England* (1778) volume 6 he writes, “Newton...shewed...the imperfections of the mechanical philosophy” (542). Like Newton, Hume firmly believes that we ought not to go beyond experience in developing the science of man. He writes, “any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical” (5). He continues, “[A]s the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation” (4). Hume’s rejection of metaphysical hypotheses creates significant differences from the more moderate empiricists, Hobbes and Locke. For example, Hume employs an eviscerated concept of causation.

Hume takes the notion of causation to be subject to his standard of semantic empiricism. He proposes to, “turn the ideas of cause and effect on all sides,” looking for the impression from which these ideas arise. Thinking that the idea of causation must derive from some relation among objects, Hume finds that it is *contiguity and succession* that are the essential relations among cause and effect. In other words, Hume denies the ordinary sense of causation and replaces it with one

that acknowledges only that we observe that one thing follows from another. He argues that motion in one body is regarded as the cause of motion of another upon contact. When we pay careful attention we notice that one body approaches the other, and that its motion precedes the motion of the other. He writes,

Motion in one body is regarded upon impulse as the cause of motion in another. When we consider these objects with the utmost attention, we find only that the one body approaches the other, and that the motion of it precedes that of the other, but without any sensible interval...we can go no *farther* in considering this particular instance. (*Treatise*, 54-55)

We can't establish any necessary connection from the known qualities of objects. About this, Winkler (1991) writes,

According to Hume, our only causal conceptions (of any sort) are captured either by his own definitions, or by the loose and inaccurate ideas against which he argues...Necessity *as we understand it* lies entirely in the mind...This cuts off belief in objective necessary connection...without positively denying its existence. (576).

There is no case in which the ultimate connection between any objects can be discovered either by our senses, or by reason. We cannot penetrate into the essence and construction of bodies, but can only observe their constant union. Instead, what we experience is constant union, and it's from this that we get the idea of necessity (257). The mind draws an inference about causation from the experience of one thing following from another. But causation itself is never directly experienced. In Book II, Part III, section I of the *Treatise*, Hume writes,

If objects had not an uniform and regular conjunction with each other, we shou'd never arrive at any idea of cause and effect; and even after all, the necessity, which enters into that idea, is nothing but a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and infer the existence of one from that of the other. Here then are two particulars, which we are to consider as essential to necessity, *viz.* the constant *union* and the *inference* of the mind; and wherever we discover these we must acknowledge a necessity. As the actions of matter have no necessity, but what is deriv'd from these circumstances, and it is not by any insight into the essence of bodies we discover their connection, the absence of this insight, while the union and inference remain, will never, in any case, remove the necessity. (257-258)

The inference Hume is talking about here is the habitual determination of the mind to form a lively idea of the effect upon having an impression of the cause. While it is true that we infer the one from the other by observing their constant union, it is essential to remember that, “the inference is nothing but the effects of custom on the imagination” (261). When we call one object the cause, and the other the effect, and consider them in themselves, distinct and separate from each other, we can't infer one from the other. The connection between the two is a perception of the mind. When we observe the same union, we have the idea of causes. “From this constant union [the mind] *forms* the idea of cause and effect, and by its influence *feels* the necessity” (261). In other words, Hume's sense of causation is not metaphysical, but it points instead to the way that our minds habitually perceive things.

Hume's extreme form of empiricism lead him to refrain from positing causal explanations, as well as metaphysical suppositions that go, “beyond the phenomena.” While Hume was committed to the New Science, his understanding of it differed in important ways from other major thinkers during his time. His view was not mechanistic, which can be seen from the sense of causation at play in his



system. The fact that Hume is not a mechanist does not mean that his view is inconsistent with mechanical explanations. Hume certainly does not deny mechanism. He simply advocates restricting causal and metaphysical claims to what is warranted only on the basis of the phenomena. For this reason, his view is a kind of “metaphysical agnosticism.” He seeks to remain silent on metaphysical matters. This is not because he thinks metaphysical statements are false, but because his concern is about developing knowledge that is warranted by his empiricist presuppositions.

### Hume’s View of Volition

Hume calls the will the most remarkable of all the immediate effects of pain and pleasure (Hume, 257). The will is not, strictly speaking, a passion—Hume’s taxonomy of the passions includes desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, and fear—but it is necessary to the explanation of the passions. By “will” Hume means, “*the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind*” (257). Hume’s understanding of the will as an impression is a forceful perception of the human mind. Impressions for Hume are sensations, passions, and emotions. The notion of volition Hume espouses then, is that it is a sensation, feeling, or passion that is experienced via the senses, and which produces motion in the body. It is not a faculty. The similarity with Hobbes is clear. Both Hobbes and Hume arrive at this similar view because of the empiricism behind the view. Both Hobbes and Hume orient *toward* sensation as the foundation of knowledge, which places sensory experience at the centre of what can be experienced and known. While Hobbes gives a more in depth account of *how* objects interact with the senses to produce experience, Hume does not. He is interested in what can be known from experience, and therefore does not attend to metaphysical questions. As Hume mentions, questions of physiology are ones that he leaves to the anatomists.

## Buckle's Argument

In his 2012 paper, “Hume on the Passions” Stephen Buckle makes a case that Hume is a covert materialist. This argument is particularly relevant because the errors made in this argument depend on a failure to appreciate the way Hume’s version of the New Science and empiricism work together to produce his view of volition. Buckle’s argument draws on the similarity between Hobbes and Hume on volition to claim that, since Hobbes and Hume are so similar on the structure of volition, and since Hobbes is a materialist, then inference to the best explanation is that Hume too, is a materialist. But as I’ll show, the similarity between Hume and Hobbes derives not from any shared metaphysical view, but instead, is the result of their shared *empiricism* combined with their commitment to the New Science. Because Buckle doesn’t take account of the Newtonian nuance of Hume’s approach to the New Science, he conflates it with the approach of the Cartesians—an approach that Hume was clearly in opposition to.

First, I show that the relevant parts of Hobbes’ account of volition are rooted in his empiricism, not his materialism. Second, I expose why the variation among the notions of empiricism and New Science is sufficient to account for the shared similarity between Hume and Hobbes on volition. Neither of these views implies materialism. Inference to the best explanation, therefore, is that Hume is *not* best regarded as implicitly materialist—at least not for the reasons Buckle provides.

## Contrasts Between Hobbes and Descartes

In laying the groundwork for his case, Buckle begins by setting up a contrast between two *kinds* of explanation of volition. The first is materialist—the one that Hobbes offers—and the second is dualist, and this is exemplified by Descartes’ account. Buckle shows the alignment of Hume’s view with Hobbes’, pointing out that the rest of the contrasts also hold between Hume and Descartes. Namely, he

argues that since Hobbes differs from Descartes on the issue of materiality, Hume must also differ in just the same way.<sup>25</sup>

Beginning with Descartes and Hobbes, Buckle points out that both philosophers agree that the passions have a bodily origin. Since Hobbes believes that *everything* is matter in motion, passions are matter in motion. Because thought and passion are metaphysically identical, the materialist does not set up a hierarchy among them, the way that a dualist can. Thought does not “rule” passion in any way, whereas for the dualist, just such a hierarchy can be invoked. Thus, it is difficult for a materialist to provide an account of volition whereby the rational part of the human being—the thinking part—intervenes on the passionate impulses. Instead, volition is subject to the same natural universal laws that govern matter. Volition is governed by deterministic laws, and is itself determined. By way of contrast, while the dualist can affirm that passions arise as a result of material motion in the brain, he denies that the mind is *constituted* by those brain events. Instead, the mind stands apart from feelings and passionate impulses, and is capable of judging and intervening upon them. The mind is immaterial, and is independent from the passions, which are bodily, and hence material. The immaterial mind can exercise control over bodily processes. Because of the separation of mind from passion, a libertarian conception of volition becomes possible. In Buckle’s words,

[T]he dualist will affirm that the human being is rational and free. The materialist in contrast, can be expected to resist any separation and independence of the mind from those processes which occur in it because of motions in the brain and body: thought, volition and passion should all occur on the same level, such that no part of the mind – in particular no rational part – can claim rule over the rest.

---

<sup>25</sup> It’s important to keep in mind that while Hobbes and Descartes disagree about the materiality of mind, they do not disagree about the materiality of the natural world. Hume, on the other hand, strives to draw no such conclusions at all, restricting his views to only what is warranted on the basis of the phenomena.

(192-3)

Buckle calls this the *litmus test* for distinguishing dualist and materialist positions. Contrasting Descartes' dualism with a materialist perspective, Buckle draws attention to a patterned set of conceptual relationships. Buckle writes,

The materialist, in contrast [to the dualist who affirms the human being is rational and free], can be expected to resist any separation and independence of the mind from those processes which occur in it because of motions in the brain and body: thought, volition and passion should all occur on the same level, such that no part of mind – in particular, no rational part – can claim to rule over the rest. This is precisely what we find in Hobbes. He denies the very possibility of control over the passions by denying any space for reason or volition that is independent of passion: instead, he defines volitions by reference to the passions themselves...He also treats the passions as a species of imagination: just as 'sense is motion in the organs and interior parts of man's body', so 'it is evident that the imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion'...This commits Hobbes to determinism." (193)

It's true that Hobbes denies the possibility of control of the passions by reason, and that his account of volition is deterministic. But the story that Buckle tells is that this is *because* of Hobbes' materialism. Materialism is *consistent* with this way of structuring mind, but it's not the case that if mind is structured this way, then the account is materialist. Hobbes' account is structured as it is in large part because of his *empiricism*. It is the empiricism in Hobbes' account that leads him to understand mind as *bodily*. Since mind is body, then there are no divisions among kinds of things that make up the human being—there are not material parts and immaterial parts that need to find a way to interact, and which structure themselves in a hierarchy. There is no hierarchy because both thoughts and passions *are* body.

Notice that this view does not *imply* materialism. One can hold that thoughts and passions are bodily—whatever it is that body turns out to be, notwithstanding.

### The Function of Empiricism in Hobbes' Account

In making his case for Hume the materialist, Buckle begins by setting up a set of contrasts between the paradigmatic dualist—Descartes—and the paradigmatic materialist—Hobbes. Because these thinkers are exemplars of dualism and materialism, it is understandable why Buckle might treat them as foils on account of their complementary *metaphysical commitments*. It's not their metaphysical commitments, however, that are driving the sets of contrasts at issue. Instead, it is their epistemological ones. While Descartes is a dualist, he is also a rationalist. And while Hobbes is a materialist, he is also an empiricist. The important distinction between Descartes and Hobbes is the way each one orients his view toward the role of sensation in the production of knowledge.

Recalling our earlier discussion, what's clear in Descartes' account of mind is that he makes a conscious move away from sensation, focussing on the “large number of falsehoods” the senses have produced in him, thereby creating a doubtful edifice upon which all his views were based. An important aim of his *Meditations* is to demolish everything of this edifice and start again from the right foundations, in order to establish knowledge in the sciences that could be stable and lasting. In so doing, Descartes finds the senses to be deceivers, writing, “Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses...I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once” (Descartes, 12). Given that this is so, Descartes' method is to look “inward” to the mind to develop a rationalist foundation for knowledge. This is to say that he turns consciously and explicitly *away from* sensation and the senses as a reliable source or foundation for knowledge. Descartes is a staunch rationalist.

Contrast this with Hobbes who, on the other hand, consciously and explicitly turns *toward the senses* as a foundation for knowledge. Hobbes affirms that the foundation for all knowledge is sensation, writing, “there is no conception in a man’s mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by part, been begotten upon the organs of sense. The rest are derived from that original” (*Leviathan*, 85). This very different initial orientation makes all the difference for the resulting view of the production of knowledge for each thinker. Since the sense organs are a kind of *conduit* for knowledge according to Hobbes, the body is directly implicated in the discovery or discernment of information. We look to the senses to tell us what the case is.

It is important to note that neither empiricism nor rationalism entail any metaphysical position in particular, nor do they entail that a metaphysical position must be taken *at all*. As epistemological positions, they are about what can be known, or the sources of knowledge—not about the nature of things. There are a great variety of possible positions among the various metaphysical and epistemological commitments involved here. For instance, it is possible in principle to be a rationalist materialist, idealist, or dualist. It is possible to be a rationalist who is agnostic, or remains silent about metaphysical matters. Likewise, depending on the degree and type of empiricism at issue, it is possible to be an empiricist materialist, dualist, idealist, or to remain metaphysically agnostic on the matter of metaphysics. These notions can combine in various ways, so that it’s not the case that if one is a rationalist, as is Descartes, one is also a dualist, as Descartes happens to be. What is at issue in the contrasting set of commitments between Descartes and Hobbes is their opposing epistemological positions—not their metaphysical ones.

This can be seen in two ways. First, by looking at what follows from each metaphysical position. There is nothing inherent about dualism that entails a libertarian view of volition. True, the dualist has an easy way to appeal to libertarianism by conceptualizing mind and body as distinct kinds of things. But this appeal is not as problem-free as it first might appear. The renowned problem the

dualist faces is the problem of interaction: if there are two *kinds* of things in existence, how can the one interact with, or influence the other? The details of *how* the immaterial mind causally—or even more precisely, mechanistically—impacts the material body are in short supply. Without such an account, the dualist’s claim to free and easy libertarian free will is rather hand-wavy. But more importantly than that, libertarianism doesn’t *follow* from a dualist position. One might be a dualist and nevertheless deny that there is such a faculty as volition, and further deny that one is free to intervene on causal processes.

### Finding the Right Contrasts

The mistake that Buckle makes in drawing his parallel between Descartes and Hobbes is that, while he *intends* to compare and contrast dualism and materialism, what he is actually contrasting is materialism and rationalism. It is not the position that two *kinds of things* exist that moves Descartes to structure his account of mind such that the thinking part can rule over the passions. No internal mental/bodily hierarchy is implied at all by dualism itself. Instead, it is Descartes’ *rationalism* that moves him to structure the mind this way. It is that part of the mind that can attain to truth independently of the senses that provides the human being with reason and knowledge. This falls out of Descartes’ self-conscious move away from sensation as a foundation for knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Rather than orient toward sensation as a foundation for knowledge, Descartes instead builds his foundation of knowledge in a paradigmatically rationalist way. This is what leads him to structure his account of mind and passion as he does—that which cannot be doubted turns out to be the *fact that* Descartes is in meditation, in thought. He writes, “At last, I have discovered it—thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist—that is certain” (Descartes, 18). The mind itself is the foundation for knowledge. This epistemological claim is separate from the dualist metaphysic that Descartes argues

---

<sup>26</sup> Because Descartes finds the senses to be deceivers, he begins his meditations by stopping up his senses and doubting everything that can be doubted. In so doing, he turns “inward” to establish a different foundation for knowledge—one based on rationality.

for. Descartes' metaphysics supports and is consistent with his rationalism, but neither of the two entail or imply one another.

The problem with comparing and contrasting materialism and rationalism is that materialism is a *metaphysical* position, while rationalism is an *epistemological* position. Not realizing this inappropriate set of contrasts, Buckle provides evidence of Hobbes' denial of the possibility of control over the passions by reason as support for his conclusion that Hume was a materialist. For example, Buckle writes, "The materialist, in contrast can be expected to resist any separation and independence of the mind from those processes which occur in it because of motions in the brain and body...This is precisely what we find in Hobbes" (Buckle, 193). He then continues,

Hobbes thus offers an account of the relation between reason, will, imagination and passion that is wedded to his materialism. This account is explicitly materialist by explaining all psychological phenomena by reference to physiological causes. But it also shows how a theory could be implicitly materialist: by avoiding the physiology, but affirming the conjunction of doctrines about reason, will, imagination and passion that is distinctive of the Hobbesian theory. Hume's theory does just this. (195)

What Buckle's argument implies is that the *source* of Hobbes' view of mind, particularly the relations between reason, passion, volition, and body, is his materialism. This is mistaken. While it's true that each of the elements of this constellation of relations is *consistent* with materialism, is *also consistent* with any number of metaphysical positions. Refraining from asserting a bifurcated mind-body system is not equivalent to the claim that everything that exists is matter. Even more to the point: this constellation of ideas is consistent with metaphysical agnosticism. It is conceptually possible not to make claims about the ultimate nature of reality, and mind in particular, and still maintain the general *structure* of mind that Hobbes offers, whereby volition is a passion that causes motion, and creates



action and behaviour in the human being. Instead of materialism as the source of Hobbes' view of mind, it's his *empiricism* that creates this constellation of ideas.

### Parallels Between Hobbes and Hume

After drawing up the ways that Descartes and Hobbes contrast with each other in their accounts of volition, Buckle takes himself to have articulated the key differences between a materialist and a dualist account. In the second part of his argument, he compares the accounts of Hume and Hobbes with one another, with the aim of showing their patterned similarity. As several commentators have noted, Hume and Hobbes both offer very similar accounts of volition, and mind more generally. Buckle calls Hume's account, "pure Hobbism" and writes, "Hume's definition of the will could have been written by Hobbes himself" (197). There is no contest to the fact that the two accounts are very similar. The issue is not about whether the similarity exists, but instead the issue is about the *source* of the similarity. Buckle reasons that Hume's view is "implicitly materialist" because his view of the will is "nothing more than an experience that attends, or is part of a chain of causes and effects" (197). Buckle quotes Hume saying, "by the *will*, I mean nothing but *the internal impressions we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind*" (ibid). According to Buckle, the resembling feature of Hume's account with Hobbes' is that,

Hume's argument, like Hobbes', reduces freedom to the power to choose...Hume's compatibility argument is not to weaken the case for determinism, but to remove any objection to it...In affirming these two aspects of Hobbes' determinism, Hume thereby endorses doctrines that are key elements of Hobbes' materialist account of the human being. (198)

Because the views of Hobbes and Hume are similar, and yet given that Hume is not a materialist (as he explicitly denies taking any metaphysical position, and condemns materialism particularly), the similarity must lie elsewhere. With another source of this similarity, Hume doesn't have to be an implicit materialist. This is a better interpretation because it accords with Hume's avowed position. The similarity between Hobbes and Hume isn't rooted in a shared materialism, but in the combination of empiricism and New Science.

Hume and Hobbes are both determinists. But in what sense is Hume a determinist? Recall Hume's eviscerated sense of causation, as explicated in Part I. For Hume, causation is about the way human beings experience phenomena, not a statement about the way the world actually is in its nature, or its underpinnings. Hume doesn't believe in causation in any metaphysical sense. He's clear that causation is an inference of the mind, resulting from the fact that we experience objects as being constantly conjoined. Hume writes,

It has been observ'd already, that in no single instance the ultimate connexion of any objects is discoverable, either by our senses or reason, and that we can never penetrate so far into the essence and construction of bodies, as to perceive the principle, on which their mutual influence depends. 'Tis their constant union alone, with which we are acquainted; and 'tis from the constant union the necessity arises. If objects had not an uniform and regular conjunction with each other, we shou'd never arrive at any idea of cause and effect[...]  
(257).

Observation of constant union creates an "inference of the mind" that there is a necessity between the two. And, "'Tis the observation of the union, which produces the inference" (258). Hume is consistent and careful in maintaining that humans experience and understand events to be necessary based on the habitual inferences of causal chains based on the experience of constant conjunction. In other words, his

view regarding determinism is not based on any metaphysical ones. Rather, it's based on his *empiricism*. Hume appeals to what we observe and infer from experience to justify his sense of causation, and hence determinism. It is the shared commitment to empiricism that leads both Hume and Hobbes to their determinism. The determinism that underlies both accounts offered by Hume and Hobbes leads both thinkers to deny libertarianism. But materialism isn't the source of their shared determinism.

Similar to the mistake he makes in his first set of comparisons, Buckle goes on to offer more evidence in favour of the view that Hume is an implicit materialist. This time, the evidence is the fact that Hume and Hobbes have very similar views on the relationship between reason and passion. Like Hobbes, Hume also thinks that reason can't oppose a passion—only another passion can do so. Impulses of feeling can be opposed only by other such impulses. Unless reason has the capacity to oppose such an impulse, it is impossible that it should have any efficacy in directing the will. We can see this where Hume writes,

'Tis impossible reason cou'd have the latter effect of preventing volition, but by giving an impulse in the contrary direction to our passion; and that impulse, had it operated alone, wou'd have been able to produce volition. Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse; and if this contrary impulse ever arises from reason, that latter faculty must have an original influence on the will, and must be able to cause, as well as hinder any act or volition. But if reason has no original influence, 'tis impossible it can withstand any principle, which has such an efficacy, or ever keep the mind in suspence a moment. Thus it appears, that the principle, which opposes our passion, cannot be the same with reason, and is only call'd so in an improper sense. (266)

For Hume, reason cannot oppose a passionate impulse, and does not cause or hinder any volition. For Buckle, the fact that Hume utilizes the language of “impulse” implies a mechanical picture of causation. Buckle calls “impulse” the “*sine qua non* of mechanical causation” (199). He interprets this to mean that passions have impulsive force, and therefore, they are not merely impressions. He then concludes, “thus Hume’s subordination of reason to passion, and his related incorporation of volition into the same overall account, commits him to determinism, and, implicitly, to materialism” (200). It’s true that Hume is committed to determinism in *his* sense. But Hume’s use of the word “impulse,” surely is not sufficient to convict him of intellectual dishonesty about his metaphysical views, or to commit him to materialism particularly. A mechanical picture of causation is just that: a picture, or a model. One can make use of a model without thereby implying a certain metaphysical stand about the real nature of that which is being modeled. Materialism hardly follows *from* the word “impulse.”

What’s more, it’s possible that Hume was not making use of a mechanical metaphor at all when he used the language of “impulse.” One set of meanings of the word “impulse” is a force, impetus, or strong and unreflective urge or desire to act. A more consistent interpretation is that Hume intended the word to be understood in this sense, in which case it captures the general meaning of the term “passion.”

### Hume’s Metaphysical Agnosticism

Buckle’s view of Hume the implicit materialist rests on establishing that Hume endorsed a mechanical picture of the universe. The reasoning is that, if the mechanical view implies materialism, and Hume endorses the mechanical view, then Hume must also endorse materialism. In support of this, Buckle argues that it was Hume’s aim to, “explain the passions entirely in terms comparable to modern mechanical science” (2012, 190). It’s not clear exactly what this means, since it’s not clear in what sense an explanation might be *comparable* to modern mechanical science. This might only mean that it was Hume’s aim to provide a scientific

account of the passions. It might also mean that Hume's account is not *inconsistent* with modern mechanical science. Because Hume remained metaphysically agnostic, he does not reject any particular metaphysical view as false. Just so, Humean passions are explained in a way that is *consistent* with modern mechanical science. But since this doesn't amount to a mechanical explanation, not much hangs on this. Yet Buckle seems to think that more does hang on it. It was, Buckle admits, "a hallmark of the mechanical philosophy to explain the passions in this way" (ibid) and that, "For [early] modern philosophers – of all stripes – the passions were understood to be the mental effects of bodily motions" (191). But notice that understanding passions as the effects of bodily motions does not amount to a view about what "bodily motions" are, metaphysically. Accordingly, Buckle acknowledges that Descartes, the paradigmatic dualist, offered just such an account, as did Malebranche, Hobbes, and Spinoza (190). Because Modern philosophers of all stripes talked in terms of mechanism regarding the passions, this is not the feature that distinguishes materialists from non-materialists. Nor does it indicate that a metaphysical position has been taken. The use of mechanistic metaphors or models does not imply the acceptance of any kind of ontology in particular, or of adherence to any metaphysical position in general. The fact that Hume's account was not completely divorced from the mechanical philosophy does not mean that he endorses the mechanical philosophy. Hume's Newtonian version of the New Science relies on his eviscerated notion of causation. Hume's view of causation is not mechanical—as an inference by the mind, it is more psychological than it is mechanical. As such, it implies nothing at all about his metaphysical commitments, except that he refrains from making any.

Buckle bolsters his case for Hume the mechanist by virtue of the way Hume treats physiology. Buckle admits that Hume does his best, throughout the *Treatise* to "avoid appeal to physiological explanations" (195). But, Buckle argues, Hume doesn't *deny* physiology, and at times appears to appeal to it. For example, in Book 1, he appeals to brain physiology to explain errors in reasoning (196). He adds that he hasn't made more use of physiology, not because doing so is specious and

implausible, but instead because doing so would go beyond experience. Hume writes that the reason he avoids this topic is because “’twas more in prosecution of my first maxim, that we must in the end rest contented with experience” (44). Hence Hume does not talk much about physiology for the very reason that he finds those concerns irrelevant to the matter that really concerns him: how the mind *works*. Yet it’s true that at times, Hume explains sensation by reference to the body as the result of physical contact with the external world, or from the body’s own inner motions. For Buckle, this is an endorsement of materialism. If Hume is prepared to accept a physiological account, Buckle wonders, why he doesn’t just spell this out as his preferred view? (196) Because doing so is wide of his purpose, is the answer Buckle provides. “But not only is he prepared to enlist psychology to his cause, where necessary; the psychological account he offers is entirely parallel to Hobbes’ overtly materialist account” (197). Buckle affirms that Hume’s account implies a background physiology, and that such a physiological account is “fully in accord with mechanical materialism” (202).

Once again, understanding the particulars of Hume’s version of empiricism makes clear how and why Hume remains metaphysically agnostic even given his occasional appeal to physiology. Because Hume is metaphysically *agnostic*, he does not affirm *or deny* any particular metaphysical position. Hume thinks that the asking and answering of metaphysical questions is inappropriate, because it requires us to go beyond the phenomena. Just so, Hume does not *deny* physiology, or reject the possibility of physicalism, because doing so would be dogmatic. Hence Hume’s account is consistent with contemporaneous physiological explanations. But it’s not the case that Hume’s account originates *from* physiological explanations.<sup>27</sup> His lack of denial of physiology should not be taken as a metaphysical stance. It’s not that we would expect Hume to deny physiology. Hume is in no way *anti-materialistic*, because taking that position would be to enter into the debate about the ultimate nature of reality. It’s not Hume’s view that physicalism is in any way *incoherent*, as

---

<sup>27</sup> What’s more, the discipline of physiology does not depend on a materialist metaphysic.

someone like Berkeley might assert. It's Hume's position that such questions are distractions. Metaphysical explanations are not necessary, and can't be answered according to his empiricist commitments.

Rather than any shared materialism, it's his empiricism, and more particularly, the role that sensation plays in Hume's approach to volition and mind more generally, that account for the way that his view maps onto Hobbes'. Experience and observation are the basis for knowledge for Hume, and these are mediated via the senses. This position can be, and is coherently taken by Hume, without implication for what the nature of the body is. And it is this central role for sensation that leads both Hume and Hobbes to affirm hedonism, as well as the view that reason is inert, the conception of emotion as motivational, to consider volition as a feeling, and to determinism. For Hume, determinism is not a claim about the ultimate nature of reality; it is an observation about a habitual inference of the mind when it encounters constant conjunction. Hence Hume's determinism falls directly out of his empiricism.

Buckle's position is that there is a constellation of ideas that work together in Hobbes' account of volition. In particular, Hobbes treats thoughts and feelings as of the same metaphysical kind, and hence does not separate mind and body. Passions are motivational, and they create movement, while thoughts are inherently inert. Volition *is* passion, and cannot be intervened upon by thoughts. The account is hedonistic determinism. Hobbes' psychology is overtly materialist, backed up by a mechanical physiology. This constellation of ideas shows up in almost the exact same ways in Hume's account, according to Buckle. Since this is so, they must share the metaphysical presumption that is explicit in Hobbes' account: materialism. Like Hobbes, Hume denies that there is a faculty of the will, calling the will an impression that accompanies action. Hume is a compatibilist; Hobbes is also sometimes understood to be a compatibilist. Hume also "subordinates reason to passion." Buckle writes,

Taken together, then, these elements comprise a mutually-supporting network of theses corresponding almost exactly to the Hobbesian account of the human being as a machine. It is not credible to suppose that these resemblances are accidental, or that Hume did not see their significance. To hold, then, that Hume's account of the passions is implicitly materialist is simply to affirm that he knew what he was doing. (204)<sup>28</sup>

Buckle's argument is a kind of *inference to the best explanation* position. But understanding Hume as a materialist is not the best interpretation for the following reasons. First, the parallel between Hobbes and Descartes picks out the differences in their *epistemological* positions, not their metaphysical ones. Therefore, the set of parallels that we find between Hobbes and Hume don't contrast with the dualist account by virtue of their underlying metaphysics, but instead, they contrast on the basis of their epistemological commitments. It is the shared empiricism that produces the patterned sets of commitments, and it's Descartes' rationalism that produces his contrasting set of commitments. What's more, given Hume's Newtonian approach to science, which influenced his particular version of empiricism, the most consistent interpretation of Hume is that he is, as he says he is, metaphysically agnostic. In other words, since we can interpret Hume's view of volition without appeal to metaphysics, then the best and most charitable interpretation is that he in fact holds the position that he says he does.

## Conclusion

There are several interpretive problems with Buckle's account of Hume as a materialist. I've uncovered many of the most important ones. The two most significant errors Buckle makes are first, thinking that Hobbes' materialism is what

---

<sup>28</sup> Part of Buckle's argument is that, in claiming not to engage in metaphysical theorizing, and yet knowing what he was doing, Hume was intellectually dishonest. This is a serious charge, and one worthy of refuting.



underpins the features of his view of mind and volition that are at issue here. In fact, Hobbes' materialism is logically separate from his empiricism, which is the real driving force behind his view. So while Hobbes chose to affirm materialism, as far as his account of mind is concerned, he need not have in order to arrive at the structure of mind he advances. The second major error Buckle makes is in thinking that Hume is a mechanist. This interpretation can only be sustained with cherry-picked evidence. Given Hume's reiterated avowal of his intention to refrain from metaphysical theorizing, all other things being equal, this is the better interpretation. Hume's view of the New Science follows the Newtonian method, whereby one does not go "beyond the phenomena". This is about strict adherence to observation without formulating hypotheses. Hume's views of both causation and determinism align with this practice. The senses in which he affirms causation and determinism are minimal, proportional to what he can affirm with observation. Nevertheless, his views are consistent with physiological accounts of passion and sensation. But this does not create any inconsistency for two reasons. The first is that, even if physiology implied materialism, Hume's view is consistent with materialism without implying it. The second reason is that physiology does *not* imply materialism. Physiology is the study of natural bodies, while materialism is a theory about the basic constituents of reality. Physiology does not make a statement about the basic constituents of the natural body, or of reality generally.

Clear understanding of Hume's empiricism and his version of the New Science is sufficient to explain how and why his view of volition aligns so nicely with Hobbes', without having to attribute a metaphysical view to him. This is the simpler explanation, and it doesn't require us to consider Hume intellectually dishonest. Hume ought not to be considered a covert materialist—at least not for the reasons Buckle provides. And yet, Buckle's argument provides ground from which we can appreciate the various subtleties and nuances involved in accounts of mind that emerge from the constellation of empiricism and the New Science. Buckle's view provides an excellent example of the importance of understanding the relations between empiricism, New Science, and aspects of mind as they were theorized in the

Modern period. Without having picked apart these notions carefully, and seeing clearly how and why they fit together the way they do, we might be persuaded of this inaccurate view of Hume.

## Works Cited

- Buckle, Stephen. "Hume on the Passions." *Philosophy* 87. 2, (2012): 189-213.
- Descartes, Rene. "Objections and Replies: Third Set of Objections With the Author's Replies." *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. II*. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Print.
- Domski, Mary. "Newton's Empiricism and Metaphysics." *Philosophy Compass* 5.7 (2010): 525-534.
- Flew, Anthony. *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*. New York: The Humanities Press, 1961. Print.
- Harris, James. *Of Liberty and Necessity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *The Elements of Law*. Hobbes: English Works. Comp and Ed., Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. Web. Oct 21, 2014.
- . *De Corpore*. Hobbes: English Works. Compiled and edited by Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. Web. Sept. 9, 2014.
- Hume, David. *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, Foreword by William B. Todd, 6 vols. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983. Vol. 6. Accessed online 2016-05-29.
- . *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*. Ed. David Fate Norton, and Mary J. Norton. Oxford Clarendon Press, 2011. Print.
- Newton, Isaac. *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in *On the Shoulders of Giants: The Great Works of Physics and Astronomy*. Ed. Stephen Hawking. Philadelphia/London: Running Press, 2002, pp.733-1160. Print.
- Penelhum, Terence. *Themes in Hume: The Self, the Will, Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Sapadin, Eugene. "A Note on Newton, Boyle, and Hume's 'Experimental Method.'"

*Hume Studies* 23.2 (1997): 337-344.

Stroud, Barry. *Hume*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977. Print.

Winker, Kenneth P. "The New Hume." *The Philosophical Review* 100.4 (1991):  
541-579.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

*The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones.*

~ John Maynard Keynes

### Unit-Ideas - Revisited

In this dissertation I've analyzed issues pertaining to aspects of mind in the history of philosophy, by way of unit-ideas. Analysis in terms of unit-ideas is an alternative historical approach to contextualist approaches, which place primary emphasis on the historical conditions, and the intellectual context of a given historical era, in order to understand a certain discourse. Analyzing in terms of unit-ideas puts the ideas themselves as the central subject. In working with unit-ideas, old arguments and views are broken down into their component parts. This allows those components to be re-examined in a new, different organization. It becomes possible to bring those parts into new relations, and view them from the standpoint of a specific purpose. The purposes, aims, and values of this historical approach are many. Analysis in terms of unit-ideas allows different patterns of the same component parts to be identified across key texts. Finding these patterns can provide insight into the evolution of ideas and frameworks. It also facilitates understanding how certain groupings of components can offer mutual support to one another, while others produce negative tensions.

### For History of Philosophy

When we understand how different unit-ideas work together, and how others don't, we are in a position to re-conceive old arguments. Recognizing them as constellations of familiar components, it becomes possible to evaluate them in a novel way. Understanding that many philosophical systems are original or distinctive not so much in their components, but rather in their *patterns* can help to

provide a new perspective on “old” positions. Different logical combinations of elements of a philosophical doctrine are not always readily recognizable, but in recognizing various evolutions of these patterns, we can come to see and understand theoretical systems at a deeper level. Doing this helps expose similarities among theoretical systems that at first appear to be dissimilar, and we can find surprising connections across texts.

One aim of this approach is to take note of some of the most significant influences of bodies of thought, and to see how later generations may have derived conclusions from them that are very different from what their originators might have thought. Appreciation of this is very helpful when it comes to identifying and situating evolved iterations of those ideas. This puts us in an excellent position to identify problems that are new iterations or previously articulated patterns comprised of these units. Recognizing evolutions of patterns of already familiar theories creates deep understanding and insight into resolving, or abandoning these issues.

### For Contemporary Philosophy

Historical analysis in terms of unit-ideas can also provide deeper understanding and evaluation of our current unit-ideas by exposing their evolution from earlier versions. In so doing, it creates space for us to recognize new possible combinations of these unit-ideas, and to recognize novelty in our present theorizing, not just in new components of our theories, but in novel patterns. It enriches the conceptual resources at our disposal, allowing us to understand the landmark positions that frame contemporary discussions. Making our unit-ideas and their organization explicit exposes underlying assumptions that are too familiar to be easily noticed, and which may be deeply embedded, un-argued for, or even un-avowed. Identifying these assumptions helps us to ask better questions, diagnose current ills, and attend more perceptively to the ways that philosophers have been “received.”

## Specifics: Empiricism, New Science, and Aspects of Mind

In this dissertation, I have examined the problem of how to fit mind into the natural world, given the presuppositions of empiricism and the New Science. In order to do that, I've articulated a variety of empiricisms, as well as broken apart various tenets of the New Science, in order to observe their various combinations in key texts.

Table 1 is a reminder of some important aspects of empiricism

Sub-variety of Empiricism	What is approached empirically
Justification	Philosophy of psychology (The science of mental development) Individual epistemology (Grounding justification of individuals' beliefs) Philosophy of science (Scientific methodology)
Psychology	Source of mental contents Mental development over time The source of mental mechanisms

Table 1

While empiricism exists in various formulations, the fundamental idea is that the senses are the foundation of knowledge. Empiricist thinkers orient themselves *toward* sensation as a source of knowledge, as opposed to rationalist thinkers, who are oriented *away from* sensation as a source of knowledge.

Table 2 is a reminder of many of the components of the New Science. As we have seen, it is possible for a thinker to accept some of these components, and reject others. Components of the New Science can be used in various ways along with different components and degrees of commitment to empiricism in order to fit mind into the natural world.

New Science	Rival & replacement for Aristotelianism Anti-authoritarian in tenor
Nature	Natural world entirely passive Motion/change is not actualization of some power in the substance itself Elimination of powers from all natural substances
Mode of explanation	Macro-level properties explained in terms of lower level ones Removal of occult forces and powers
Mechanism	Mechanization of world-picture Nature described with mathematical/geometrical concepts
Particles	Simple, unified, deterministic, quantifiable
Causation	Only efficient causes recognized or required Rejection of teleology and final causes
Cartesian New Science (Rationalist)	Science is demonstrative as a series of valid deductions from self-evident truths, rather than as something rooted in observation and experiment. Starting point for science and physics is the existence of God (as described in <i>Discourse on Method</i> )
Newtonian New Science (Experimental Philosophy)	Self-conscious turn away from Cartesian scientific methodology Denies the metaphysics of essences Refrains from formulating hypotheses Admits no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances Whatever is not deduced from the phenomena is rejected Whether metaphysical, physical, based on occult qualities, or mechanical, hypotheses have no place in experimental philosophy

Table 2



My purpose here is to assess these constellations for their adequacy in fitting mind into the natural world. In order to do that, I've chosen three case studies that highlight some of the virtues as well as some of the drawbacks of this class of framework. The fundamental idea that structures this dissertation is that these varying constellations of ideas reside in ways that are mutually supporting, and which are productive in explaining mind, while at the same time they create negative tensions, and new problems.

### Three Case Studies: Hobbes, Locke and Hume

In the first paper, I looked at how Hobbes' particular conception of empiricism and his version of the New Science support one another in his account of mental architecture. This analysis also showed that while Hobbes' framework fits mind into the natural world seamlessly, it leaves out some important components of mind that don't fit within that framework. In particular, the Hobbesian system does not explain how content fits into this system.

As we saw in Chapter Three, commentators have long been spilling ink in search of Locke's "final" position on the question of freedom of the will. The trouble Locke had with this portion of the *Essay* might appear as weakness, but when analyzed in terms of his constellation of empiricism and the New Science, a very different image appears. Here we see that Locke exposes some of the real tensions in the presumptions of his framework. In seeing the source of these tensions, we can see that Locke *didn't have* a settled or consistent position on freedom of the will, and so we can put this old debate to bed.

In the fourth chapter I analyzed Hume's view of volition as it relates to his commitments to empiricism and the New Science. Both Hume's empiricism and his version of the New Science differ in important ways from those of his predecessors. Yet, Hume's account of volition is still very similar to Hobbes' account. This is not because Hume was a covert materialist. Analysis in terms of unit-ideas exposes the

source of the similarity as a new combination of empiricism and New Science. This chapter functions to highlight the kind of error of interpretation that can arise from lack of clarity on the relationships between unit-ideas in general and New Science and empiricism in particular.

### Limitations:

Analysis in terms of unit-ideas is not designed for the specialist. It is intended for a more general audience of philosophers. Because of this, there are limitations of detail in dealing with some of the texts. A specialist in Hobbes, Locke, or Hume might take issue with a given interpretation of each thinker's view, based on a more detailed understanding of that thinker. This type of analysis also stands to miss out on some of the nuance involved in each thinker's system. In attending to unit-ideas as they appear, and reappear in new patterns across various texts, what falls out of the analysis is nuance in other areas. It's important to keep in mind, however, that a highly specialized perspective also excludes relevant information. Because of the coarse-grain level of analysis, the application of my findings is limited to problems and issues that are of a similarly coarse grain.

### Findings – Empiricism & New Science

Empiricism, as we have seen, comes in a variety of kinds and degrees. They all orient *toward* sensation as the foundation for knowledge. As an epistemological view, empiricism does not imply any metaphysical position, although it can be consistent with different metaphysical positions. Empiricisms vary also according to whether or not the formulation of "hypotheses" is justified. According to Humean empiricism, for example, no hypotheses are warranted that go beyond observation. This is why Hume advances a concept of causation, for example, that is not mechanistic, but rather an *inference of the mind*. As far as Hume is concerned, we cannot penetrate into the "inner" workings of appearances.

These variations of empiricism combine with the tenets of the New Science in ways that are generally mutually supporting. For instance, in its rejection of Aristotelian substances, the New Science accords with empiricism—inhering substances are not themselves directly observed, and ought not to be admitted within an empiricist view that affirms only what is directly observed. In its anti-authoritarian tenor, the New Science is also mutually supporting with empiricism, which “democratizes” knowledge by putting a priority on observations anyone can make. Both New Science and empiricism affirm that occult forces and powers have no place in explanation.

There are parts of the New Science and empiricism that create negative tensions with one another. The New Science, as it was taken up and advanced in the Early Modern period, implies a certain metaphysical view. Namely, that the world is made up of tiny particles, that macro-level properties are to be explained in terms of micro-level properties, and that change occurs mechanistically. This is at odds with “radical” empiricism of Hume’s type, since this kind of empiricism affirms the inappropriateness of such metaphysical theorizing. The Newtonian version of New Science accords well, however, with Humean empiricism.

### Fitting Mind into the Natural World

The question remains about how well each of these combinations of New Science and empiricism succeeds at fitting the mind into the natural world. Hobbes’ explanation of mind as fitting in with the natural world succeeds by essentially leaving out certain properties of mind by construing man as a machine. But Hobbes’ does not explain how content gets into the system, nor does he explain how it could *possibly* get into the system. There is no indication that Hobbes was even aware of this problem. One strategy for avoiding this problem is to say that content just *is* physical or material in one way or another, and hence that it does have the same properties as the natural world, viewed from the appropriate level. With this strategy, we still require an account of how it is that content *is* physical. Without

this, there is no explanation.

When analyzed from the perspective of unit-ideas, Locke's particular constellation of empiricism and New Science creates negative tensions when it comes to fitting mind into the natural world. Locke's orientation *toward* sensation, and thus his approach of looking *internally* for data and evidence, combines with the tenets of the New Science he endorses to produce the various problems and tensions with his account of free will. Some of the most problematic tensions are that he invokes teleology within his explanation of volition. The teleological aspect of his account of volition does not fit within the empiricist-New Scientist framework that is deterministic and seeks to explain phenomena in terms of efficient causation only. Locke's idea of the suspension of the will does not fit with his apparent determinism, which arises from his adherence to the New Science. Contrary to what some of Locke's critics on liberty and volition have argued, these inconsistencies run deeper than a few edits that Locke failed to make. Locke would have been unable to create consistency at the surface without making changes to his more fundamental commitments, and there is no evidence that he was willing to do that. This is a feature of Locke's commitments to the New Science, *as well as* his fundamental orientation *toward* sensation as a foundation for knowledge. These tensions don't arise for Descartes, who is committed to the New Science, but is oriented *away* from sensation as a foundation for knowledge. His orientation away from sensation as a foundation for knowledge allows him the theoretical space to invoke a second ontological category. Thus he posits the *immaterial*, by way of which he explains mentality. In forming a fundamental separation between mind and matter, Descartes is thus able to avail himself of a libertarian account of free volition that is free for the taking. What this helps us to see is that it is the combination of the New Science and empiricism that causes negative tensions when Locke attempts to provide a libertarian account of free will.

Understanding the way that Hume's version of the New Science and his version of empiricism meet to create his broader framework has served to highlight the relevance of the variation that is possible within this constellation of unit-ideas.

Marrying this view of empiricism within the intellectual culture of New Scientism created an important evolution of thought on how mind could be explained. Following Newton in refraining from formulating hypotheses, Hume illustrates what an empiricist-New Scientist framework could be like without metaphysical “baggage.” Insofar as it is satisfying and possible to fit mind into the natural world without attending to metaphysical issues, Hume’s view is consistent.

## Future Directions

In Chapter Two, I briefly discussed the significance of the combination of Hobbes’ empiricism and New Science for his political philosophy. For Hobbes, understanding the nature of mind, and particularly the mind of man is the foundation for his political philosophy. Hobbes does not think, as I gestured at, that reason and passion are at war with another. Mapping out exactly how and where the empiricism and New Science that underpin Hobbes’ view of mind impact his political philosophy is one possible future direction of this research.

Another future direction of this research might involve exploring the value-added concepts that evolved from Locke’s wrestling with the issues of self-observation, volition, and suspension of the will. In particular, the development of Locke’s concept of consciousness as it relates to his empiricism and his New Science commitments could inform how the notion of consciousness has evolved in the literature.

## Conclusion

I began this dissertation lamenting what appears to me to be an unfortunate tendency in contemporary philosophy of mind to treat issues and problems of mind as essentially ahistorical. This is the tendency to regard philosophy of mind as progressed beyond what historical figures have to teach us. There is a general sense of confidence, it seems, that problems of mind can, and will be answered with

enough scientific research. But for reasons I've already mentioned, I don't share this confidence.<sup>29</sup> And looking at problems of mind from a historical perspective engenders precisely the healthy skepticism about this prospect that is needed.

By looking at the way the greatest thinkers of their own time, and more generally of the last several hundred years, struggled with fundamental confusions and problems, we gain a more conservative sense of our own place in history, and in the process of understanding mind. Contemporary thinkers using the same cluster of ideas discussed here may benefit from thinking of this approach as belonging to a lineage of similar attempts to resolve problems, and explain aspects of mind. Doing so engenders a strong sense of humility about modern-day progress. These are virtues of a well-rounded philosopher, but they are also attitudes that orient research questions. Without a historical perspective to draw on, we are limited in what can be imagined, understood, and created.

---

<sup>29</sup> As Hume says, Nothing is more usual and more natural for those, who pretend to discover any thing new to the world in philosophy and the sciences, than to insinuate the praises of their own systems, by decrying all those, which have been advanc'd before them. (Treatise, 3)

## Works Cited

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Volume 1, Ed. Norton & Norton, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007.

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Lisa Pelot

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** Lakehead University  
Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada  
2000-2004 H.B.A.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2004-2005 M.A.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2010-2016 Ph.D.

**Honours and Awards:** Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship  
2012

Dean's Award for Research Excellence, UWO  
2005

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)  
Canadian Graduate Scholarship (Master's)  
2005

**Related Work Experience** Lecturer

The University of Western Ontario  
Gender & Sexuality, 2012

Lakehead University  
Philosophy of the Occult & Paranormal, 2012, 2006  
Introduction to Philosophy, 2012  
Philosophy of Law, 2008, 2006