Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

FEAR AS THE DETERMINING FACTOR IN HUMAN LIFE

Hobbes maintained that the constant back-and-forth mediation between the emotion of fear and the emotion of hope is the defining principle of all human actions. Either fear or hope is present at all times in all people. In a famous passage of *Leviathan*, Hobbes states that the worst aspect of the state of nature is the “continual fear and danger of violent death.” In the state of nature, as Hobbes depicts it, humans intuitively desire to obtain as much power and “good” as they can, and there are no laws preventing them from harming or killing others to attain what they desire. Thus, the state of nature is a state of constant war, wherein humans live in perpetual fear of one another. This fear, in combination with their faculties of reason, impels men to follow the fundamental law of nature and seek peace among each other. Peace is attained only by coming together to forge a social contract, whereby men consent to being ruled in a commonwealth governed by one supreme authority. Fear creates the chaos endemic to the state of nature, and fear upholds the peaceful order of the civil commonwealth. The contract that creates the commonwealth is forged because of people’s fear, and it is enforced by fear. Because the sovereign at the commonwealth’s head holds the power to bodily punish anyone who breaks the contract, the natural fear of such harm compels subjects to uphold the contract and submit to the sovereign’s will.

GOOD AND EVIL AS APPETITE AND AVERSION

Hobbes believed that in man’s natural state, moral ideas do not exist. Thus, in speaking of human nature, he defines good simply as that which people desire and evil as

Sources:
http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/inequality/themes.html
that which they avoid, at least in the state of nature. Hobbes uses these definitions as bases for explaining a variety of emotions and behaviors. For example, hope is the prospect of attaining some apparent good, whereas fear is the recognition that some apparent good may not be attainable. Hobbes admits, however, that this definition is only tenable as long as we consider men outside of the constraints of law and society. In the state of nature, when the only sense of good and evil derives from individuals’ appetites and desires, general rules about whether actions are good or evil do not exist. Hobbes believes that moral judgments about good and evil cannot exist until they are decreed by a society’s central authority. This position leads directly to Hobbes’s belief in an autocratic and absolutist form of government.

**ABSOLUTE MONARCHY AS THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT**

Hobbes promoted that monarchy is the best form of government and the only one that can guarantee peace. In some of his early works, he only says that there must be a supreme sovereign power of some kind in society, without stating definitively which sort of sovereign power is best. In *Leviathan*, however, Hobbes unequivocally argues that absolutist monarchy is the only right form of government. In general, Hobbes seeks to define the rational bases upon which a civil society could be constructed that would not be subject to destruction from within. Accordingly, he delineates how best to minimize discord, disagreement, and factionalism within society—whether between state and church, between rival governments, or between different contending philosophies. Hobbes believes that any such conflict leads to civil war. He holds that any form of ordered government is preferable to civil war. Thus he advocates that all members of society submit to one absolute, central authority for the sake of maintaining the common peace. In Hobbes’s system, obedience to the sovereign is directly tied to peace in all realms. The sovereign is empowered to run the government, to determine all laws, to be in charge of the church, to determine first principles, and to adjudicate in philosophical disputes. For Hobbes, this is the only sure means of maintaining a civil, peaceful polity and preventing the dissolution of society into civil war.
Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1712 - 1778)

Rousseau attempts to demonstrate that modern moral inequality, which is created by an agreement between men, is unnatural and unrelated to the true nature of man. To do this, he begins in the imaginary state of nature, a condition before society and the development of reason. Rousseau examines man's physical and mental characteristics, and finds him to be an animal like any other, motivated by two key principles: pity and self-preservation. Man in the state of nature has few needs, no idea of good and evil, and little contact with other humans. Nevertheless, he is happy.

However, man does not remain unchanged. The quality of perfectibility allows him to be shaped by, and to change in response to, his environment. Natural forces such as earthquakes and floods drive men into all parts of the globe, and force them to develop language and other skills. As men come into contact more frequently, small groups or societies start to form. The human mind begins to develop, and as man becomes more aware of others, he develops a series of new needs. The emergence of reason and society are related, but the process by which they evolve is a negative one. As men start to live in groups, pity and self-preservation are replaced by *amour propre* (a sense of one's own worth; self-respect), which drives men to compare themselves to others, and to need to dominate others in order to be happy. At the same time that human reason develops, and enlightenment emerges, man is corrupted and undergoes a decline from his original condition. Rousseau is clear that this corruption is both a mental and a political process. Mental corruption occurs as man becomes subject to a new system of needs and to the operation of *amour propre*. His corruption is evident in the attention he now pays to the opinion of others, his loss of basic pity for other creatures, and his general dissatisfaction with life. The operation of *amour propre* additionally makes him inauthentic, or untrue,
both to himself and to others. He cannot behave in an authentic way towards his fellow citizens, because he is continually thinking about how to deceive and dominate them.

Need is the key diving force behind modern society. Needs result from the passions, which make men desire an object or activity. In the state of nature, needs are simple and restricted to those that are necessary to human survival: food, rest and sex. As societies and cooperation develop, however, men have more leisure time to fill. The result is a development of more and more needs, which gradually become necessities. Rousseau means things like socializing, exotic food and entertainment. Although they are initially pleasurable, these new needs bind men together and shape their lives. Ultimately, needs control men and make them the slaves of others. When a man requires others to fulfill his needs, or simply the needs of other people, another can dominate him. Unnecessary needs are the foundation of modern inequality, according to Rousseau.

The invention of property and the division of labor represent the beginning of moral inequality. Property allows for the domination and exploitation of the poor by the rich. Initially, however, relations between rich and poor are dangerous and unstable, leading to a violent state of war. As an attempt to escape from this war, the rich trick the poor into creating a political society. The poor believe that this creation will secure their freedom and safety, but in fact it merely fixes the relations of domination that existed before, creating laws to establish inequality. Inequality is now more or less unrelated to man's original nature; physical inequality is replaced by moral inequality.

Rousseau's account of the operation of society focuses on its various stages. Beginning with the trick played by the rich, he sees society as becoming more and more unequal, until its last stage, which is despotism, or the unjust rule of everyone by one man. This development is not inevitable, but it is extremely likely. As wealth becomes the standard by which men are compared, conflict and despotism (absolute power) become possible. For Rousseau, the worst kind of modern society is that in which money is the only measure of value. Rousseau's conclusions are clear: inequality is natural only when it relates to physical differences between men. In modern societies, however, inequality derives from a process of human evolution that has corrupted man's nature and subjected him to laws and property, both of which support a new, unjustifiable kind of inequality, termed moral inequality, which Rousseau finds unacceptable.