

Hobbes' main project

To develop a better system of politics.

His route to doing this

Prove that human beings are just machines.

All their actions are determined, like the actions of machines.

So they have no souls distinct from their bodies, and no free will.

And their actions can be predicted from knowledge of their nature and their circumstances.

A well functioning state is built to put them in circumstances where they will tend to work co-operatively and increase the common wealth.

And once we understand that people are just machines the way to do this will become uncontroversial, whereas now self-interest makes it disputatious and irresolvable

The project of the opening chapters of *Human Nature*

To determine the laws of the operation of the human body-machine

And first, the laws of its cognitive operations, whereby it gains knowledge.

So, to reduce the process of gaining knowledge to a mechanical process, performed by a machine

and prove it is not a spontaneous, deliberative process, performed by a spirit

Hobbes' method

“not to take any principle upon trust, but only to put [us] in mind what [we] know already, or may know by [our] own experience”

An initial principle

Cognitive operations are operations performed upon
“conceptions”

(also called “images” and “phantasms”)

Conceptions turn out to be motions.

Specifically, vibrations of the parts of the
nerves, brain, and heart

They are caused by the action of objects.

Sensation

Conceptions existing concurrently with the action of the objects that cause them

Imagination

Conceptions existing after the action of the objects that cause them

Memory

Conceptions existing after the action of the objects that cause them that are not as detailed as the originally caused conceptions in the structure of their parts

Object of sense

The object that acts to cause a sensation.

Sensible qualities

The conceptions received from vision *appear* to us to consist of colour and figure.

Consequently, we infer that the objects of vision have qualities of colour and figure.

Four contrary theses:

- i. Colours do not inhere in the object of sense.
- ii. Nothing that exists outside us has any colour.
- iii. Nothing that exists inside us has any colour either (what exists inside us is a motion of colourless particles; and colour is just an “apparition” of this motion)
- iv. The same is true of sound, smell, taste, and feeling.

Arguments for these theses

1. Colours seen in water or mirrors are seen in a different place from the objects that are supposed to have those colours.

So colours can exist apart from the objects that are supposed to possess them.

A further argument for the first thesis

In double vision we see images in two different places where we know there is just one object in one place.

So one of the images is not where the object is.

But the sense organs are functioning equally well in delivering both images.

So any reason we have to say that the one image is not in the place where the object is

(and we must say this since we know by experience that it is true)

carries over to what the sense organ tells us about the other image.

2. The colours seen in water or mirrors do not exist even in the place where they are supposed to be, as anyone may discover by experience.

So these colours are “merely apparent”

3. Blows produce apparitions of light.

(Specifically apparitions of light taken to be located somewhere out along the line from which the blow came)

So in all cases it is likely that the experience of colour is not produced by colours in the objects, but by blows.

A further implication

But the only possible effect of a blow is a motion or reverberation of parts of the thing hit by the blow.

Note: light as it exists outside us is probably just a pulse in the air, produced by a pulsating object, such as flame.

So not only do colours not exist outside us, they cannot exist inside us either.

They are not *appearances in us*.

They are *appearances of* what is really in us (motions of body parts).

Similar arguments against the reality of other sensible qualities

Doubling of sensations experienced in echoes,

Feeling one and the same object to be hot and cold with different hands,

Finding different people to experience different tastes and smells from the same object, etc.

Discovering that sensations of sound are produced by blows,

Discovering that smells, tastes, and feelings are states of pleasure or pain, which cannot exist in insentient bodies.

If colours, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings do not exist outside us, ...

... and they do not exist inside us, either ...

what and where are they?

They are “apparitions” and “seemings”

What is an “apparition” or “seeming” and where is it to be found?

How can a motion of colourless, silent, odourless, tasteless particles appear as a colour, sound, smell or taste?

To what do these things appear?

How can they give rise to a pleasure or pain and where is this pleasure or pain located?

If memory is a conception with less detail than the original conception, how can I ever know that I am remembering?

Knowing that I am remembering would seem to require comparing the original conception with the current one.

But to do that, I would have to *remember* the original conception in some other way than by having a less detailed conception than the original one.

The purpose of Hobbes account of imagination and dreaming

Explain away empirical evidence for the existence of spirits (incorporeal bodies).