

---

## LANGUAGE AND CURIOSITY IN HOBBS' PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

OBERTO MARRAMA

### Introduction: Humanity and the faculty of language

If we look at Hobbes' philosophical system, we cannot fail to notice the fundamental role that language plays at all levels of his discourse.<sup>1</sup> Language is a key element in Hobbes' political theory and in his ethics; in Hobbes' philosophy of science as well as in his theory of mind. Language is so important because it is the distinctive feature of human beings, according to Hobbes, and Hobbes' philosophy is in fact centred on man. Its main concerns are with how men should live, and in which kind of society; about what men are capable of knowing of nature, and by which means; as to how all men can have a grasp of their own "train of thoughts," so to be aware of and regulate their passions according to the dictate of their reason. Now, man is what he is, Hobbes says, because man is the only animal – or "sensible creature," as Hobbes puts it – who is capable of speaking. That is, only humans are capable of recalling, comparing and computing objects of knowledge through words, and through words they are also able to communicate their thoughts and knowledge to their human counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. The abbreviation EW, followed by the volume number and the page number, refers to William B. MOLESWORTH (ed.), *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 11 vols, London, John Bohn / Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1839-1845.

This work was supported by scholarships from the *Programme de soutien aux étudiants de cycles supérieurs* and from the *Laboratoire sur l'histoire et la pensée moderne* of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. I am grateful to Syliane Malinowski-Charles, Samuel Lizotte, Jean-François Houle and Torin Doppelt for their helpful comments on a first version of this paper.

2. See *Leviathan*, I, 4 / EW III, p. 18: "The most noble and profitable invention of all other, was that of SPEECH, consisting of *names* or *appellations*, and their connexion; whereby men register their thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them one to another for mutual utility and conversation; without which, there had been amongst men, neither commonwealth, nor society, nor contract, nor peace, no more than amongst lions, bears, and wolves." See also Yves C. ZARKA, "Aspects sémantiques, syntaxiques et pragmatiques de la théorie du langage chez Hobbes," in Martin BERTMAN and Michel MALHERBE (eds.), *Thomas Hobbes, De la métaphysique à la politique (Actes du Colloque franco-américain de Nantes)*, Paris, Vrin, 1989, pp. 33-46.

Without language, therefore, there would be neither laws, nor any form of social contract between men. In a nutshell, there would be no human society as we know it. For, as Hobbes says, “Men indeed publish their laws by word or voice; neither can they make their will universally known any other way.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there would be no science, or philosophy, if by “science” and “philosophy” we understand a kind of universal knowledge, which proceeds from causes to their effects, and from effects to their causes. “Philosophy,” Hobbes says, “is such knowledge of effects or appearances, as we acquire by true ratiocination from the knowledge we have first of their causes or generation: And again, of such causes or generations as may be from knowing first their effects.”<sup>4</sup> According to Hobbes, this capability of ratiocination is peculiar to all men: “Every man,” Hobbes says, “brought Philosophy, that is, Natural Reason, into the world with him; for all men can reason to some degree, and concerning some things.”<sup>5</sup> More importantly, this capability of reasoning is peculiar only to human beings. Because only human beings can reassemble their thoughts through words and form syllogisms – which thing would be otherwise impossible without the aid of language. “It is manifest,” Hobbes says, “that living creatures that have not the use of speech, have no conception or thought in the mind, answering to a syllogism made of universal propositions.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, to conclude, we can say that without the use of language, according to Hobbes, human beings would be and would behave just like beasts: they would not be able to gather together and to organise themselves into a society, and no man could attain any advance in knowledge, socially or individually. However, human beings are not beasts. To the contrary, Hobbes explicitly says that humans cannot share anything with beasts and beastly life. And this impossibility of any kind of social agreement between humans and beasts is precisely due to the use of language, which distinguishes men from beasts, and by means of which humanity has definitively emancipated itself from the animal condition: “We cannot compact with beasts,” Hobbes says, “neither can we give or take from them any manner of right, by reason of their want of speech and understanding.”<sup>7</sup> In short, all the beauty, on the one hand, as

3. *De Cive*, III, 15 / EW II, p. 205.

4. *De Corpore*, I, 1, 2 / EW I, p. 3. See also *Leviathan*, IV, 46 / EW III, p. 664: “By PHILOSOPHY is understood the knowledge acquired by reasoning, from the manner of the generation of any thing, to the properties: or from the properties, to some possible way of generation of the same; to the end to be able to produce, as far as matter, and human force permit, such effects, as human life requireth.”

5. *De Corpore*, I, 1, 1 / EW I, p. 1.

6. *De Corpore*, I, 4, 8 / EW I, p. 50. See also *Leviathan*, IV, 46 / EW III, p. 665: “The faculty of reasoning being consequent to the use of speech, it was not possible, but that there should have been some general truths found out by reasoning, as ancient almost as language itself.”

7. *De Cive*, I, 2 / EW II, p. 22. See also *Leviathan*, I, 14 / EW III, p. 125: “To make covenants with brute beasts, is impossible; because not understanding our speech, they understand not,

well as all the problems related to the specifically human life, on the other hand—all the achievements of men, as well as all of their mistakes, failures, and deceptions—, all of these things peculiar to human life only, find their origin in this unique feature of human beings: that men can speak. As Hobbes puts it:

It is evident, that truth and falsity have no place but amongst such living creatures as use speech. [...] Wherefore, as men owe all their true ratiocination to the right understanding of speech; so also they owe their errors to the misunderstanding of the same; and as all the ornaments of philosophy proceed only from man, so from man also is derived the ugly absurdity of false opinions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Language, reason and desire: The physiological principle of the humans' actions**

Now, language makes reasoning possible, and language and reasoning altogether make human beings essentially different from all other sensible creatures, which are nonetheless equally capable of perceiving the world and acting accordingly. What, then, is the benefit provided to men by their faculty of reasoning?

According to Hobbes, “Every man, by reasoning, seeks out the means to the end which he propounds to himself.”<sup>9</sup> Reason, therefore, considered in itself, does not substitute, nor is it opposed to the fundamental drive of all of men’s deliberations and actions, namely their appetite or desire – that is, their natural inclination towards what pleases them and their natural aversion towards what causes them harm. “From their first birth,” as Hobbes says, “as they are merely sensible creatures, they [i.e., men] have this disposition, that immediately as much as in them lies they desire and do whatsoever is best pleasing to them, and that either through fear they fly from, or through hardness repel those dangers which approach them.”<sup>10</sup>

This peculiar agreement between the dictates of reason and the final goals of men’s passions and desires, which we can find in Hobbes’ philosophy, rests entirely on physiological bases, and it has been well noted by Gianni Paganini, in a few illuminating lines: “Of all the principles ‘moving’ the will,” Paganini writes, “Hobbes recognizes in the end a single true one: the transmission of movement from outside, by a sensible object, and the reaction in terms of *conatus*, that is an infinitely small movement, by the inner parts of the sentient being. [...] For Hobbes, all actions, whether spontaneous or voluntary, ‘follow

---

nor accept of any translation of right; nor can translate any right to another: and without mutual acceptation, there is no covenant.”

8. *De Corpore*, I, 3, 8 / EW I, p. 36.

9. *De Cive*, II, 14 / EW II, p. 195.

10. *De Cive*, Preface / EW II, p. xvi.

immediately the last appetite<sup>11</sup> and are the result of basically the same psychological process. [...] The last act of deliberation, that is, the last appetite or aversion, is the will.<sup>12</sup>

However, it is to be noted that the physiological principle which guides humans' will and actions, and with which human reason complies – that is, their desire or appetite, which is necessarily determined by their “conatus,” or “endeavour,” as Hobbes also calls it – is the same physiological principle which also determines the behaviour of all the other creatures capable of perception and spontaneous movement – that is, of both men and animals. That is, the will and the actions of any sentient being are necessarily determined by their desire – viz. by their appetite towards what pleases them and by their fear towards what causes them harm –, which appetite or desire is in turn caused by a physiological reaction in terms of “conatus.” I quote from Hobbes:

A child may be so young, as that the appetite thereof is its first appetite, but afterwards and often before it come to have the use of reason, may elect one thing and refuse another, and consider the consequences of what it is about to do. And why not as well as beasts, which never have the use of reason; for they deliberate, as men do? For though men and beasts do differ in many things very much, yet they differ not in the nature of their deliberation. A man can reckon by words of general signification, make propositions, and syllogisms, and compute in numbers, magnitudes, proportions, and other things computable; which being done by the advantage of language, and words of general significations, a beast that hath not language cannot do, nor a man that hath language, if he misplace the words, that are his counters.<sup>13</sup>

From the quoted passage we can see how humans and beasts, in Hobbes' account, are not distinguished because of their common capability of deliberating according to their sensations, or because of the presence in them of a kind of free will.<sup>14</sup> To the contrary, the difference between men and the rest of the sentient beings is that men can use the instruments provided by language and, as a consequence thereof, by their faculty of reason, in order to elaborate their deliberations upon things. That is to say, for example, that men can formulate their deliberations in terms of “general signification” – or, other-

11. See EW V, p. 345 (*Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*): “Those actions that follow immediately the last appetite, are voluntary. And here, where there is one only appetite, that one is the last.”

12. Gianni PAGANINI, “Passionate Thought: reason and the passion of curiosity in Thomas Hobbes,” in Sabrina EBBERSMEYER (ed.), *Emotional Minds: The Passions and the Limits of Pure Inquiry in Early Modern Philosophy*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 236-237.

13. EW V, pp. 94-95.

14. See also *Leviathan*, I, 6 / EW III, p. 48: “This alternate succession of appetites, aversions, hopes and fears, is no less in other living creatures than in man: and therefore beasts also deliberate. [...] In *deliberation*, the last appetite, or aversion, immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the *WILL*; the act, not the faculty, of *willing*. And beasts that have *deliberation*, must necessarily also have *will*.”

wise stated, that they can formulate general precepts and tenets, which are universally true and valid independently from the present circumstances affecting their senses.

The same physiological principle which is at the core of all animals' will and behaviour, is also the principle according to which all the images and thoughts of the things are produced in their brain by their organs of sense. So that there is a continuity between the sensible experience of the world, the deliberation upon the things thus known, and the following actions, which proceed from that deliberation or appetite. This continuity between understanding, willing and acting, is granted by the animals' "conatus," or "endeavour." According to Hobbes, in fact, all the perceptions and thoughts that a sentient creature may have of external things derive their existence from the physiological reaction – in terms of "conatus" or "endeavour" – that arises within the body after the pressure of an external body upon the organs of sense.<sup>15</sup> To quote Hobbes:

Setting aside the discourse of the tongue in words of general signification, the ideas of our minds are the same with those of other living creatures, created from visible, audible, and other sensible objects to the eyes and other organs of sense, as their's [sic.] are. For as the objects of sense are all individual, that is, singular, so are all the fancies proceeding from their operations; and men reason not but in words of universal signification, uttered or tacitly thought on.<sup>16</sup>

Note, once again, that except for the later intervention of language concerning the isolated case of human beings, the principle of formation of singular thoughts and images is the same for all animals – namely, their "conatus" or "endeavour" –, which principle, as we have seen, is also at the basis of their will and behaviour. So, we are led back to our first question: what is the benefit provided to men by the faculty of reasoning? And in which sense are men said to be different from all other sentient creatures, due to their capability of speaking and, hence, of reasoning?

Considered exclusively from an individual standpoint – leaving thus apart, as far as this paper is concerned, the otherwise extremely important aspect

---

15. See Jianhong CHEN, "On Thomas Hobbes's Concept of Wonder," in Michael F. DECKARD and Péter LOSONCZI (eds.), *Philosophy Begins in Wonder: An Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy, Theology and Science*, Eugene OR, Wipf and Stock, 2011, p. 133: "According to Hobbes, all intellectual phenomena derive their existence from sense, the origin of the thoughts of man, and sense is caused or stirred by the pressure of the external body upon the organs of sense. In consequence of that pressure, there arises within the human body a resistance or counter-pressure. Hobbes uses the word 'endeavor' to describe this kind of 'small beginnings of motion' within the body of men. This inner endeavor expresses itself outward as the original fancy in different organs of sense: light to the eyes, sound to the ear, odor to the nostrils, savor to the tongue, and other qualities to the other parts of the body. After the object has been removed, the retained image or the decaying sense is what Hobbes calls imagination."

16. EW V, p. 197.

related to the possibility of communicating and sharing their thoughts –, language allows men to recall and compare things that are not presently given to their senses, which is something impossible to all other creatures capable of perceptions, but devoid of language. Otherwise stated, by the use of words, which signify the concepts of the mind independently from a thing's being actually perceived by the organs of sense, men are provided with the possibility to detach their thoughts and images of the world from the material order of their sensible perceptions of the world itself, so to be able to reassemble their thoughts independently and compute things abstractly, or – as Hobbes says – in terms of “universal signification.” Furthermore, by giving men the possibility to name things which do not actually exist, language makes fictions and hypotheses possible. That is, language allows human beings to forecast future effects and imagine antecedent causes of the things, of which causes and effects we might have had no previous experience. This possibility of attaining knowledge of nonexistent things is explicitly acknowledged by Hobbes as a result of our faculty of language. As Hobbes says:

Nor, indeed, is it at all necessary that every name should be the name of something. [...] Also this word *future* is a name, but no future thing has yet any being, nor do we know whether that which we call future, shall ever have a being or no. Nevertheless, seeing we use in our mind to knit together things past with those that are present, the name *future* serves to signify such knitting together.<sup>17</sup>

It is to be noted that Hobbes does not completely deny the presence of a kind of basic causal way of thinking common to all animals, which is acquired by habit and memory and not by reason, and which is equivalent to common experience or to “prudence,” as Hobbes also calls it.<sup>18</sup> All animals, in fact, are somehow able to “foresight” and to refer to future events, by keeping track of the sequence of the things that they experience.<sup>19</sup> As Hobbes says, if I have already seen several times that one thing uses to follow another, the actual presence of the first can act as a “natural sign” of the other to me.<sup>20</sup> However, in this case, the future consequence evoked in my mind by a present thing corresponds to nothing other than the persistence of my memory of past

17. *De Corpore*, I, 2, 6 / EW I, p. 17.

18. See *Leviathan*, IV, 46 / EW III, p. 664: “That original knowledge called experience, in which consisteth prudence [...] is not attained by reasoning, but found as well as in brute beasts, as in man; and is but a memory of successions of events in times past, wherein the omission of every little circumstance altering the effect, frustrateth the expectation of the most prudent: whereas nothing is produced by reasoning aright, but general, eternal, and immutable truth.”

19. See *Leviathan*, I, 3 / EW III, p. 15.

20. See *De Corpore*, I, 2, 2 / EW I, p. 14: “For example, a thick cloud is a sign of rain to follow, and rain a sign that a cloud has gone before, for this reason only, that we seldom see clouds without the consequence of rain, nor rain at any time but when a cloud has gone before.”

things: it is in no way a scientific hypothesis, and it provides no certain or universal knowledge of things and of their real causal connections.<sup>21</sup>

To the contrary, words are "arbitrary signs": their reference to particular objects is "arbitrarily imposed."<sup>22</sup> Words mean the things we think, that is to say, independently from any existing connection between those very things and the signs chosen to signify them in our mind.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the order of our speech – that is, our faculty of language – is granted a sort of autonomy from the order of our sensible experience. This allows men to use words with the purpose to establish new connections between the things they already know, on the one hand, and to name other things of which they have had no previous experience, on the other hand.<sup>24</sup>

To provide an example, let us assume the actual presence of clouds as a possible natural sign of incoming rain. After having had many experiences of the same enchainment of events, an animal will become able to associate the presence of clouds with the possibility of an incoming storm; to be precise, based on its past experience, that animal will quite inevitably end up establishing that connection. However, a beast will never be able to ask itself whether the same clouds might also be inhabited by some strange divinities: a beast, in fact, lacks the linguistic instruments apt to establish such an independent connection between different objects – that is, a connection between objects which is not immediately implied by the past sequence of its sensible experiences. Furthermore, as Hobbes adds, a beast lacks the very will to enquiry whether such a hypothetical connection between things, never directly experienced, might eventually correspond to truth. That is to say, therefore, that animals are different from humans not only on account to their

21. See *Leviathan*, I, 3 / EW III, p. 16: "As prudence is a *presumption* of the *future*, contracted from the *experience* of time past: so there is a presumption of things past taken from other things, not future, but past also."

22. See *De Corpore*, I, 2, 4 / EW I, p. 16.

23. See *De Corpore*, I, 2, 2-3 / EW I, pp. 14-15: "Of signs, some are *natural*, [...] other are *arbitrary*, namely those we make choice of at our own pleasure, as a bush hung up, signifies that wine is to be sold there; a stone set in the ground signifies the bound of a field; and words so and so connected, signify the cogitations and motions of our mind. [...] Words so connected as that they become signs of our thoughts, are called *SPEECH*, of which every part is a *name*."

24. With regard to this important point, and to the difference that exists between the mere voice (the physical act of emitting and hearing sounds, which is common to both men and animal and which can constitute a form of natural sign for any animal) and the specific human speech (the autonomous development of which is based on the arbitrariness of the signification imposed to the words, or vocal signs, used), see Yves ZARKA, "Aspects sémantiques, syntaxiques et pragmatiques de la théorie du langage chez Hobbes." See also *Leviathan*, I, 2 / EW III, p. 11: "The imagination that is raised in man, or any other creature indued with the faculty of imagining, by words, or other voluntary signs, is that we generally call *understanding*; and is common to man and beasts. For a dog by custom will understand the call, or the rating of his master; and so will many other beasts. That understanding which is peculiar to man, is the understanding not only his will, but his conceptions and thoughts, be the sequel and contexture of the names of things into affirmations, negations, and other forms of speech."

lack of language and reason, but also on account to their lack of a specific passion and desire – namely, the passion of curiosity.

### **Curiosity, or the appetite for knowledge: A dialectic between reason and passion**

The possibility of reassessing our knowledge of things by linguistic means, independently from the material order of our sensible perceptions, and of investigating in abstract and universal terms the order of possible causes and effects of things, is indeed our faculty of reason. This faculty, which we gain only through a correct use of the words, enhances our present knowledge of the world, and it is an invaluable asset insofar as it allows us to better predict future events, to orientate our desires accordingly, and to modify the world at our will. In this sense, our knowledge of the world in terms of universal causal laws becomes itself an object of desire and of human appetite. And the human appetite for knowledge is what Hobbes calls “curiosity.”<sup>25</sup>

Needless to say, Hobbes mentions this passion of curiosity along with the faculty of language, characterising both of them as specific traits of human nature. I quote from Hobbes’ *Elements of Law*:

As in the discerning of faculties, *man leaveth* all community with *beasts* at the faculty of *imposing names*; so also doth he surmount their nature at this *passion of curiosity*. For when a beast seeth anything new and strange to him, he considereth it so far only as to discern whether it be likely to serve his turn, or hurt him, and accordingly approacheth nearer to it, or fleeth from it: whereas man, who in most events remembereth in what manner they were caused and begun, looketh for the cause and beginning of everything that ariseth new unto him. And from this passion of admiration and curiosity, have arisen not only the invention of names, but also supposition of such causes of all things as they thought might produce them. And from this beginning is derived all *philosophy*.<sup>26</sup>

From this passage, we can see quite clearly, once again, the peculiar agreement, typical of Hobbes, between reason and passion. Reason, represented by the faculty of imposing names to the things, complies with our passionate desire of knowing the causes and the effects of the things themselves – that is, it complies with our “passion of curiosity,” as Hobbes calls it.

In interpreting this passage, Gianni Paganini argues that curiosity would provide that specifically human “passionate thought” which is capable of regulating our “train of thoughts” or “mental discourse” towards an end –

---

25. See *Leviathan*, I, 12 / EW III, p. 94: “It is peculiar to the nature of man, to be inquisitive into the causes of the events they see, some more, some less; but all men so much, as to be curious in the search of the causes of their own good and evil fortune.” See also Jianhong CHEN, “On Thomas Hobbes’s Concept of Wonder,” pp. 133-135.

26. *Elements of Law* I, 9, 18 / EW IV, pp. 50-51.



namely knowledge –, which end is in no way a sensual pleasure “arising from the sense of an object present,”<sup>27</sup> as Hobbes says in the *Leviathan*, and which can only be attained by reason<sup>28</sup> – that is, by the correct use of our language.<sup>29</sup> I agree with this reading. Other commentators, such as Jeffrey Barnouw and Kathryn Tabb, go way further, claiming that the presence in men of the passion of curiosity alone would be a sufficient cause for their inventing language out of the blue, as it were, as a mean to an end.<sup>30</sup> They correctly refer to another passage in Hobbes' *Anti-White*, where he says that men, unlike all other animals, invented marks and names out of their curiosity of knowing the hidden causes of things – which is a kind of desire that the other animals lack at all.<sup>31</sup> Yet, both Barnouw and Tabb fail to notice at least one fundamental point: that is, that curiosity, like all desires, is an intentional passion, which must refer to an object. Now, being the object of curiosity by definition something which is not present to our senses, it can be grasped only by linguistic means and through reason – namely, in the actual form of hypotheses or fictions.<sup>32</sup> Without language, that is to say, it would be absolutely impossible to be curious of anything, for it would be impossible to address the very object of our actual curiosity. Hence, that would be curiosity of nothing, and curiosity would not exist at all. Therefore, either Barnouw's and Tabb's interpretation is wrong, or else they have unwittingly unveiled a dramatic contradiction lying at the core of Hobbes' philosophical system.

27. *Leviathan*, I, 6 / EW III, p. 42.

28. Gianni PAGANINI, “‘Passionate Thought’: reason and the passion of curiosity in Thomas Hobbes.”

29. See also the definition of curiosity provided in *Leviathan*, I, 6 / EW III, pp. 44-45: “Desire to know why, and how, CURIOSITY; such as is in no living creature but *man*: so that man is distinguished, not only by his reason, but also by this singular passion from other *animals*; in whom the appetite of food, and other pleasures of sense, by predominance, take away the care of knowing causes; which is a lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnal pleasure.”

30. See Jeffrey BARNOUW, “La curiosité chez Hobbes,” *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, 32 (1988), pp. 41-69; Kathryn TABB, “The Fate of Nebuchadnezzar: Curiosity and Human Nature in Hobbes,” *Hobbes Studies*, 27 (2014), pp. 13-34.

31. *Anti-White* XXX, § 15, fol. 345, in Jean JACQUOT and Harold W. JONES (eds.), *Thomas Hobbes: Critique du “De Mundo” de Thomas White*, Paris, Vrin, 1973, p. 356.

32. I am grateful to Torin Doppelt for having drawn my attention to the following passage, concerning the interrogative form, in *Leviathan*, I, 6 / EW III, p. 50: “Of the desire to know, there is a peculiar expression, called *interrogative*; as, *what is it, when shall it, how is it done, and why so?*” See also *De Corpore*, I, 3, 1 / EW I, p. 29: “From the connexion or contexture of names arise divers kinds of speech, whereof some signify the desires and affections of men; such are, first, *interrogations*, which denote the desire of knowing: as, *Who is a good man?* In which speech there is one name expressed, and another desired and expected from him of whom we ask the same.”

### Conclusion: Naming the objects of our curiosity – The case of God

Now, in the *Leviathan*, which is posterior both to the *Anti-White* and to the *Elements of Law*, Hobbes writes that “The first author of *speech* was God himself, that instructed Adam how to name such creatures as he presented to his sight,” and that “This was sufficient to direct him to add more names, as the experience and use of the creatures should give him occasion; and to join them in such manner by degrees, as to make himself understood.”<sup>33</sup> He also says that “the name of God is used, not to make us conceive him, for he is incomprehensible; and his greatness and power are unconceivable; but that we may honour him.”<sup>34</sup> So, how do we get this notion of God, since he is incomprehensible and unconceivable? Of course, out of curiosity, by looking for the hidden cause of everything, on the one hand; and out of our use of language, by naming that hidden, unperceivable cause of the things, on the other hand.

Curiosity, or love of the knowledge of causes, draws a man from the consideration of the effect, to seek the cause; and again, the cause of that cause; till of necessity he must come to this thought at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternal; which is it men call God. So that it is impossible to make any profound inquiry into natural causes, without being inclined thereby to believe there is one God eternal; though they cannot have any idea of him in their mind, answerable to his nature. For as a man that is born blind, hearing men talk of warming themselves by the fire, and being brought to warm himself by the same, may easily conceive, and assure himself, there is somewhat there, which men call *fire*, and is the cause of the heat he feels; but cannot imagine what it is like; nor have an idea of it in his mind, such as they have that see it: so also by the visible things in this world, and their admirable order, a man may conceive there is a cause of them, which men call God; and yet not have any idea, or image of him in his mind.<sup>35</sup>

Put in front of a burning fire, an animal would either flee or warm itself, according to its sensations, without however interrogating itself as to the real causes of its actual feelings. To the contrary, a blind man, who can only feel the effects of the fire, without however having any idea or image of the actual cause of the heat he is presently feeling, can use that word, “fire,” to address that unknown cause of its present sensations – of which he is naturally curious. The same is for the case of God: we do see in fact many different effects in the world, whose ultimate explanation, however, relies upon a cause of which we can have no idea, nor any image or sensible experience. By the name

33. *Leviathan*, I, 4 / EW III, p. 18. See also *De Corpore*, I, 2, 4 / EW I, p. 16: “Though some names of living creatures and other things, which our first parents used, were taught by God himself; yet they were by him arbitrarily imposed.”

34. *Leviathan*, I, 3 / EW III, p. 17.

35. *Leviathan*, I, 11 / EW III, pp. 92-93.

of "God," therefore, we address that hidden ultimate cause, which is also the ultimate unperceivable object of our curiosity.

Thus, if we are to maintain that there is indeed an essential primitive difference between the nature of men and that of animals, it is not incoherent to assume the distinctive traits of humanity to be, so to say, simply "brute facts," whose final explanation can only rely upon God, that is, the ultimate incomprehensible reason of everything existing as such. Both the faculty of language, then, and the passion of curiosity, precisely because they mark an otherwise unexplainable difference between human beings and all other sentient beings, can be assumed, and must be assumed, to be the existing effects of the impenetrable will of the creator of everything – should there be one.

Therefore – this is my thesis, and these are also the last lines of my paper –, I would not say that the passion of curiosity *alone* is sufficient to explain the raising of the faculty of language in human beings. Rather, I would say that curiosity and language work together, and the one cannot exist without the other. Language, as a rational faculty, makes curiosity possible, by providing curiosity those abstract objects to which curiosity itself applies. *Vice-versa*, curiosity, as a passion, makes language meaningful and reason effective, by providing language and reason their final scope and aim – thus emancipating human beings from the animal condition.

*Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières*

#### SOMMAIRE

Cet article montre comment l'interaction spécifique et la dépendance réciproque entre langage et curiosité se trouvent à la base, chez Hobbes, de la dialectique plus générale entre raison et passion, et comment cette interaction et cette dépendance mutuelle fournissent le vrai trait distinctif des êtres humains et de leur comportement.

#### SUMMARY

This article shows how the specific interaction and mutual dependence between language and curiosity accounts for the more general dialectic between reason and passion in Hobbes' philosophy, providing the distinguishing trait of human beings and their behaviour.