Self-Creation in Descartes

Andreea Mihali
Wilfrid Laurier University

Recently, Descartes scholars have turned their attention to the practical part of Descartes' philosophy, in general, and to his notion of "generosity", more specifically. Noteworthy are Lisa Shapiro's\(^1\) and Byron Williston's\(^2\) treatments of the topic. While these articles constitute important contributions to our understanding of Descartes' main virtue, generosity, as well as of his ideal moral type (the sage), none of these philosophers has in my view paid sufficient attention to the emotional make-up of the generous person as seen by Descartes.

In three parts this paper aims to remedy this neglect. First, I provide a close analysis of the generous person as described in the *Passions of the Soul*. Then, in order to make the defining features of the Cartesian generous person salient, I contrast the generous person with the abject person which Descartes evaluates as a deficient moral type. This compare and contrast analysis, which surprisingly has not been undertaken so far, will bring to light Descartes' emphasis on the crucial role of taking an active stance towards one's passions. Not allowing oneself to be led around, tossed by one's emotions but rather controlling and harmonizing them is accomplished by means of the will; the will discovers and puts in practice moral values. The control over and harmonization of emotions Descartes recommends amount to self-creation, not just self-mastery, as we will see in Part II.

**Self-creation** is preferable to self-mastery since this notion does more justice to the active role the Cartesian agent plays in bringing about, not just in setting bounds to, her passions. Control, not giving in to the passions that external objects and situations cause in us is only the first step in the moral development of the Cartesian agent as described by the *Passions*. To achieve a truly stable psychic equilibrium, Descartes tells us, we must move beyond merely properly reacting to passions that come upon us\(^3\) to *arousing positive passions* in ourselves\(^4\).

Descartes' generous person is not passion-free. She does feel justified passions, i.e., those passions have the proper objects (e.g., hating vices\(^5\)). She also feels them at the proper intensity (i.e., in the senses, not her innermost soul\(^6\)) and with the proper attitude (with enough detachment to not allow her inner balance to be disturbed). Self-induced passions have a higher chance of meeting these conditions. Descartes refers to them as "passions in so far as they belong to the soul".\(^7\) They arise as a result of movements of animal spirits strengthening a well-founded thought.\(^8\) He also mentions that to pursue virtue means *desiring* those things that depend entirely on us, adding that the mistake we make is not desiring too much but rather too little.\(^9\) Or, desire is one of the six primitive passions according to Descartes.\(^10\)

I will conclude that Descartes' practical philosophy opens the way not only for Enlightenment ideas in general (as Peter Schouls has already shown by emphasizing the role of the will in

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\(^1\) (Shapiro 1999)
\(^2\) (Williston 2003)
\(^3\) (PA 48, 49)
\(^4\) (PA 144)
\(^5\) (PA 87)
\(^6\) (PA 147)
\(^7\) (PA 139)
\(^8\) (PA 160)
\(^9\) (PA 144)
\(^10\) (PA 57)
Descartes’ system\footnote{Schouls 1989}) and for Kant’s in particular (as André Gombay argued by uncovering the similarities between Cartesian generosity and Kantian respect\footnote{Gombay 2007}), but even further forward for self-creation, a notion often associated with Nietzsche\footnote{Nietzsche 1974}. Self-creation understood as the deliberate harmonizing of emotions squares well with Descartes’ practical views.
Necessitarianism in Leibniz’s *Theodicy*

Chloe Armstrong  
Lawrence University

I offer a study of the modal notions of *Theodicy* along with a defense of reading Leibniz as an *all things considered* necessitarian. Leibniz thinks that if we take all truths that couldn’t be otherwise into account, including the nature of God, God’s understanding of essences, and his will to do what is best, then all truths are necessarily true. All truths are necessarily true because the denial of any truth contradicts some necessary feature of God. Instead of understanding Leibniz’s theories of contingency as rejecting necessitarianism, I treat them as attempts to offer proxy notions of contingency, or notions of quasi-contingency. Leibniz offers and liberally invokes proxies for contingency, which include moral necessity and hypothetical necessity in the *Theodicy*.

To build a case for reading Leibniz as a necessitarian, I will first offer reconstructed versions of necessitarian arguments that Leibniz first considers in his early work (1671-7)—one based on God’s omniscience and one on God’s perfection. Although Leibniz does not consider these arguments directly in the *Theodicy*, I will show how each of these arguments is affirmed by Leibniz’s commitments in the text.

Importantly, the *Theodicy* is a challenging text for reading Leibniz as a necessitarian because it includes a number of passages and arguments that seem distinctly anti-necessitarian. First, Leibniz develops a notion of freedom that includes contingency as a requisite condition, emphasizing “freedom is exempt not only from constraint but also from real necessity.”14 He affirms that both human agents and God are in fact free; thus, he seems committed to the view that some propositions (about free actions) are contingently true. Secondly, Leibniz explicitly distances himself from Abelard, Hobbes, and Spinoza who are all recognized (and publicly criticized) for endorsing necessitarian claims, including the claim that all non-actual worlds are impossible. Third, Leibniz shifts his language from “sufficient” reasons to “determinate” reasons,15 emphasizing “reasons incline without necessitating”.16 If the reasons involved in choice are not necessitating, then perhaps Leibniz comes to understand free choice as a source of contingency. Fourth, Leibniz notes that moral necessity “has the name by analogy only: it becomes effective...through the will of God”.17 He identifies “real necessity” with absolute necessity, and denies that all truths are absolutely necessary.

I will argue the distinction between absolute necessity and moral necessity does not, and is not intended to, make room for genuine metaphysical contingency all things considered. Further, I will argue that the contingency involved in freedom is explicated using notions of quasi-contingency. These discussions of freedom offer the opportunity to understand how reasons can “incline without necessitating” even in a necessitarian framework. Lastly, I will review Leibniz’s discussion of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Abelard to show that the ways Leibniz distances himself from these thinkers does not require the rejection of necessitarianism. With respect to Hobbes and Abelard, Leibniz emphasizes that his dispute is merely terminological. Leibniz does reject Spinoza’s “blind necessitarianism,” according to which God’s creation is not a deliberative choice. However, Leibniz’s dispute with Spinoza concerns not the claim that God necessitates the existence of the actual world, but how God necessitates the existence of the actual world.

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15 *Theodicy* §44 147, §360 341.  
16 *Theodicy* §4 419, §45 148, §48 150.  
17 Appendix to the Theodicy 387.
Shared Parts and Political Authority: Groups as Individuals in Spinoza

Christopher Fruge
University of Houston

In this paper, I contend that Spinoza offers a unique argument for treating the state as a natural individual of the same sort as humans. The argument is that all and only individuals have power, the state has power, and so the state is an individual. Some obvious extensions of this reasoning have quite radical metaphysical and political implications that contemporary philosophers should take seriously. We must treat other groups of humans as individuals with the same political authority as states. We must also view the parts of these groups at a finer grain than entire persons, namely that portion of a person's power that aligns with the goals of the group. Metaphysically, this means we must take composition to be restricted and yet hold that distinct composite objects are able to share proper parts. Politically, this undermines the distinction between stateless persons and those within a state. Against the orthodox assumptions of the social contract tradition, Spinoza gives us a picture in which various groups, including the state, vie in the state of nature for authority over the same people, where no person is completely part of any organization.

In the first section, I argue that the standard considerations given in favor of treating the state as an individual are inconclusive. Pro-state-individualists tend to draw support from the physical digression between Ethics IIP13-14 in which Spinoza defines an individual as something whose component bodies have a sustained pattern of motion and rest. However, the most straightforward reading of the text suggests that bodies are distinguished by relative motion while relative motion is at the same time attributed directly to bodies. The account is thus circular. Moreover, even if it were not, the account is too general to tell us whether the state counts as an individual. Pro-state-individualists draw further support from Ethics IVP18S, where Spinoza discusses rational humans composing an individual. Yet at best this is an ideal situation. It cannot show that actual states with irrational subjects are individuals.

In the second section, I argue that the considerations given by anti-state-individualists are likewise inconclusive. First, they note that Spinoza only ever metaphorically speaks of the state as having a mind and a body, whereas a literal individual would have a literal mind and body. Yet, against this, Spinoza also speaks of the state as a natural thing. Second, they argue that according to Spinoza's conatus doctrine a state-individual would have a tendency to preserve itself, but the state has an internal tendency to dissolution. However, in response, one can treat all destructive tendencies as external to the state. Third, they hold that if the state were an individual with power, then its citizens would have to grant it their own power, which is impossible.

I respond in the third section by formulating the power argument. All and only individuals have power, the state has power, and so the state is an individual. One can rebut the third objection above by noting that, for Spinoza, citizens give the state power by granting it authority to direct their own, and so both share in the same power.

But if we allow for state-individuals, then we must allow that other groups of humans also form individuals. Many groups like corporations and gangs share the state's self-preservative purpose and also cohesively coordinate behavior. Spinoza holds that two states relate to one another as in the state of nature, and so the same should hold for state and non-state organizations.

Moreover, entire persons cannot be parts of states and groups, counter to what Spinoza himself believes. Spinoza equates essence with power to preserve oneself, thereby distinguishing what is internal and external to an individual on the basis of whether it aligns with that power. But the
self-preservation of a state or other group need not always align with the self-preservation of a person. Only that portion of a person's power that aligns with the goals of a group is a part of it.

The standard model in social contract theory is that each person belongs to a single political authority structured by a single moral theory. Against this, Spinoza gives us a view in which various groups, including the state, vie in the state of nature for authority to control the activity of the same persons, where no person is completely part of any group. Spinoza forces us to ask how to structure society when a plurality of organizations, including the state, have equal claim on the same people.
Flourishing without the Good: Hobbes on Eudaimonism

Ericka Tucker
Marquette University

In “The End of Ends: Aristotelian themes in Early Modern Ethics,” Donald Rutherford proposes that the recent fashion for categorizing the ethical writings of early modern philosophers as “Epicurean” or “Stoic” obscures the early moderns’ debt to Aristotle. Despite early modern philosophers’ vocal rejections of Aristotle, his ethics pervades theirs. Rutherford argues that even one of the most strenuous objectors to Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, is best understood as an ethical eudaimonist. According to Rutherford, to embrace eudaimonism requires accepting two principles:

1. That the idea of happiness is a human end (as the end of action)
2. That one achieves the former (1) through rational deliberation

Rutherford argues that Hobbes accepts (1) and requires (2). Tellingly, Rutherford does not require something like (3): that there must be one ‘Good’ that all seek, generally thought to be the defining characteristic of eudaimonism. Rutherford argues that early modern ethics, particularly that of Hobbes and Spinoza, could not ignore the diversity of human ends. Rather, beginning with a diversity of human ends is what characterizes Hobbesian ethics. Flourishing, Hobbes recognizes, can take many forms, and this forms the basis of his argument for a strong, but limited state. These philosophers transform the notion of eudaimonism; yet, Rutherford argues, they do so still firmly within the Aristotelian eudaimonist tradition in accepting (1) and (2).

Although I am overall supportive of Rutherford’s project, in this paper, I will reject one of Rutherford’s proposals, namely, that Hobbes requires the notion of practical reason or rational deliberation to yield individual and collective flourishing. Rutherford argues that Hobbes requires a notion of practical reason so that he can explain how individuals are able to seek happiness more successfully than they would be by passion alone. However, this notion of practical reason is misapplied to Hobbes. Hobbesian biology and psychology, I will argue, are the principal partners in any program of individual or collective happiness. Reason can do some work, but it is not required to achieve happiness, nor does Hobbes give us an account of practical reason as such.

Hobbes does not think reason motivates morality. Instead, he offers an account of human moral and political motivation based on Aristotelian notions of voluntary motion. Appetites - not reason - motivate human action. As such, for Hobbes, effective ‘felicity’ or happiness, both individual and collective, must be achieved through the manipulation of the affects and appetites. For Hobbes, morality is a political project. The state, for Hobbes, is a prerequisite to any individual notion of flourishing. Whether one seeks trade, learning, or pleasure, a civil state is required.

To create a peaceful state – the prerequisite for individual flourishing – one must coordinate the appetites and actions of a multitude of diverse individuals. Doing so requires understanding what reliably motivates them. To do so one needs not reason but knowledge of cause and effect – something quite different than reason in Hobbes’s view. I will argue that neither individuals nor the sovereign use practical reason to yield individual or collective felicity and thus reject Rutherford’s proposal (2, above) that practical reason is required for achieving felicity or flourishing in Hobbes’s moral philosophy.

Rejecting (2) however, does not necessarily sink Rutherford’s overall thesis that Hobbes is a
eudaemonist. In the second part of this paper, I will present a set of arguments from Hobbes’ political theory in favor of Rutherford’s thesis, that Hobbes is a variety of eudaemonist against those who argue that Hobbes understands humans to seek self-preservation rather than something like eudaimonia. I will show that by tying Hobbes’s argumentation in favor of felicity to his additional arguments from flourishing in his justification of the civil state we can amass further evidence for (1) and for the eudaimonist thesis.

Hobbes may indeed embrace eudaimonism, as Rutherford argues, but only the in more limited way suggested in 1) above. *Pace* Rutherford, practical reason in Hobbes does not play the role it does in Aristotle. For Hobbes, affects and appetites, etc. do the work of yielding increased happiness. The political state does indeed have a role to play in shaping the affects of those in the multitude; however, Hobbes does not seem to think it should do so on every matter, recognizing the importance and irreducibility of human diversity in desire and appetite. This recognition of diversity is the revolutionary spin Hobbes’ takes on the idea of eudaimonia – flourishing without one Good.
Hume's Analogy of True Judgments in Colors and Morals

Jason Fisette
University of Nevada - Reno

Hume's analogy of moral values to so-called “secondary qualities,” like color, is widely read as broadcasting his anti-realism in ethics. Part of the considerable attraction of this standard reading is that Hume is also widely held to be an anti-realist about secondary qualities, and by extension about the moral qualities that he analogizes to them. On this view, there is only one way to read his analogy: Given that Hume conceives of secondary qualities as nothing but psychological reactions to a world containing no such qualities, so too (as Russ Shafer-Landau puts the platitude in his undergraduate ethics textbook), “[for Hume] there is no moral reality to describe.”

I argue that Hume’s analogy is shaped by a number of historical aspects to which this standard reading fails to attend. On my reading, the analogy is shaped by Hume’s hostility toward a conception of moral truth as mind-independent that is defended by rationalists such as Clarke and Wollaston, and we fundamentally misread Hume if we conflate his target in this key passage with a general position called “realism” in ethics. The surprising outcome of my arguments is that Hume’s analogy attributes no metaphysical significance to the discovery that moral properties do not exist outside the mind. Rather, he is making room for a kind of moral cognitivism on which mind-dependence is no more a barrier to the truth-aptitude of ethical matters of fact than it is for phenomenal secondary qualities, at least some of our judgments of which Hume regards as true.

My paper has two parts. Part One argues against metaphysical interpretations of Hume’s analogy. The locus classicus for readings of Hume as an anti-realist about secondary qualities is his discussion of the primary-secondary distinction in Treatise 1.4.4, in which he appears committed to anti-realism about primary and secondary qualities alike. I briefly review an objection that several commentators have raised to this standard reading. As Hume understands it, the realist/anti-realist debate turns on taking “real” to be equivalent to existence not merely in the mind or (what I call) extra-perceptual existence. As an empiricist for whom “external objects become known to us only by [our] perceptions” of them, Hume argues that nothing puts us in contact with anything ontologically different in kind from our perceptual objects, and he consequently abstains from the realist/anti-realist debate as unintelligible (T 1.2.6.7; SBN 67). I locate a similar rebuke to debates about the reality of morals in the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, at the outset of which Hume offers a laconic rejection of such disputes as “disingenuous.” There are thus philosophical and textual grounds for thinking that Hume did not conceive of the analogy as an intervention in realist/anti-realist debate in ethics.

I argue that Hume’s intentions for the analogy become clearer if we return the passage to its origins.

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21 EPM 1.2; SBN 169-170.
historical context. To that end, I make three claims in Part Two. (1) The analogy is part of Hume’s critique of Clarke and Wollaston. The bulk of Treatise 3.1.1 is an attack on Clarke and Wollaston’s moral rationalism, and Hume instructs to read the analogy as “the second part of our argument” against the view that moral distinctions cannot be made by reason alone.22 (2) The rationalists were worried by mind-dependent accounts of value. Clarke and Wollaston were exercised by an apparent incoherence in Hobbesianism and Voluntarism’s accounts of moral truth’s dependence on human or divine minds: Such accounts allow for judgments to be true for some minds (or at some times), but not others. In response, they formulated a kind of semantic moral cognitivism, on which moral values are mind-independent a priori truths or relations that can be detected through reason alone. (3) The analogy is Hume’s cognitivist response to Clarke and Wollaston. When Hume invokes the analogy in his 1740 letter to Hutcheson and in the footnote that appears in the 1748 and 1750 editions of his Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, he concedes that because moral judgments concern matters of fact that existence of which depends upon human sentiment, moral truths might not hold for “all rational Beings” or “every intelligent Mind.”23 On my reading, the analogy is Hume’s attempt to disarm Clarke and Wollaston’s suspicion that truth has no place in these judgments of mind-dependent phenomena. Significantly, Hume holds that judgments of phenomenal secondary qualities, such as how blue looks, are at least sometimes true.24 By analogizing morals to secondary qualities, therefore, Hume is reassuring us that mind-dependence is orthogonal to considerations of truth and corrigibility. In sum, Hume’s initially anti-realist-sounding analogy is his promissory note for a sentimentalist alternative to the rationalists’ conception of moral cognitivism.

22 T 3.1.1.26; SBN 468.
23 L 1:40 and EHU 11.11, p. 232.
24 T 1.1.1.5, SBN 3; T 1.3.1.2, SBN 70.