

# SCIENZA & POLITICA

per una storia delle dottrine



## The Appearance of Power in Hobbes' *Leviathan*

L'apparenza del potere nel *Leviatano* di Hobbes

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### ABSTRACT

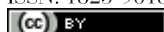
Power is widely acknowledged as central to Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy. There is ongoing debate over whether singular human beings or, instead, plural relationships, are the true source of power. After tracing the debate between the individualist and relationist interpretations, I offer an alternative option which, I argue, can accommodate both the individual and the relation together. Hobbesian power, I contend, is an appearance of a human being as having a means to satisfy his desires and, hence, while power belongs to an individual, it only appears in relation to another who recognizes him as such. In closing, I reflect on the political implications of this notion of power in connection with desire.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Hobbes; Power; Individualism; Desire; Recognition.

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Com'è noto, il potere è centrale nella filosofia politica di Thomas Hobbes. Chi sia la vera fonte del potere, se il singolo essere umano oppure i rapporti al plurale, è tutt'ora oggetto di dibattito. Dopo aver riassunto il dibattito tra le interpretazioni individualiste e quelle relazioniste, propongo una soluzione alternativa capace di tenere insieme sia l'individuo che la relazione. Il potere in Hobbes è un'apparenza di un essere umano dotato dei mezzi per soddisfare i suoi desideri per cui, mentre il potere appartiene a un individuo, appare soltanto in relazione a un altro che lo riconosce in quanto tale. In conclusione, rifletto sulle implicazioni politiche di tale nozione di potere in connessione con il desiderio.

KEYWORDS: Hobbes; Potere; Individualismo; Desiderio; Riconoscimento.



1. *The question: What is the origin of power?*

That a concept of power is foundational for Thomas Hobbes' political thought, both within his account of the frightening State of Nature, as well as the felicitous Commonwealth, is largely uncontested. Disagreement about the content as well as the role of power, however, continues to motivate Hobbes' critics. In the last twenty years, a centuries old debate surrounding the source of Hobbesian power has been renewed. This debate turns on the question of whether power can be attributed to singular human beings who have no relations to one another, or, alternatively, only to men in the plural, that is, to social relationships. This question is important because if the source of power can be traced back to plural relationships, rather than singular individuals, the widespread and deeply-entrenched view of Hobbes' political philosophy as fundamentally individualistic – a reading that has dominated Anglo-American discussions of Hobbes since the publication of *Leviathan* – would need to be reconsidered.

The debate between the relationist and individualist positions presents readers with an unavoidable choice between two alternatives: one must side with either the “individualists” or the “relationists”; one must choose to see power as derived from a natural faculty or a social relation. Indeed, so far, there have been only a few attempts to think about Hobbes' concept of power as covering both individual and relational registers<sup>1</sup>. This article aims to contribute to this underdeveloped third option by giving a reading of Hobbes' concept of power that does not result in either a cul-de-sac or an untraversable gap between his accounts of individual and political power. It does so by showing the recognitive basis of Hobbes' theory of desire and its connection to power.

This article has two parts. In the first, I reconstruct the debate between what I frame as the traditional “individualist” and the critical “relationist” interpretations. In the second part, I aim to bring these two positions together by giving a reading of Hobbes' account of «The Power of Man» in which the individual remains central in a way that is able to accommodate the fundamentally relational dimension of power. The conceptual beginning of Hobbesian power, on my reading, is a singular human being, more specifically, his embodied capacity to «obtain some future apparent good», and wherein «good» is determined by an individual's desire. It is the structure of desire, I argue, that is for Hobbes the crux that binds individuality and sociality. For, as Hobbes shows, desiring individuals do not appear to *themselves*; rather, they appear to someone who perceives them as such. Hobbesian desire, in short, entails a relationship

<sup>1</sup> F. TÖNNIES, *Hobbes and the Zoon Politikon*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971 and S. FROST, *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008 are exceptional in this respect.



between a perceiver and a perceived and hence depends on the social conditions of visibility. I close by returning to Hobbes' concept of power with this interpretation of desire and conclude by arguing with individualists that the source of Hobbesian power is the individual human being. Yet, I propose, the Hobbesian individual should not be understood as isolated from others. On the contrary, insofar as he is seen as desirous, he is in relation to another, so too when he is recognized as powerful.

## 2. *Individualists vs. Relationists*

Hobbes gives what seems to be a straightforward definition of power in Chapter Ten of *Leviathan*: «The Power of a Man, (taken Universally), is his present means to obtain some apparent future good»<sup>2</sup>. From where we stand today, we see that this definition has produced two opposed interpretations.

*Individualists*. The traditional reading claims that power is an effective physical capacity (or “faculty”) that belongs to singular human beings, and not pairs, groups, or plural associations of any kind. Applying a general family name to a number of diverse interpretations which share this basic view of power, we could call this the “individualist” view<sup>3</sup>. Notwithstanding important differences in their respective readings, commentators as diverse as Carl Schmitt (*The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*), Leo Strauss (*Hobbes' Political Philosophy: Its Basis and its Genesis*), Michael Oakeshott (*Hobbes on Civil Association*), Howard Warrender (*The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*), C. B. Macpherson (*The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*), Gregory S. Kavka (*Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*), Thomas A. Spragens (*The Politics of Motion*), D. D. Raphael (*Hobbes: Morals and Politics*) and David Gauthier (*The Logic of Leviathan*), to name but a few, can be identified as members of this interpretative family.

We can see the traditional individualist reading in Schmitt when he explains the Hobbesian covenant as «conceived in an entirely individualistic manner; all ties and groupings are dissolved»<sup>4</sup>. Oakeshott, for his part, asserts his individualist view of the human being as solitary and purely self-contained: «Man lives in the world of his own sensations and imaginations, desires and aversions, prudence, reason, and religion. For his thoughts and actions he is

<sup>2</sup> T. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, edited by N. Malcolm, vol. 2, 3 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2012, X, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Because this view was the standard for most of the twentieth century, an exhaustive analysis of the similarities and differences of all who hold to it is beyond the scope of this short article. For the purpose of recognizing the basic tenets shared by members of this large interpretative family, a careful consideration of a handful of interpretations will suffice.

<sup>4</sup> C. SCHMITT, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 97.

answerable to none but himself. He is conscious of possessing certain powers, and the authority for their exercise lies in nothing but their existence, and that authority is absolute»<sup>5</sup>. Warrender identifies two kinds of individual powers in Hobbes, which he explains as different kinds of effective capacities: physical power, «a capacity to move or alter physical objects in conformity with one's will» and political power, a capacity to move or alter the will or other people to produce results in conformity with our own will<sup>6</sup>.

Although interpretations which take an individualist view differ in many important respects – both with regard to their narrow accounts of original power, as well as their wider accounts of the passage from the State of Nature to the Commonwealth – the claim that power originates from unrelated individuals is often supported by reference to the connection of power and desire in Hobbes' postulation of a «perpetual and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in death»<sup>7</sup>. Individualists explain the connection between power as a means to satisfy ends, and power as a desire, diversely. Hobbes' statement that a desire «for power after power» is «a general inclination of mankind» has led commentators such as Oakeshott and Strauss to see the desire for power as the essence of human desire: «The striving after power [...] is characteristic of the human individual», says Oakeshott<sup>8</sup>. While, for Strauss, the «irrational striving after power is the natural appetite of man as man»<sup>9</sup>.

Not everyone who holds an individualist view casts the desire for power as the “essence” of Hobbesian Man; most see a continuity between desire and power. Instead of reducing power to the desire for more power, some commentators treat “power as a means” and “the desire for more power” as distinct claims. Kavka, for example, begins with a view of power as a human being's physical means to acquire what he or she wants, and goes on to argue that human beings are “forced” to increase their respective powers because one can easily surpass another thanks to the «inflationary and self-reinforcing nature» of what he calls “social” powers – the shifting nature of how individuals view one another's powers<sup>10</sup>. Raphael argues that the “means claim” entails the “desire claim”: «Power is the means to satisfy our desires. Therefore every man naturally desires power and more power»<sup>11</sup>. Gautier employs the language of force, attributing the desire to increase one's power as consequent to the nature

<sup>5</sup> M. OAKESHOTT, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2014, p. xxxiii.

<sup>6</sup> H. WARRENDER, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, p. 312.

<sup>7</sup> T. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, XI, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> Oakeshott has been called «the philosopher of individuality» (P. RILEY, *The Review of Politics*, Special Sesquicentennial Issue, 5, 4/1992, pp. 649-64).

<sup>9</sup> L. STRAUSS, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Kavka employs the potentially misleading terms “natural” and “social” to designate the two types of power an individual can have (See G. KAVKA, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton UP, 1986, p. 95).

<sup>11</sup> D.D. RAPHAEL, *Hobbes: Morals and Politics*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 31.



of human desire itself. Beginning from an image of the human being as a “self-maintaining engine”, Gauthier argues that satisfying the desire to preserve one’s own life entails a concomitant desire for power: «Hobbes’ self-maintaining engines are forced into constant activity by the presentation of ever-new objects of desire and aversion in sense-experience. The world is full of helps and hinderances to their vital motions [...]. Power is the means of success in this unfolding activity. But no finite degree of power can ever ensure success»<sup>12</sup>.

What is important for the current discussion is the connection between power, desire and life. Individualists takes a singular human being as the beginning of Hobbes’ political philosophy and envision him as animated by a desire – most basically, the desire to preserve his life. This human being is understood as a fully independent and self-contained being. Moreover, for many individualists, power is also recognized as the cause of human opposition. Strauss, for one, attributes the “War of all against all” to the individual’s will to power: «The war of every one against every one arises of necessity from man’s very nature. Every man is for that very reason enemy to every man because each desire to surpass the other and thereby offends the other»<sup>13</sup>. So too, for Macpherson: «The capacity of every man to get what he wants is opposed by the capacity of every other: every man’s power is opposed by the power of others»<sup>14</sup>. Gauthier echoes this thought: «men, seeking to strengthen themselves to prevent being overcome, find themselves locked in a race which ensures that most are overcome. The “perpetual and restless desire for power after power” leads only to impotence. And impotence is death»<sup>15</sup>.

While for many individualist interpreters, power is the direct cause of violent conflict, for others it is only indirectly so. Schmitt, for instance, argues that violent conflict is caused by knowledge of the consequences of the equality of power – namely, that «anyone can slay anyone» – which is felt as a perpetual fear of violent death<sup>16</sup>. Kavka also argues that knowledge of power is the cause of war in Hobbes. On his so-called “rational choice” reading, there are two kinds of human beings: dominators and moderates. The former desire power over others for its own sake, while the latter, desire power only as means to secure their own lives and possessions. Power and the desire for power oppose these individuals who not only are unrelated, but care nothing for one another’s wellbeing. Since both are aware that preemption is the most strategic means to

<sup>12</sup> D. GAUTHIER, *The Logic of Leviathan*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2000, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> C.B. MACPHERSON, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, London, Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> D. GAUTHIER, *The Logic of the Leviathan*, p.18.

<sup>16</sup> C. SCHMITT, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 92.

success, anticipation is «the most reasonable course of action»<sup>17</sup>. As he concludes, Kavka makes plain his radically individualist vision of Hobbesian power: «to imagine people in a state of nature is to imagine them in a condition in which there is no power over any pair of them that can reliably protect each from the other by threat of punishment. To say that this state is a state of war of all against all is to say that each individual knows that every other is willing to fight him»<sup>18</sup>.

In sum, although they present diverse interpretations of Hobbes' political philosophy as a whole, in each of the accounts outlined above, power is construed as a physical property which belongs to singular human beings who have no relation to one another. Secondly, power is seen as what opposes individuals. Finally, power and the desire for more power are considered as obstacles to human relationships, if not the mechanistic cause the «War of All Against All».

*Relationists.* On precisely this point, the individualist interpretation has been challenged by those who have noticed its limitations for making sense of what they see as its interpersonal basis. These relationist critics reject the traditional view of power as originating from fully independent human beings. They see interpersonal relations as constitutive of Hobbes' concept of power. For these relationists, there are no powerful individuals in Hobbes, properly speaking, but only power relations. Some relationists offer an alternative image of the State of Nature, depicting it as a dynamic social world in which human beings struggle with others, not only through conflict but also cooperation. Relationists see Hobbesian power as productive rather than merely destructive of human relationships. As with the individualists, there are subclasses within this interpretive class which can be distinguished by the specific solution each gives to explain the relational basis of Hobbesian power. Since the individualist reading has been dominant for the last three and a half centuries, relationist interpretations are far fewer in number. Four will be outlined below: *comparative*, *positional*, *recognitive*, and *prospective*.

*Comparative power:* Gabriella Slomp offers a compelling critique of the traditional individualist interpretation in the context of her account of the centrality of glory, which, she argues, «runs throughout the pages of *Leviathan* like Ariadne's thread and binds the argument together»<sup>19</sup>. Slomp's aim is to defend

<sup>17</sup> G. KAVKA, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> Kavka considers the possibility of the existence of common powers in the state of nature (considered as the powers of families or other groups), but ultimately concludes that the natural condition that Hobbes envisioned is «the extreme one in which no pair of individuals is under a power common to them». It is important to note that Kavka explains common power as a condition in which one or more persons are all *under* the same power, that is, as a vertical relation. He does not consider the possibility of horizontal forms of power in the Hobbesian State of Nature (*ivi*, pp. 88-89).

<sup>19</sup> G. SLOMP, *Hobbes on Glory and Civil Strife*, in P. SPRINGBORG (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 181-98.



what she sees as glory's "relational" basis<sup>20</sup>. To this end, she begins with an analysis of Hobbes' concept of power, which she describes as glory's «original ingredient»<sup>21</sup>. Slomp argues that, despite the "universal" definition of power put forward in *Leviathan*, Hobbes' view of power is consistently relational: «even in his later work», she suggests, «Hobbes spells out clearly that power is an inherently relational concept»<sup>22</sup>. Slomp defends her account by establishing the connection between glory, power and honor and by showing that each depends upon a shared basis: *opinion*. In Hobbes's view, she says, opinion accomplishes two functions: «it gives expression to our evaluation of power and it generates new power»<sup>23</sup>. On account of its basis in opinion, she argues, power is similar to glory and honor; each is grounded in evaluation which requires a comparison between two or more individuals. For, in order to achieve glory, she argues in an earlier work, an individual «needs above all a relationship with others in order to understand who he is and in order to have desires and aims in his life»<sup>24</sup>. Slomp makes plain her anti-individualist position when she defends an image of the Hobbesian individual as «thoroughly interdependent»<sup>25</sup>. Against the traditional view of Hobbesian man as «psychologically self-contained, autonomous, independent, self-sufficient», Slomp argues that man is a deeply social creature who cares about his relations to others<sup>26</sup>. Using the glory-seeker as a paradigm, she portrays human beings as primarily concerned not with power in itself but with the power they have vis-à-vis one another: «A plentiful Eden enjoyed in isolation is not what the Hobbesian glory-seeker wants. He desires dominion, success, prestige and control, not over animals but over human beings»<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, the desire for glory has conditions of interdependency, she says.

*Positional powers:* Like Slomp, Philip Pettit defends a relational interpretation of Hobbesian power by emphasizing its comparative basis. Within his argument that, in Hobbes, language is what «provides the magic that allows us to jump the limitations of the natural, animal mind», Pettit argues that human desire not only concerns the private, but also the public. Human beings are driven to concern themselves with one another, he argues, because resources are limited. What matters most for human beings who have the ability to reflect and reason, on Pettit's reading of Hobbes, is not simply having resources, but

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ivi*, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> *Ivi*, p. 184.

<sup>24</sup> *Ivi*, p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> G. SLOMP, *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi*, p. 109.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

having more resources than others: «Where there is competition for resources the important thing for each will not be the absolute quantity of resources commanded but the extent to which those resources enable the creature to outdo its competitors»<sup>28</sup>. For Pettit, the condition of limited resources produces the desire for more resources or, more specifically, the desire to be recognized as having resources – as more powerful than others. Pettit concludes that Hobbesian power, like glory and honor, is essentially comparative:

«And it is only human beings, of course, who can become aware of these observations, since only they will be able to compare themselves with others for the resources they each command, and only they will be able to see that the important thing for each will be to have more resources than the other – greater power»<sup>29</sup>.

What is meaningful about power, moreover, what motivates human beings to seek it, Pettit argues, is not the desire to satisfy needs, but to be positively regarded by others: «Human beings are not just moved by the private passions that dominate other animals but by desires of a positional kind – in particular, desires for the enjoyment of a position of superiority in relation to others on matters involving power and the acknowledgement of power»<sup>30</sup>. Human power is essentially social in that unlike other animals, we are not satisfied with having sufficient resources to satisfy our desires, but are driven to appear as having more resources – that is, as more powerful – than others. Just as the “positional desire” that motivates it, power primarily concerns an individual’s social standing. «Power, honor, and glory are each essentially positional, and unlike equality, for example, they are asymmetrically positional. Where one succeeds in gaining such a good, therefore, others are bound to fail»<sup>31</sup>. On Pettit’s reading, in short, power is relational in that it originates in a social position – and, hence, is located in the way human beings comparatively recognize one another.

*Recognitive powers:* The desire to be recognized is central to another interpretative subclass which, similarly to the two positions above, attempts to de-center the individual by showing the connection between social passions and power as situated in an interpersonal struggle. Barbara Carnevali takes this approach, arguing that «one cannot claim [of the Hobbesian model of human nature] that its center of gravitation is the individual»<sup>32</sup>. Rather, she suggests, Hobbes privileges the social over the individual:

«Hobbes reflects on human nature essentially as a political philosopher, whose psychological interests are always subordinate to the collective interest, and in particular to the good of social stability: in view of the primary objective of peace, the crucial

<sup>28</sup> P. PETTIT, *Made with Words*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2008, p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.





problem reveals itself to be inter-subjectivity, the relationships that men undertake with each other, the difficult interaction of their personalities»<sup>33</sup>.

Since what is primarily at stake for Hobbes, according to Carnevali, is a specific social organization, he is most concerned with collective interests and intersubjective relationships rather than with the individual as such. Following in the same vein as the two positions outlined above, Carnevali explains her view of the relational basis of power by turning to Hobbes' account of glory. She begins by acknowledging Hobbes' individualism as centered on the principle of *conatus* understood as an individual's desire to preserve his own life and to attain power. From this account of desire, she distinguishes two kinds of passions, those of "utility" and those of "glory"<sup>34</sup>. The former find satisfaction in the material world; whereas the latter turn toward the "symbolic" or "spiritual" domain and are satisfied by an imaginative feeling of being esteemed by others<sup>35</sup>.

For Carnevali, glory entails a form of knowledge which requires «symbolic confirmation» and, hence, «depends on the attitude and behavior of other people and therefore it involves relations of interdependence»<sup>36</sup>. Glory comes to be the dominant passion in Hobbes, she argues, when it «superimpose[s] itself [...] on the *conatus*», with the effect that «the need for social recognition becomes the key to social existence»<sup>37</sup>. It is within this paradigm that Hobbesian power comes to appear as a social standing, Carnevali proposes. Moreover, it is a specific social passion, and not pure self-interest, that fundamentally shapes individual desire, and which gives rise to the interpersonal. As she writes, «Hobbes makes a very selective choice, exclusively on *one* dimension of the need for recognition: that which expresses symbolic demands tied to the strategic competition for power: *the desire for honor or prestige*, with all its subtleties and derivations, as pride, vanity, consideration, fame, the search for distinction»<sup>38</sup>. The desire for honor and prestige gives rise to conflict as the others upon whom we depend for this recognition can fail to give it to us – indeed, they want the same recognition from us that we seek from them and, hence, the satisfaction of our desire is unlikely without a struggle. Born out of the drama that unfolds when human beings attempt to achieve acknowledgment

<sup>33</sup> B. CARNEVALI, *Power and Recognition: the Hobbesian Model*, presented at the workshop on "Recognition: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Research", European University Institute, Florence: <http://www.sifp.it/pdf/Power%20and%20Recognition.pdf>. p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> «Glory, in this context, plays an archetypical role from the moment that it presupposes an inter-subjective definition of what the individual considers most precious, that is, knowledge of his own value: the image that the Hobbesian consciousness has of itself does not arise in a spontaneous manner from internal feeling rather, it has to be mediated by other consciousnesses» (*ivi*, p. 9).

<sup>36</sup> *Ivi*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 8.

of their superiority from one another, power cannot be traced to independent individuals: it lies first and foremost in the interpersonal.

*Prospective cause:* Samantha Frost takes an original approach when she elaborates power as «prospective cause». Frost aims to dislodge the traditional view of Hobbesian individual as «a solitary and rapacious warrior driven by self-interest to pursue power relentlessly and to destroy anyone who stands in the way». Frost agrees with other relationists that power cannot be explained simply as the effective capacities of independent belligerent human beings. However, unlike those commentators outlined above, Frost does not seek to defend her view of power by showing its logically necessary *comparative* dimension, or by looking for some *social* passion within man, or even by tracing it an interpersonal relation. Frost situates her solution outside of human beings altogether, positing power in the conditions for action in general. Frost begins by criticizing the individualist interpretative tradition for overlooking the “spectral” concept of power as “prospective cause”, which she describes as «the collection of causes that together will produce an act in the future»<sup>39</sup>. Since the conditions for future action are necessarily shared, human beings must think about one another when they think about future action: «The fact of interdependence – the fact that we are contributing causes to one another’s actions means that to think about power is to take into account our future interdependence»<sup>40</sup>.

Frost’s argument for power as prospective cause is complex and can be presented only in outline. Through a reading of *De Corpore*, she argues that action involves both an “active” agent and a passive “patient”<sup>41</sup>. The active element is the body which produces the motion, the passive is the body which is moved. Moreover, when examined from a broad perspective, everybody is both agent and patient since, according to Hobbes’ materialism, all events are connected in a physical chain of cause and effect. Frost sees the terms “cause” and “effect” as identical to “power” and “act” in Hobbes’ thought, save that the latter pertain to the future, while the former pertain to the present. For this reason, every event, she argues, «is produced by and contributes to manifold and complex causal chains»<sup>42</sup>.

Drawing upon her reading of power as «the efficient and material causes that will coalesce to occasion an act», she argues that we must reject the traditional individualist view of Hobbesian power as «a characteristic or accident of something or someone»<sup>43</sup>. Once we accept this idea of power as a situation in

<sup>39</sup> S. FROST, *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker*, p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>42</sup> *Ivi*, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 137-8.



which a body finds itself, not only must we reject the idea of power as belonging to distinct individuals, but we must also give up the idea that an individual is the source of her action: «[Hobbes] suggests that we eschew the tendency to think of acts in terms of an agent whose energy and power are both self-originating and the single cause of an act. Instead, Hobbes pushes us to think of acts in terms of the broad conditions for their occasion»<sup>44</sup>. As she elaborates her original interpretation of power as the conditions for action, Frost contests the traditional individualist image of power as purely destructive: «In Hobbes' telling the pursuit of power does not necessarily or only tear us apart. It also brings us together»<sup>45</sup>. And, not only is power productive of new relationships, it also depends upon an established social world: «the pursuit of power depends upon and produces a form of sociality characterized by mobile relations of hierarchically patterned interdependence»<sup>46</sup>. Furthermore, like other relationist critics, Frost attempts to establish the necessity of a social world by arguing that certain practices such as glory and honor require intersubjective evaluations, and hence, relations: «Depicting power again as a matter of the conditions for action, he observes that individuals evince a keen awareness of the significance of their visibility and of public opinion and for people's perceptions of their power»<sup>47</sup>.

While going further than any of the other commentators in excavating how deep the structure of relationality runs in Hobbes, Frost's position, in my view, goes too far in de-emphasizing the role of the individual. She admits that Hobbes considers individuals as the efficient cause of their actions, and even addresses the importance of the expressivity of the human body for the evaluation of power, but still concludes that Hobbesian power is more accurately described as «people power»<sup>48</sup>. On first glance, this may seem to reconcile power's individual and relational dimensions. Yet she concludes with a decisively anti-individualist claim, proposing that Hobbes' enacts a “double displacement of the individual” by «focusing our attention on the collective»<sup>49</sup>. What this claim reveals is Frost's assumption that the individual and the collective can be placed on the same ontological playing field, so to speak. At the opening of her analysis of power, Frost pushes aside the question that has captivated interpreters of the *Leviathan* for so long, namely, how and why human beings would agree to give up their natural liberty and obey a sovereign authority. In her view, Hobbes was not as interested in explaining this as «trying to come to grips with

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, p. 140.

<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, p. 141

<sup>46</sup> *Ivi*, p. 140.

<sup>47</sup> *Ivi*, p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> *Ivi*, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> *Ivi*, p. 156.

how we should understand the workings of political power and authority once they have been denaturalized and secularized and are seen as the product of human artifice»<sup>50</sup>.

Although I agree that Hobbes was attempting to give a justificatory explanation of the legitimacy of authority under the new scientific paradigm and that he rejects any naturalistic or theological explanations as sufficient, I do not think that the question of how men make themselves into a Commonwealth can be so easily pushed aside, nor do I think that the individual is displaced in Hobbes' text<sup>51</sup>. On my reading, contracts are the "artificial beginnings" of the Hobbesian Commonwealth and contracts are made by individuals, and the question of how and why individuals make these contracts and thereby begin to lay the foundation for the commonwealth is central to *Leviathan*. Determining the basis of Hobbes' conception of power is central to understanding his answer. And, as I will argue below, there is a way to understand Hobbesian power as beginning from singular human beings which does not oppose them to one another, but expresses a more basic relationality which is capacious enough to accommodate both the natural inevitability of the "War of All against All" and the possibility of making artificial peace.

Hobbes' theory of power is widely acknowledged as the conceptual pivot at which his "philosophy of man" turns into a "philosophy of men" and thereby opens onto a properly "political" philosophy. How one comes down on the question of power – casting it as a natural faculty which belongs to a singular human being or, alternatively, as essentially socially constituted, shapes how one views the passage from the State of Nature to the Commonwealth. For, if Hobbesian power requires a pre-established social world, then the question long-considered central to the *Leviathan* must be reformulated. Rather than asking whether and why fully independent creatures come to establish peaceful relations with one another, we would need to ask why and how human beings come together to establish *new* and *different* social conditions? Because individualists and relationists tend to have one-sided conceptions of the source of power, when confronted with the passage from the "Natural Condition of Mankind" to the institution of the "artificial" Commonwealth, each confronts a hermeneutical problem. Since individualists understand power as originating from fully independent human beings, they must explain the rise of that "common power" in purely artificial terms, that is, in terms which break the radically individualistic and purely mechanistic understanding of life in the State of Nature. Relationists, on the other hand, conceive of power as socially constituted from the

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> Indeed, we might ask, displaced from where? Hobbes' political thought is widely known as one of the first instances in which the individual occupies a central position in the history of political thought.



start and so they must account for Hobbes' clear distinction between "natural" and "artificial" conditions, as well as the explanatory role of pacts and contracts. In what follows, by tracing Hobbes' concept of power through desire, I will propose a different picture of the relationship between individuality and relationality that does not face these explanatory limits.

### 3. *The Power of a Man*

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes analyzes various kinds of powers: «Natural power», «Instrumentall Power», «power imagined», «riches, knowledge and honor», which are each «several sorts of power», the «Power of a Commonwealth», the «just power or authority of a Sovereign», not to mention the long list of micropowers which includes «reputation», «good success», «nobility», «eloquence», «form» and «the arts of public use». Although power appears in many forms, does Hobbes conceive of power as having an original form and, if so, does it belong to a singular individual or, rather, a plural relation?

Hobbes puts forth a "universal" definition of power in the Tenth Chapter of *Leviathan*: «The Power of a Man (taken universally) is his present means to obtain some future apparent Good»<sup>52</sup>. Power, in this definition, is described as the power of «a man». Moreover, that the singular human being is the intended subject of power is indicated when Hobbes defines "the power of a man" as «his present means to obtain some future good». The possessive "his" indicates that the "present means" *belongs* to this particular man and not to any other man. Hobbes could have defined power merely as "present means", making room for both singular individuals and plural relations, but he did not. Although the power of a man could turn out to have social conditions of possibility, and so the question cannot be resolved with this brief analysis alone, it seems clear that when Hobbes defines power as «the power of a man», the intended subject is a singular human being. Power appears as the power of some *one*.

Secondly, the singularity of the subject of power is affirmed in the next passage when power is distinguished into two kinds: «Originall» and «Instrumentall». The former is described as «the eminence of the Faculties of Body, or Mind», while the latter are «those Powers, which, acquired by these or by fortune, are means and Instruments to acquire more»<sup>53</sup>. Instrumental powers are connected to original powers in that the former are obtained by way of the latter (or by "sheer luck"). Instrumental powers are those through which a man obtains *more* power than he originally appeared to have. Hence, original

<sup>52</sup> T. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, Chapter X, p. 132.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*.

powers have a temporal precedence over instrumental powers. Before going on to consider the important point that some – but, importantly, not all – of the instrumental powers Hobbes lists involve social relations (such as “reputation” and “friends”), it is crucial to note that instrumental powers depend upon original powers. In other words, the distinguishability of original and instrumental powers depends upon there being a subject who is recognized as having original power. And this subject is singular: “a man”.

Thirdly, when Hobbes elaborates the “original” or what, in the next passage, he describes as the “natural powers” as «the eminence of the Faculties of Body, or Mind», the individual once again appears central<sup>54</sup>. Natural powers of a man, Hobbes says, are those which are “of the faculties”. What are faculties? Faculties generally indicate the mental and or physical aptitudes and endowments of a singular subject, not a plural relation<sup>55</sup>. As mental or bodily faculties, they are powers which reside in or otherwise belong to a subject endowed with a body and mind, in this case, an individual human being. Notwithstanding the important term “eminence” which requires an evaluation and, hence, an evaluator, for its appearance, (as each of the relationists outlined above argued) it seems that natural power is attributable only to human beings in the singular. A person can have more or less power than another, to be sure. As Hobbes goes on to say, to cite one of many examples of social powers that Hobbes describes in *Leviathan*: «what quality soever maketh a man beloved or feared of many; or the reputation of such quality, is Power; because a means to have the assistance and service of Many»<sup>56</sup>. Moreover, one can acquire power purely on behalf one’s relations with others (as Slomp, Pettit, Carnevali and Frost convincingly argue). And, although social and material conditions contribute to the appearance of power, the simple point remains true: whether it appears in either its “natural” or “instrumental” permutations, power is the appearance of a singular human being, as regards «his present means to obtain some good».

From these considerations, we can conclude that there are good reasons for taking this definition as the starting place of our analysis and maintaining that the basic claim of the individualist position is correct: even if it is also correct to insist on its relationality by pointing to its comparative dimension, or the necessity of pre-established social world for the existence of social powers such as honor and glory. Power can belong to individuals and to pairs or groups in a way that does not deny that the individuals are the basis for the realization of these plural relations. In the next passage, he explains:

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> Admittedly, Hobbes allows for corporate bodies which are made up of singular individuals, and he describes the corporate body of the commonwealth as having both mental and physical powers, but this body has artificial, not only natural, conditions of possibility.

<sup>56</sup> T. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, VI, p. 78.



«The greatest of human powers is that which is compounded of the powers of most men, united by consent, in one person, natural or civil, that has the use of all their powers depending on his will; such as is the power of a Commonwealth: or depending on the wills of each particular; such as is the power of a faction, or of diverse factions leagued»<sup>57</sup>.

When Hobbes explains the act of “compounding powers”, he says that these powers are made out of the wills or inclinations of “particular” human beings. Man in the singular and not men in the plural are the “beginnings” of compounded power (this crucial point will be discussed further later).

Beyond Hobbes’ universal definition of the power of a man, his elaboration of original powers as those adhering in the body and mind, and his insistence on individuals as the basic unit of compounded power, there are other reasons for emphasizing the centrality of the individual which have to do with his notion of the origin of good. When we take into account what Hobbes says about the source of the good, we can see that the individual is central to his account of power in a twofold sense: first, power is the present means of one who has an ability to *obtain future goods*. Even if an individual instrumentalizes his friends to obtain what he wants, it is ultimately he who is evaluated as having the means do so. Secondly, it is the individual who *determines* what is good, according to Hobbes:

«But whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good [...] For these words of good, evil, and contemptible are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man, where there is no Commonwealth or, in a Commonwealth, from the person that representeth it»<sup>58</sup>.

The desires of individuals and the goods which these desires establish are integral to Hobbes’ definition of power as «a man’s present means to obtain some future apparent good». The individual is fundamental to Hobbes’ concept of power in that it is his desire that determines the “apparent good”. Hobbes says that until human beings have made artificial pacts and contracts and authorized an artificial sovereign person to represent them as a unified “people”, they remain a multitude of powerful individuals driven to obtain disparate goods.

For these reasons, it would be misleading to call Hobbesian power “people power”, as Frost proposes. Again, in his “universal” definition of the power of a man, Hobbes describes it as «his means to obtain some future apparent good». And until human beings have authorized a sovereign to represent them, good is determined by each individual alone; there are no naturally shared goods.

<sup>57</sup> *Ivi*, X, p. 132.

<sup>58</sup> *Ivi*, VI, p. 78.

Neither “a people” nor any kind of plural relation can be the original subject of power. To repeat, insofar as it involves a good, and goods are determined by individuals, which Hobbes clearly states, then power must begin with particular individuals. To be sure, Hobbes explicitly mentions that human interests can be aligned, as when they make themselves into what he calls “leagues” and “factions”, but he is careful to distinguish what he calls «Private bodies regular [...] that unite themselves into one person representative, without any public authority at all»<sup>59</sup>. However, he is careful to distinguish this kind of plural relation from the “true unity” which is achieved when human beings agree to give up their natural liberty and submit to a sovereign whom they authorize to represent them as a people<sup>60</sup>. It is only in the latter context, and not the former, where a “common good” can be established.

Given that it involves an apparent good, and the individual is the basis of good, then there is no way to make sense of Hobbesian power without taking account of his more basic definition of good, and hence of that which determines good: namely, desire. The desire which determines the good in Hobbes (and which is integral to his concept of power) is that which is seen as belonging to a particular man, and not to men in the plural. At the same time, when “taken universally” by Hobbes, power is the *appearance* of a human being as able to obtain some good and, hence, it must also be understood as requiring some basic relationship between two or more human beings. This is not only because it has a comparative or evaluative requirement, as has been demonstrated by each of the relationists cited above. The appearance of a man as able to obtain some good is necessarily built upon a more basic appearance, namely, the appearance of desire which, I will now turn to argue, has a relational structure.

#### 4. *Desire*

In this section, I show how desire is the key concept for comprehending the way power begins with particular embodied individuals and yet depends upon a form of relation. I do this by looking closely at the concept of endeavor (*conatus*) and desire, arguing that desire has a condition of visibility and thus entail a relationship between one who sees an individual as desirous and one who is seen as such.

<sup>59</sup> *Ivi*, XXII, p. 368.

<sup>60</sup> «This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner as if every man should say to every man: I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition; that thou give up, thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner. This done, the multitude so united in one person is called a Commonwealth; in Latin, *Civitas*. This is the generation of that great Leviathan, or rather, to speak more reverently, of that mortal god to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defence». T. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, XVII, p. 260. This passage will be returned to below (Part 3).





In order for the “power of a man” to appear, there are some requirements: first, there needs to be a human being who appears *able* to obtain some “future apparent good”. In other words, entailed in the human appearance of power is the appearance of desire, or better, of a desirer. (As we have seen, it is an individual’s desire that originally determines what is good). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes gives an account of desire in the context of a larger discussion of what he calls “voluntary motion”. He opens this discussion by elaborating two ways animals move:

«There be in Animals two sorts of Motions peculiar to them, one called Vitall; begin in generation and are continued without interruption through their whole life; such as are the course of the Bloud, the Pulse, the Breathing, ... &c; to which Motions there needs no help of the Imagination. The other is called Animall motion, otherwise called Voluntary motion; as to go, to speak, to move any of our limbes, in such a manner as is first fancied in our minds»<sup>61</sup>.

The terms “vital” and “voluntary” indicate two interrelated ways in which animals move. Vital motions are those which “begin in generation” and continuously unfold until the organism’s death. For the continuations of these motions, no cognitive effort is needed: the vital body, in other words, seems to move on its own accord. These are the motions that sustain the life of the animal. Not only can an animal move in this “vital” way, but it can also move itself in a particular way or “manner”. And when an animal moves itself a particular “manner”, its movement appears to be guided by a thought, imagination or “fancy”<sup>62</sup>. Vital and voluntary motions are the two ways that a human being moves. Vital and voluntary motions are distinguishable on account of having different origins, although both are movements of an animal body. Vital motions begin at the time of the generation of that animal. Voluntary motions, alternatively, have beginnings which are not only distinct from these vital motions, but also from one another: each is «first fancied in our minds». We can distinguish one voluntary motion from the next by seeing the moving body as moving in one way and then in another going slowly and then going quickly, for example. It is the diversely mannered nature of the movements that allows us to see the voluntary motion as voluntary, that is, as guided by some «internall beginning»: «And because going, speaking, and the like Voluntary Motions, depend always upon a precedent thought of whither, which way, and

<sup>61</sup> *Ivi*, VI, p. 78.

<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, Hobbes does not distinguish the human animal from other animals in his account of voluntary motion: rather, he implies that there is a continuity between these motive domains. Voluntary motion is a physical capacity. Yet, even if Hobbes allows for continuity between the two motive registers, when he describes voluntary motion as “to speak”, (a capacity which, in *Leviathan*, he ascribes to human beings alone) or «to move any of *our* limbes, in such a manner as is first fancied in *our* minds», we can be assured that the human animal is the focus of the analysis. Hobbes in other words is interested in the vital and voluntary motions of human being in order to explain their “interior beginnings” as “the passions”, and then to connect the passions to their spoken expression.

what; it is evident that the Imagination is the first internall beginning of all Voluntary Motion»<sup>63</sup>.

Hobbes takes care to emphasize his materialist point that both kinds of motions are purely physical: «Although unstudied men, doe not conceive of any motion at all to be there where the thing moved is invisible; or the space it is moved in, is (for the shortnesse of it) insensible; yet that doth not hinder, but that such Motions are»<sup>64</sup>. The voluntary is characterized as a purely physical motion; there is no divine free will, or any other transcendent source of motion, here. When we move ourselves in the way that Hobbes calls voluntary motion, our movement *appears* to have come from some thought or imagination, whereby this appearance is manifest in the variable manner in which our body moves. It may seem a simple point, but it is crucial to keep in mind that although Hobbes is outlining two kinds of motions, he is describing the movement of one body. Although they have distinct beginnings in that vital motions need not be directed by the mind, these two kinds of motion are physically connected in so far as it is the same body that moves vitally and voluntarily. Whenever one «goes, speaks or moves one's limbs in a way that is fancied in one's mind», blood is circulating through one's veins.

Now, when Hobbes elaborates the voluntary motion of human beings as expressive of what that human being desires (or alternatively fears) in the next passage, he emphasizes that desire, exactly like vital and voluntary motions, originate in an individual human body. And, as just as the former, the latter require more than one human being to appear. Indeed, if we pay close attention to Hobbes' language, we can see that both endeavor and desire have a condition of visibility. "Endeavor" is the name that Hobbes gives to the "small beginnings" of voluntary motions which will go on to appear as desire: «These small beginnings before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called Endeavor»<sup>65</sup>. He continues,

«This Endeavour, when it is toward something which causes it, is called Appetite, or Desire, the latter being the general name, and the other oftentimes restrained to signify the desire of food, namely Hunger and Thirst. And when the Endeavour is fromward something, it is generally called Aversion»<sup>66</sup>.

An endeavor, as Hobbes presents it here, is a physical movement which begins within an individual human body and which gives rise to a visible action. Endeavor and desire are two sides of the same movement – its origin and its expression. When that movement is seen as moving toward something in the world, it appears as "desire". When the endeavor, is away from something, that

<sup>63</sup> T. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, VI, p. 78.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.



movement is «called aversion». Endeavor, to repeat, is the beginning of human desire and it is not purely invisible, but goes on to appear as a “visible action”. When it appears in a visible action, an endeavor takes on a new face: it appears as *desire*. In other words, *desire* is the apparent movement, endeavor is the movement *before* it «appears in walking speaking, striking, and other visible actions». Or, put inversely, when it appears in «walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions», endeavor is recognized as *desire*<sup>67</sup>.

Hobbes’ aim in invoking endeavor in this moment, as I see it, is to argue that, although our voluntary motions might seem to spring from an immaterial source, since they arise in such a way that makes it impossible to see precisely where they originate, and so quickly that we do not feel their origins, they are *purely* physical motions which originate in an individual body and go on to appear as the “visible actions” of that body.

Hobbes’ account of desire enters precisely at this juncture as what allows the purely physical movements within an individual body to appear as a visible action. Later in this chapter, Hobbes links the most basic bodily movement – the self-moving movement of limbs – to desire, stating that «Life itself is but a motion and can never be without desire»<sup>68</sup>. What is crucial is that desire is more than mere life in the sense that the ability to move oneself about in the world is not yet to move in a way that appears voluntary or desirous since in order to move voluntarily or desirously one must be seen not only as moving in a particular manner, but also as orienting oneself toward objects or away from others. Interestingly, in Hobbes, the shift from moving about (“life”) and moving about in a way that expresses desire or fear is the appearance of the movement as expressive of desire or fear and nothing more. This is consequent of Hobbes’ materialism: since Hobbes’ rejects the idea that there is a transcendent or immaterial source of voluntary motion – such as a divine will or a disembodied mind – that allows us to distinguish our vital from voluntary motions, for him, it is a physical appearance – the way in which these motions are recognized and responded to by others – that makes this difference.

The condition of visibility of endeavor as an individual’s desire is significant in that it shows that it requires a relationship with another human being: in order to appear as a visible action, desire must appear to someone who recognizes it as such. This implies that Hobbesian desire, in general, and not only the particular social passions such as glory and honor, have this cognitive feature. Indeed, the condition of visibility – that it appears as a visible action – makes possible what Hobbes might call the “readability” of an individual desire,

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

not only as *desirous* – as signifying wanting in general – but as expressive of something in particular that that individual wants and, thereby, manifests what she takes as good. The “good” of power is also visible, described as some «future apparent good». And, it is only on account of the more basic appearance as a moving body who is oriented toward particular goods – as a desirer – that can also appear as more or less capable of acquiring those goods which she appears to desire – in a word, as *powerful*.

##### 5. *Power Reconsidered*

Returning to the tenth Chapter of *Leviathan*, we can now offer a new solution to the question posed at the beginning: is the source of power in an individual or in a relationship?

When Hobbes defines the “power of a Man” as his present means to obtain some future apparent good, I have tried to show, he is claiming that power begins with and not before individual human beings. These powerful individuals, however, do not appear entirely on their own but only in relation to another who sees them as such – that is, as more or less capable of obtaining their respective future apparent good. When Hobbes goes on to distinguish “the power of a Man” as “natural” and “instrumental”, without question he is acknowledging that the eminence of natural powers, such as extraordinary «Strength, Forme, Prudence, Arts, Eloquence, Liberality and Nobility», some of which depend upon specific social conditions being in place, and that can be employed to achieve a greater capacity to “obtain some future apparent good”.

Although the employment of instrumental powers of obtaining more power is helpful – as Hobbes says, «for the nature of Power is, in this point, like to Fame, increasing as it proceeds» – instrumental power, nevertheless, is seen as belonging to a particular human being – as his capacity to obtain some apparent good. Even as power is augmented by relationships, and has social conditions and forms, power *originates* from a particular human being. My point is that, regardless of whether individuals can derive their power from relationships with one another, or that social conditions are necessary for their appearance – and Hobbes clearly acknowledges that they can in either of the larger “natural” and “commonwealth” conditions that he distinguishes, as testified by the various social desires (e.g. “indignation”, “benevolence”, “good will”, “ambition”, “glory”, etc.) and social powers (e.g., “reputation”, “nobility”, “honor”, etc.), elaborated in Chapter Six and Chapter Ten of *Leviathan* respectively – power originates from a particular human being.

Recall that at stake in this question is how to adequately account for the passage from the State of Nature to the Commonwealth. As I have indicated,



the relationalists were able to properly explain this. Having concluded that power arises in the individual but enters into relationality through the conditions of visibility, we are now prepared to explain the emergence of the state of nature and the making of the first pacts that lay the foundation of the commonwealth.

The relationships between perceived and perceived entailed in power, and, more basically, in desire are too weak on their own to count as “true” or lasting bonds in Hobbes’ sense of the term. True relationships only appear if they are made and they cannot be made until human beings make pacts and authorize a sovereign to enforce them through law. The relational aspect of desire highlighted above – that desire entails a physical encounter between a perceiver and a perceived – is not sufficient to explain the emergence of the state of nature or the making of the first pacts that lay the foundation of the commonwealth, but it is necessary. With endeavor and desire thusly interpreted, as visible actions which entail a relation between a perceiver and a perceived, we can make sense of the two great confrontations staged in the *Leviathan* – namely, war and peace – as two distinct ways that human beings can take up and respond to their respective desires.

Also recall that, according to Hobbes, the conflict which occasions the possibility of making pacts is called the «War of all Against all». Because he has also explained the various causes that produce conflict between pairs and groups, he is careful to highlight that this war is not a battle between two opposing parties but of «every man against every man»<sup>69</sup>. This is the conflict of individuals’ desire – indeed, of individuality made and constrained by desire alone: «if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot enjoy, they become enemies»<sup>70</sup>. There can only be a conflict of this kind if desire appears at the perceptible level, as expressed by individuals. «The War of all Against All» is the logical consequence of desires which know no limits save for the bodily form of each individual. Moreover, in order to attempt to «endeavor to destroy or subdue one another» individuals must see one another as a potential enemies and hence must read this desire in their movements. Endeavor, in its appearance as the will to contend by battle, is what drives each individual into conflict with every other.

The «War of All against All», as Hobbes presents it, is a conflict in which each man confronts every other. So too in each of the scenes which lay the foundation for the Commonwealth:

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*, XIII, p. 196.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

«The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort as that by their own industry and by the fruits of the earth they may nourish themselves and live contentedly, is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and every one to own and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgements to his judgement»<sup>71</sup>.

The individual is essential in each of the moments outlined above: the war of all against all, the making of the first pacts, and all that is involved in the authorization of a sovereign representative person. This suggests that whatever the explanatory power of social passions such as glory and honor may have for grasping the causes of conflict or coordination – and I take it that each of the relationists above are correct, these are passions and powers which depend upon relationships and an established social world – it is the power of individuals and not pairs, groups, or plural associations of any kind which is central to explain the political community that Hobbes calls the Commonwealth.

Although a careful analysis is required before making any conclusions about the possible consequences of this revised image of the Hobbesian “man of power” as the appearance of an individual made by way of a relation, we now have the resources to understand the emergence of the «War of all against All», as well as the subsequent passage from the State of Nature to the Commonwealth, in a new way. By showing the connection between desire, and finally, power as an internal physical connection that begins from one living human body while nevertheless standing in relation, we can uphold the individualist view, seeing singular human beings as the origins of power, but we can do so in a way that does not foreclose the possibility of natural human sociality. We can think conflict and the making of lasting contractual agreements together, that is, as two ways in which human beings can take up their desires and respond to one another. Hobbesian Man is a singular individual to be sure, but one who is able to be recognized by another as desirous or fearful and, as such, is already in relation.

Indeed, it might be this very feature of life that allows human beings to fashion and refashion their relations with others. And, perhaps, it is on account of seeing one another as desirous, powerful creatures that Hobbesian men can not only make relationships with one another, but can also alter their conditions, moving themselves out of the State of Nature and into an “artificial” Commonwealth by making pacts and actually hold themselves to agreed upon rules or laws. For, it is the same individuals who recognize one another as more or less

<sup>71</sup> *Ivi*, XVII, p. 260.



capable of obtaining their “future apparent goods” – as powerful – that go on to make that «the Greatest of human Powers [...] which is compounded of the Powers of most men, united by consent, in one person, Naturall or Civill, that has the use of all their Powers depending on his will; such as is the Power of a Common-wealth»<sup>72</sup>. With a concept of power that is able to accommodate an individual in a relation, the possibility of explain this transition as the passage from one form of recognition to another is opened in a new way.

<sup>72</sup> *Ivi*, X, p.132.