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Exploring the Complexity of our Nature: Revisiting Hobbes's Perception of Human Nature

Hooijkaas, Nigell

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*Exploring the Complexity of our Nature: Revisiting Hobbes's
Perception of Human Nature*

Readings in the History of Political Thought

Nigell Ethan Hooijkaas s2835584

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Instructor: Dr. M.B. Longo

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Introduction

The study of human nature has been a fundamental area of research through the centuries, influencing disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, psychology and political science. Many marvelous minds have devoted a part of their life attempting to answer the question: what is our true human nature? One of those minds is the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who has portrayed his perception of human nature in his revolutionary work 'Leviathan'. This perception formed the basis of his theories on the social contract and the need for a strong sovereign to maintain order within the commonwealth. Today, these theories continue to shape our political structures and thinking, which again became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. This tumultuous period in human history presented a unique challenge to political authorities around the world, as they seek to balance public health concerns with economic considerations and individual freedoms. In the wake of the pandemic, governments had to respond to the spreading of the virus. These responses to COVID-19 reflect Hobbes's idea of a strong central authority, as governments have used their powers to enforce curfews, mandate masks and require vaccinations. These measures were infringing individual freedoms and have been met with resistance. However, they have been justified by the need to protect citizens and maintain social order. The continuing discussion about the appropriate balance between individual rights and the power of a sovereign is an example of how Hobbes's ideas, written in *Leviathan*, continue to influence contemporary political systems and beliefs. However, there has been quite some critique on Hobbes's perspective of human nature. Some describe the view of Hobbes as simplistic, suggesting that human behavior is far more complex and nuanced, while others suggest that he portrays a too pessimistic view of human nature. With this in mind, the research question I am going to answer in this paper is: Is Hobbes's perception of human nature accurate? This research aims to explore the accuracy of Hobbes's perception of human nature, drawing insights from scientific research. By examining psychological experiments such as the Milgram experiment, the Robbers Cave experiment and the Asch conformity experiments, we gain some valuable insights into human nature. Based on these insights I argue that Hobbes oversimplifies the complexities of human nature and portrays a too pessimistic view of it. Humans are capable of cooperative behavior, trust, empathy, and moral sentiments. The understanding of human nature as predominately driven by self-interest, competition and prone to violence overlooks these aspects. Also, the experiments challenge Hobbes belief for the need of political authority by showing peaceful social cohesion can exist without it and by demonstrating the dangers of authority. With this

research I want to start shaking the foundation of Hobbes's arguments, what will result in the need to rethink our current political structures and values. This paper will start with the literature review. Here I will provide multiple perceptions on human nature through the centuries with an specific focus on Hobbes. This section creates space to contribute to the discourse surrounding Hobbes's conception of human nature and its wider implications as scholars, by criticizing Hobbes, have opened the door to a reassessment of Hobbes's understanding of human nature by analyzing psychological experiments. In my main argument, I am going to analyze the Milgram experiment, the Robbers cave study and the Asch conformity experiments. With this analysis I am going to argue that Hobbes oversimplifies the complexities of human nature and portrays a too pessimistic understanding of human nature driven by self-interest, competition and prone to violence. In my discussion I will revisit the literature review and demonstrate how the argument presented addresses these debates by challenging Hobbes' perception of human nature and offering alternative perspectives. In my conclusion I will provide a summary and wrap up my argument.

Literature review

Understanding the concept of human nature has been a subject of discussion through the centuries. ‘What is our true human nature’ is a fundamental question that has implications for various fields. By exploring what drives our behavior, we can develop a deeper understanding of the individual and how he/she interacts in certain situations. With this in mind, the overall theme of this research lays in the question ‘What is our true human nature’, which will then slowly transition into my more specified research question: ‘Is Hobbes’s perception of human nature accurate?’ These questions open the door to delve into the contrasting perspectives and theories put forth by scholars through the centuries. This research aims to shed light on the theories surrounding human nature through a comprehensive review of existing literature and by analyzing the results of multiple psychological experiments. By narrowing the focus towards Hobbes’s perception of human nature and his relevant arguments, such as the need for political authority, we will gain insights into the discussion surrounding his beliefs. By exploring the debates of human nature and by critically evaluating Hobbes’s perception in light of scholarly interpretations and scientific experiments, this research aims contribute to the discourse on human nature and to shake the foundation of Hobbes’s arguments and point out the implications it brings for his broader political theory.

Unveiling the Debates: Exploring Diverse Perspectives on Human Nature

The concept of human nature encompasses the general psychological characteristics, feelings, and behavioral traits that people are said to have naturally. The concept has its origins in ancient Greece, where Aristotle developed the most influential theories. According to Aristotle humans are social, political and rational animals that are naturally inclined to form governing bodies as they facilitate the flourishing of people. He writes ‘*the ultimate object of the state is the good life*’ and ‘*It is founded on a natural impulse, that towards political association*’ (Aristotle, n.d., p. 31). For Aristotle, our true human nature involves the cultivation of virtues and the pursuit of moral excellence. Our actions and behavior are driven by our ultimate goal to achieve ‘eudaimonia’, which can be translated to ‘the good life’. Also in Chinese philosophy the concept of human nature has been theorized, mostly by Mencius. While Mencius’ theory of human nature has been interpreted in various ways, the most widely supported interpretation is that everyone is born with innate seeds to do good (Hwang, 1979, p. 207). These seeds then must be developed or cultivated to reach its full potential. Goodness is not in ourselves, but in our seeds. Human nature is like fire. When you don’t start the fire, nothing happens. However, when you start the fire and guide it through its course, its

potential is massive (Hwang, 1979, p. 207). Also Christian theology has examined the concept of human nature, what they recognize as initially created in the image of God but corrupted by Adam's fall into sin (Hoekema, 1986, p. 141). This fall created the so called 'original sin', which is the doctrine that suggests that all humans are born with a tendency to sin. However, theological discussions on human nature emphasize that through regeneration and transformation, involving a radical change, human nature can be conformed to the image of Christ (Hoekema, 1986, p. 101). The concept of human nature became really significant, when the era of the early modern philosophers arrived. Starting with Francis Bacon's two accounts of human nature: a medical-physical account of the composition and operation of spirits specific to people and a behavioral account of the character and activities of individual persons (MacDonald, 2007, p. 287). While Bacon did not provide an answer to the question of our true human nature in the sense of a fixed essence or inherent characteristics, his scientific line of thinking inspired René Descartes and David Hume. In his *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes writes *'as regards reason or sense, inasmuch as it is the only thing that makes us men and distinguishes us from brutes, I should like to hold that it is to be found complete in each of us'* (Descartes, 1637, p. 7). Here Descartes claims that reason is a human characteristic that distinguishes us from animals and is shared by all people naturally. For Descartes, the mind and its ability to reason represents the essence of our human nature. He views people as rational individuals with the capacity to self-reflect and think logically. His understanding of human nature was shaped by this emphasis on rationality and the power of the human mind. Hume challenges Descartes emphasis on reason as he believes this is not enough. Firstly, Hume argues that reason does not explain cause and effect; nor provides an account of personal identity (Moorcroft, 1997, p. 15). Secondly, Hume writes *'and no truth appears to me to be more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as man'* (Hume, 1739, p. 226). Here he argues that reason can be found in animals and is not the trait that distinguishes us. Hume proposes that not reason, but sympathy is common to all humans and the basis of our morals and nature. Sympathy influences our morals and drives our behavior (Moorcroft, 1997, p. 16). Hume not only critized Descartes, but also went after Hobbes's perception of human nature. As Hobbes is the main character in this thesis, I will now discuss his perception and his relevant arguments extensively. After which I will continue to discuss other perspectives of human nature, while examining these in relation to Hobbes's conception.

Hobbes's Leviathan and the Controversial Concept of Human Nature

With his famous words *'the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'*, Hobbes's Leviathan revolutionized the field of political science (Hobbes, 1651, p. 84). In Leviathan, Hobbes justifies the existence of a strong political authority through his understanding of the concept of human nature. He argues that without a strong sovereign men would live in what he refers to as *'the state of nature'*, which is a hypothetical scenario where there is no sovereign power that can enforce criminal laws and effectively regulate people's behaviors. He describes the consequences as: *'Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 84). For Hobbes, war extends beyond physical combat and encompasses a prolonged period characterized by constant uncertainty or as he puts it *'the nature of war, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 84). The condition of war does not follow that men are perpetually engaged in violence against each other, but that the absence of a strong sovereign does mean that there remains a permanent threat for such events (Heller, 1980, p. 25). This theory grounds its foundation in Hobbes's perception of human nature. In chapter XI of Leviathan, Hobbes writes *'in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power; but because he cannot assure the power and the means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 66). This citation highlights Hobbes's view that humans have a relentless desire for power and seek to acquire more power to secure their well-being in the state of nature and thus suggests that humans are driven by self-interest into a competitive setting. We see this understanding also in chapter XIII, where he writes *'So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 83). This citation further reinforces Hobbes's perception of human nature as driven by self-interest and competition. Hobbes identifies three primary causes of quarrel in the nature of man: competition, diffidence, and glory. Competition arises in the violent pursuit of resources and advantages. Diffidence refers to the inherent distrust and suspicion humans have towards each other, which arises due to the competitive environment. Lastly, the pursuit of glory motivates individuals to seek recognition, status, and

reputation. The competitive nature of individuals is also discussed in chapter X, where Hobbes writes that *'The greatest of human powers, is that which is compounded of most men'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 58). This citation reflects Hobbes's understanding that human nature is competitive. By emphasizing the importance of collective power, Hobbes implies that human nature is competitive. Various scholars have offered interpretations of Hobbes's conception of human nature. For example in his interpretation of Hobbes, Ahrens Dorf suggests that humans are driven by their constant awareness of death (Ahrens Dorf, 2000, p. 580). Because of the consciousness of mortality, human nature is constantly influenced by a pursuit of self-preservation. In this interpretation we see an emphasis on self-preservation, but this also implies the competitive and self-interested nature of people as everybody is focusing on what is best for them. Schwitzgebel explore Hobbes's treatment of passions in chapters VII-IX of Leviathan. He also suggests that Hobbes views people as self-interested by nature (Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 159). He writes that for passions that most would perceive as unselfish, Hobbes gives them an egoistic touch. For example, honor is seen as a sign of power rather than a moral virtue, repentance is viewed as a passion driven by the realization that an action deviates from desired ends, and charity is attributed to the recognition of one's own power to fulfill desires (Schwitzgebel, 2007, p. 159). In this interpretation we again see an emphasis on the self-interested nature of people, but how then does human nature lead to the condition of war? According to Hobbes, *"nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of the body and mind"* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 82), implying that individuals possess similar capabilities and potential for overpowering one another. One can be stronger or smarter than the other, but *'the weakest has the strength enough to kill the strongest'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 82). Hobbes then argues that when *'two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 83). This means that the equality among individuals can cause genuine hostility, when they desire the same thing that cannot be enjoyed by both. The outcome of this situation is fear and uncertainty, as individuals are worried about being dominated by others. In such conditions, where people are driven by their self-interest and fear, individuals engage in a perpetual struggle for power. This struggle manifests itself in a constant state of war characterized by uncertainty or as Hobbes poetically portrays it *'For as the nature of foul weather, lieth not in a shower or two of rain; but in an inclination thereto of many days together; so the nature of war, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the know disposition thereto'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 84). It is important to emphasize the distinction between the "conditions" of the state of nature, characterized by uncertainty and a lack of authority, and the "nature" of people. Hobbes argues that the natural

conditions, shaped by the equality and the self-interested nature of competitive individuals, lead to the state of war. The absence of a strong sovereign exacerbates the competitive and conflict-prone tendencies of human nature as there is no '*common power to keep them all in awe*' (Hobbes, 1651, p. 84). Hobbes perspective of human nature has been a subject of much debate and criticism. Hume criticizes Hobbes's idea of human nature as predominately driven by self-interest and competition. He argues that humans possess a natural sympathy towards others, which forms the basis of our morals and drives our behavior (Moorcroft, 1997, p. 16). While Hume acknowledges that self-interest and passions are part of human nature, he argues that they are balanced out by moral sentiments. Hume's perspective provides a more optimistic perception of human nature, highlighting the moral capacities and social dimensions that shape our behavior. Another notable critique comes from Locke, who also disagreed with Hobbes's belief that individuals predominantly act self-interested and violent. Locke argues that humans are social beings that are capable of reasoning. He states that '*We are all a sort of chameleons, that still take a tincture from things near us*' (Locke, 1693, p. 83). With this Locke points out that we adapt to the people around us, which is a form of acting socially. Rousseau's conception of human nature both criticizes as partially aligns with Hobbes. Firstly, Rousseau argues that the negative traits Hobbes and other scholars attribute to human nature are actually products of society (Garrard, 2014, p. 71). He paints a pretty positive picture of humans in their natural state, referring to them as 'noble savage'. According to Rousseau, in the natural state, individuals live a peaceful live isolated from one another. However, when disaster occurs, people are forced to cooperate and act socially, which they are capable of doing. With this in mind, Rousseau introduces a new concept: self-love, amour de soi-même, and vanity, amour propre (Garrard, 2014, p. 72). Amour de soi-même is a form of self-love that exists in the state of nature, when individuals have little awareness of others. Contrary, amour propre emerges when individuals become aware of others. This drives individuals to seek recognition from others, leading to competition and social inequality. This situation resembles Hobbes's description of the state of nature as a war of every man against every man. Rousseau thus argues that human nature in its natural state is peaceful, but the emergence of society can lead to the development of competition and inequality.

"Human Nature Revisited: Challenging Hobbes in the Modern Context"

The debate regarding Hobbes conception of human nature is still going, with multiple scholars arguing that Hobbes oversimplified human nature (Villarreal, 2020, pp. 21-24 & Kavka, 1983, pp. 307-308). By portraying a hypothetical scenario involving a desert environment where water is a scarce resource, Villarreal wants to demonstrate the complexity of human nature as it can be influenced by external factors. He asserts that in this scenario water is highly desirable for both short term and long term needs. However, if it rains early and there is plenty of water available, this might affect the decision to store water for future needs. With this example, Villarreal shows how the desirability of an object can be affected by its circumstances. In response to this, Hobbes might argue that his idea of human nature is a result of observing the behavior of himself and the people around him. In the hypothetical situation where there is no sovereign power to enforce laws and maintain order, Hobbes beliefs people act predominantly in their self-interest, basing this assumption on his observations. Therefore, Hobbes might argue that his view is not an oversimplification, but rather a realistic assessment of human behavior in a specific context based on his observations. However, this section server a greater purpose than highlighting the potential inaccuracy of Hobbes's perception on human nature. It creates space to contribute to the discourse surrounding Hobbes's conception of human nature and its wider implications by examining its accuracy and drawing insights from scientific research. By challenging Hobbes's idea, scholars have opened the door to a reassessment of Hobbes's understanding of human nature. Psychological experiments, such as the Milgram experiment, the Robbers Cave experiment, and the Asch conformity experiments, provide valuable insights into human behavior that challenge Hobbes's perception. These experiments portray a more positive image of human nature, highlighting our social nature and capacity for trust and cooperation. Furthermore they demonstrate the complexity of our nature, which is influenced by various social and situational factors. Moreover, these experiments also challenge Hobbes's argument for the necessity of political authority. By showcasing that peaceful social cohesion can reliably exist without a common authorithy and revealing the dangers associated with authority, they prompt a reevaluation of our current political structures and values. In summary, by analyzing human nature from a more scientific approach, this research will contribute to the ongoing discourse and provides a platform for rethinking our political structures and values.

An analysis of psychological experiments

Thomas Hobbes believes that human beings are self-interested, violent and competitive by nature. This idea of human nature serves as the foundation of Hobbes's argument that in the state of nature life will be miserable and the only possible outcome is a war of every man against every man. Over the centuries, these arguments about human nature have had not only a profound influence on the field of political science, but also on broader conceptions of society. Therefore it is very important to critically analyze the Leviathan, while paying enough attention towards other theories of human nature. I aim to explore more scientific based researches about human nature, to be specific psychological experiments, that demonstrate the true nature of humans. By discussing the results of these experiments, I will show that Hobbes his view on human nature was too pessimistic. An example of this can be found in The Milgram Experiment conducted by Stanley Milgram in 1963.

Obedience to Authority: An Analysis of the Milgram Experiment and Its Implications for Hobbes's View of Human Nature

Largely inspired by the World War Two crimes of the Nazis and their justifications for acts of genocide during the Nuremberg War Criminal trials, Stanley Milgram focused on the study of obedience and the psychology of social influence. Throughout history soldiers have followed orders, even when these orders were to slaughter innocent civilians. Many of us are horrified by these crimes and find it unimaginable that one can actually perform these criminal actions on another human being. With this in mind, the purpose of The Milgram Experiment was to research how far people would go in obeying an instruction if it involved harming another person (Milgram, 1963, p. 371). The procedure of the experiment was the same for every participant. Each time a male participant was paired with another person. The participant would be the 'teacher' and one of Milgram's confederates would be the 'student' (pretending to be a real participant). The teacher would be taken into a different room that had an electric shock generator with some clearly marked voltage levels that range from 15 (slight shocks) to 450 (life threatening shocks). In the context of a 'learning experiment' set up to study the effects of punishment on memory, the teacher is commanded to administer increasingly more intense shocks to the student, even to the point of reaching the level marked 'Danger: Severe Shock'. An important thing to mention is that the experimenter beforehand declared:

'Although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage' (Milgram, 1963, p. 373). The teacher is instructed to administer a shock each time the student

gives a wrong response and also is told to ‘move one level higher on the shock generator each time the learner flashes a wrong answer’ (Milgram, 1963, p. 374). What are the results of this experiment? Well the results shocked the world. 14 Yale senior, who had read a detailed description of the experiment, predicted the outcome and came to a class mean of 1.2% of the participants would continue through to the most potent shock available. In practice this percentage is around 65% and no subject stopped prior to administering a shock of 300 volts (Milgram, 1963, p. 377). With these results, Milgram concluded that people are likely to obey orders given by an authority figure, even to the extent of inflicting severe pain on someone innocent. In his article ‘The Perils of Obedience’ he wrote *‘Stark authority was pitted against the subjects’ strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and, with the subjects’ ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not. The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation’* (Milgram, 1974, p. 62). Milgram’s conclusion has been subject of ongoing discussions, as scholars have offered alternative interpretations and critical questions regarding the nature of disobedience. One of the main criticisms scholars had on the experiment, was the fact that almost all participants were men (gender bias). However, based on later experiments and studies on obedience, there has been concluded that there are no differences in gender regarding obedience (Blass, 1999, p. 968). Moreover, Haslam and Reicher criticizes Milgram’s conclusion by challenging the belief that people conform passively to both the instructions and the role that authorities provide, however malevolent these may be. Based on empirical work, they propose that the conformity observed in the Milgram experiment is not merely a result of obedience to authority but *‘that individuals’ willingness to follow authorities is conditional on identification with the authority in question and an associated belief that the authority is right’* (Haslam & Reicher, 2012, p. 1). They believe that the conformity observed in the Milgram experiment can be seen as a manifestation of individuals aligning their actions with the social norms established in this particular social setting. Comparing the results, conclusions and interpretations from the Milgram experiment with Hobbes’s perception of human nature brings us some interesting insights. First of all, Hobbes writes *‘And from this diffidence of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himself, so reasonable, as anticipation; that is, by force’* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 83). In this passage Hobbes suggests that due to a lack of trust among man, people are inclined to take preemptive actions, which can lead to acts of violence as a means of self-preservation. Hobbes argues that humans act out of self-interest and self-preservation, believing that individuals would resort to violence to protect

themselves in a state of nature. While the results of the experiment support this belief on the first glance, a deeper dive tells us a different story. The fact that 35% of the participants defied orders to continue, because of the pain they did not want to conflict on the other, demonstrates that violence is far from our nature. This is also evident in the fact that many participants were reported experiencing intense stress. *'I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse'* (Milgram, 1963, p. 377). If people are not violent by nature, there is no need to secure oneself, as there exists no danger to secure oneself from. Secondly, the experiment showed that people are prone to follow orders even when those are against ones natural instincts. Hobbes justifies the existence of a strong sovereign in order to prevent chaos. However, the Milgram experiment shows the negative influence an authority figure can have on one's social behavior. If we see the experimenter as the sovereign and the dynamics between the teacher and the student as social interaction within a commonwealth, one could argue it would be best to remove the experimenter/sovereign from his position of power. The teacher performed corrupted actions only because the experimenter kept pushing him to continue with sentences such as *'You have no other choice, you must go on'* (Milgram, 1963, p. 376). The experiment suggests that the authority figure is the root of the problem, not its solution. Another psychological experiment that has been widely used in the scholarly field of social psychology is the Robbers Cave experiment conducted in the mid-1950's by Muzafer Sherif.

From 'Nasty, Brutish, and Short' to Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment and Hobbes's Beliefs about Human Nature"

The Robbers Cave study was a series of three field studies on intergroup conflict in the United States of which the last one is the most debated. The experiment went as following; twenty two twelve-year-old boys attending summer camp were randomly assigned into two camps without knowledge of the existence of the other camp. Also, the participants were not personally acquainted with others prior to the experiment. In order to promote the establishment of group formation (social norms, group structure etc.) the two camps were kept separate in the first week. The pursuit of common goals during several activities led to the attachment of the boys to their groups. After the first week, Sherif brought the two groups into contact with each other and made them compete in games and challenges. Furthermore, in order to increase competition between the groups, situations were created whereby one group

gained at the expense of the other (e.g. one group was delayed getting to dinner and when they arrived the other group had eaten their food). During the second week, the investigators not only observed in-group favoritism, but also a rise in aggression and genuine hostility between the groups (Banker et al, 2000, p. 99). Inter-group dynamics entailed verbal insults, stealing from the other groups and ravishing each other properties. In the third week, Sherif and his colleagues made the two camps do activities, which were not competitive. However, these did not change the relations of the groups. Only after introducing a series of superordinate goals – goals that made it necessary for the groups to work together – the nature of the relations between groups positively changed. While the experiment has been criticized for its ethical implications, it remains a landmark study that has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of group behavior and conflict. How does this relate to Hobbes? First off all, the Hobbesian state of nature often is interpreted as a social dilemma in a group context, where each member of the population is confronted with two choices, typically called “cooperate” and “defect” (Alexander, 2001, p. 169). Each individual benefits more when everyone chooses cooperate than when everyone chooses defect, but each individual benefits more from choosing defect than to cooperate. While Hobbes does not state that cooperation is impossible, he argues that it cannot reliably be guaranteed. Individuals are uncertain of the intentions of others, and as *‘the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest’*, this uncertainty creates fear (Hobbes, 1651, p. 82). In order to overcome this fear, man’s best response is to launch a preemptive attack (Chung, 2015, p. 488). The dominant strategy in the Hobbesian state of nature is to defect (Vanderschraaf, 2019, pp. 197-199 & Chung, 2015, p. 488). People will choose violence rather than to cooperate. A first glance at the experiment is in line with this theory. We see competition, violent behavior and aggression. Furthermore, the results of this experiment suggest that when people have to compete for scarce resources there is a rise in hostility, which is in line with Hobbes argument that scarcity of resources in the state of nature plays a crucial role in shaping human behavior and can lead to conflict. However, taking a deeper dive into this experiment challenges the idea that people will choose violence by nature. In the first week of the camp friendships were made and the boys were said to be cooperating harmoniously. Only when the two camps were put in a competitive setting and manipulated by the investigators, the boys became hostile to the other camp (De Correspondent, 2017). The competition, aggression and violence did not arise spontaneously, but were constructed and encouraged by the staff. Also, the Robbers Cave experiment was a series of three field studies, but when you do research of it, you almost only come across the events happened at the third field study. Why is that? Sherif said that the

previous two attempts were ended because of unfavorable conditions. Psychologist Gina Perry, who produced a documentary about the Robbers Cave experiments, discovered the real story. The boys from the two camps in the previous field studies had become such good friends that it was impossible to separate them (De Correspondent, 2017). Even when staff members started destroying tents and stealing property, the two camps cooperated and helped each other. The results of the Robbers Cave study suggest that even in a competitive setting, people will more often than not choose to cooperate as this is beneficial for the entire group. The urge to help another is in our nature. Secondly, the Robbers Cave experiments demonstrates the power that group categorizations have on the perception of both in- and outgroup members. Group categorization positively influenced the perception of ingroup members (creating friendships), but negatively influenced intergroup dynamics. When the boys were asked to identify their friends, 90% were from their current cabin (Alexander, 2009, p. 179). This together with the tendency for people to prefer members of the ingroup over the outgroup when distributing goods, makes an commonwealth by institution seem implausible (Alexander, 2009, p. 179). It does not seem likely that individuals, as Hobbes suggests, would give up a part of their freedom to a person or group of people consisting solely out of outgroup members. Thirdly, Hobbes provides a series of arguments in Leviathan, which suggest it is extreme unlikely that human beings will live in security and peaceful cooperation without the presence of a strong and centralized political authority. His most basic argument is threefold. First, Hobbes argues that people will violently compete to secure the basic necessities of life. Second, Hobbes argues that people will fight each other, because of fear (diffidence), as to ensure personal safety. Third, Hobbes writes that people will seek glory, both for its personal benefit and for the protective effects power brings. The textual evidence for this argument can be found in chapter XIII, where Hobbes writes that '*in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory*'. However, the Robbers Cave experiment challenges the belief that people need political authority to ensure reliable cooperation. For example, a breakdown in the water resources of the two camps, required the boys to pool information in order to determine the source of the problem. This superordinate goal induced cooperation between the groups, demonstrating that individuals can reliable self-organize and cooperate with each other without the need for a central authority to impose control (Alexander, 2001, p. 179). Another famous psychological experiment that provides us with another peak into the complexity of human nature is the Ash conformity experiments conducted by the social psychologist Solomon Asch in the 1950s.

Straying from Self-Interest: Analyzing the Asch Conformity Experiments in Relation to Hobbes's Views on Human Nature

The Asch conformity experiments were a series of experiments conducted by Solomon Asch in which he aimed to investigate the extent to which individuals conform to group pressure. While conformity was a heavily researched topic during these days, Asch was convinced that previous studies were either simply documenting a Hawthorne effect, in which participants give the answer they believe the research want, or had a wrong methodology, such as Sherif's conformity experiment where there was no correct answer to the ambiguous autokinetic experiment. Asch devised an experiment, whereby the right answer was very obvious. The participants were placed in a group setting and were shown a line segment. They were then asked to match it with the line most similar in length from a set of lines. In reality, all but one of the participants were confederates and they were instructed to give the wrong answer on 12 out of the 18 trials and always starting with 2 right answers. Each person in the room had to state aloud their answer one by one and the real participant sat each time at the end of the row. Asch also had a control group, where there were only real participants. The purpose of this experiment was clear: would the participant conform to the view of the majority, while the majority is clearly wrong? What were the results? First off all, in the control group the error rate was less than 1% (Asch, 1951, p. 181). However, in the critical group only around a quarter of the participants had a perfect score. The others conformed at least once, while nearly a third of the people conformed to the majority in more than 50% of the critical trials. After the experiment, the participants were interviewed, which revealed two main reasons for why some participants conformed. There was a normative influence, which meant that people wanted to fit in with the group and were not confident enough to go against the group. One participant that conformed 11/12 times said: *'I suspected about the middle – but tried to push it out of my mind'* (Asch, 1951, p. 182). There was also a informational influence. Some believed the group was better informed than themselves. One participant stated: *'If they had been doubtful I probably would have changed, but they answered with such confidence'* (Asch, 1951, p. 183). While Asch concluded that the experiment had demonstrated powers of independence in a group setting, most scholars have portrayed his findings as evidence that individuals are weak in a group setting (Friend, Rafferty & Bramel, 1990, p. 30). An example of this comes from Stotland and Canon. They said *'This self-doubt, and its complement perception of the group as expert, may become so great that the individual may begin to conform to the group, to publicly state for example, that a line that is shorter than another is*

really the same length. In fact, Asch found that over 30 per cent of the subjects' answers were erroneous ones in agreement with the group' (Stotland & Canon, 1971, p. 426). How does it relate to Hobbes? First, the experiment challenges Hobbes idea that humans are primarily driven by self-interest and inherently competitive. In Leviathan, Hobbes argues that humans have a relentless desire for power and seek to acquire more power to secure their well-being in the state of nature and thus suggests that human are driven by self-interest into a competitive setting (Hobbes, 1651, p. 66). However, the results of the Asch conformity experiment suggest that individuals have a desire to fit in and conform the group. By conforming, participants prioritized social harmony over their personal beliefs, which challenges Hobbes's assumption that humans are driven by self-interest and competition. It suggests that there are factors, such as social acceptance or the maintenance of group cohesion, that go beyond self-interest, which play a significant role in shaping ones behavior. Furthermore, I believe that the results of the Asch conformity experiment creates an implication for Hobbes's argument about the state of nature. Hobbes writes in chapter XIII that *'In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'* (Hobbes, 1651, p. 84). This citation captures Hobbes's depiction of the state of nature and his argument that in the absence of authority, individuals experience continual fear. However, the Asch conformity experiment challenges the argument about continual fear in the absence of authority by demonstrating individuals' willingness to conform to group opinions to prioritize social harmony. Social cohesion can exist without a sovereign and there is no reason to belief that a state of continual fear is the only outcome. Of course, Hobbes could argue that a quarter of the participants did not yield, which can be used as evidence that people are self-interested. However, I would argue that this just shows the complexity of human nature. The difference between the findings of the critical groups and the control group support my first two claims and the fact that some still did not yield, shows how complex behavior is. Things as social pressure, mood, confidence and many other factors can influence behavior, making it very hard to correctly frame human nature. This would support the argument that Hobbes oversimplified human nature in his Leviathan.

Discussion

The study of human nature has been a fundamental area of research through the centuries, influencing disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, psychology and political science. In this discussion, I will revisit the literature review and demonstrate how the argument presented addresses these debates by challenging Hobbes' perception of human nature and offering alternative perspectives. After that I will focus on the importance of the argument and discuss why it matters. Lastly, I will suggest further avenues of research. The literature review provided in this research contains multiple perceptions on human nature through the centuries. Aristotle views humans as social and political animals, driven by a pursuit of the good life. Mencius argues that everyone is born with innate seeds to do good and these seeds must be developed or cultivated to reach its full potential. Christian theology recognizes the corruption of human nature but holds the potential for transformation. Descartes highlights reason as our distinguishing trait, while Hume argues it is sympathy that predominantly shapes our behavior. Hobbes than portrays human nature as self-interested, competitive, and prone to violence as a tool for self-preservation. This view has been subject of debate as other scholars, such as Hume, Locke and Rousseau challenge the idea of human nature as predominantly driven by self-interest, emphasizing moral sentiments and social behavior. The argument presented in this paper challenges Hobbes's perception of human nature by drawing valuable insights from psychological experiments. The experiments demonstrate the complexity of human nature as it is influenced by various factors beyond self-interest and competition, such as obedience, group dynamics and peer pressure. Regarding the importance of this research, the arguments made challenges the simplistic understanding of human nature portrayed in Leviathan. Furthermore, the argument presented in this research contributes to the ongoing discourse of human nature as it provides alternative perspectives on human nature. Aligning with views from Aristotle, Mencius and Hume, the experiments demonstrate the aversion against violence and the potential of humans to cooperate, to trust one another and to prioritize social harmony in order to establish a peaceful social cohesion.. Furthermore, because my research challenges Hobbes and shakes the foundation of his argument about the need for political authority, this research has the potential to influence the way we our current political structures and values. This research thus opens the door for a deeper analysis of our human nature and social or situational factors that can influence it. I would suggest specifically a deeper dive into examining external and internal factors that stimulates cooperation, trust and peaceful cohesion without the need for a strong sovereign.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, I will provide a summary and wrap up my argument by answering my research question: Is Hobbes's perception of human nature accurate? After analyzing the Milgram experiment and comparing the results with Hobbes's perception of human nature, we got to some interesting conclusions. First, Hobbes suggested in Leviathan that people will resort to violence as a means of self-preservation. He implied that people are prone to violence, but the Milgram experiment demonstrated that the opposite is true. Participants did not want to inflict pain on others, suggesting that we are not violent by nature. Secondly, the experiment showed that people are prone to follow orders even when those are against one's natural instincts. Hobbes justifies the existence of a strong sovereign in order to prevent chaos. However, the Milgram experiment shows the negative influence an authority figure can have on one's social behavior and thus shows the dangers that come with Hobbes's solution. After the analysis of the Robbers Cave study I found that even in a competitive setting, people will more often than not choose to cooperate as this is beneficial for the entire group. The urge to help another is in our nature. This challenges Hobbes's idea that cooperation cannot be reliably guaranteed without a strong sovereign, because of fear and uncertainty. Secondly, the Robbers Cave experiments demonstrate the power that group categorizations have on the perception of both in- and outgroup members. This together with the tendency for people to prefer members of the ingroup over the outgroup when distributing goods, makes a commonwealth by institution, as Hobbes suggested, seem implausible. Thirdly, the Robbers Cave experiments challenge the belief that people need political authority to ensure reliable cooperation. They show that superordinate goals can induce cooperation between the groups, demonstrating that individuals can reliably self-organize and cooperate with each other without the need for a central authority. Finally, the Asch conformity experiments challenge Hobbes's idea that humans are primarily driven by self-interest and inherently competitive as they showed the natural desire to fit in the group and prioritize social harmony over self-interest. Thus, is Hobbes's perception of human nature accurate? No, I would argue that Hobbes oversimplifies the complexities of human nature and portrays a too pessimistic view of it. Humans are capable of cooperative behavior, trust, empathy, and moral sentiments. The understanding of human nature as predominately driven by self-interest, competition and prone to violence overlooks these aspects.

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