



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Alexey A. Pleshkov

MASTER OR SERVANT: LANGUAGE IN THOMAS HOBBS' POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: HUMANITIES
WP BRP 69/HUM/2014

This Working Paper is an output of a research project implemented at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE.

*Alexey A. Pleshkov*¹

MASTER OR SERVANT: LANGUAGE IN THOMAS HOBBS' POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY²

Language theory is an important part of Hobbes' intellectual legacy. Nevertheless, it seems that the value of language can be understood only within political sphere. The role and place of language in Hobbes' political theory should be examined intimately. What can language say about distinction between natural and political philosophy? Does the sovereign have power over the language of his subjects? Can we distinguish language in the commonwealth and language in the state of nature? Searching for answers to these questions is important not only in the context of the history of philosophy, but allows us to include Hobbes' ideas in modern political and philosophical discourse.

Keywords: Hobbes, language, state of nature, social contract, commonwealth

JEL Classification: Z

¹ National Research University the Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). The Poletaev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI). Junior Research Fellow; E-mail: apleshkov@hse.ru

² This study (research grant No 13-05-0037 "Political dimension of the illegitimate argument in the language and text sciences") was supported by The National Research University Higher School of Economics' Academic Fund Program in 2014.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master – that’s all.”

Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There.*

One of the most important topics running through the body of Thomas Hobbes’ philosophy is his language theory. This theory should not be considered as a distinct sphere of Hobbes’ interest, but rather as an integral part of his political theory. Language is in the focus of attention here, as long as the state itself begins with a social contract, and the most important point of the political thinker’s work is to consider the agreements, treaties, and to analyze the constituent concepts of these.

There have been a lot of historical and philosophical works concerned with the different problems and aspects of Hobbes’ theory of language. First, it is necessary to talk about research of the topic of rhetoric in Hobbes’ works connected in particular, but not as a limitation thereof, with the name of Quentin Skinner³. Evaluation of Hobbes’ ambivalent treatment with the art of persuasion and humanistic rhetorical tradition becomes one of the most important achievements in Hobbesian studies of the last century. This allows us to see the central texts of Hobbes in a new light, as well as to understand the genesis of his thought, and clarify some of his vague ideas. Second, an important contribution to the topic was made during a heated discussion about the (inter)relation between Hobbes’ natural and political philosophy (see more below). This discussion is closely connected with the question about the apriorism of political philosophy, derived from the nature of language. The work of Philip Pettit, who considers language as a key to understanding the transition from natural to political, should be noted here apart⁴. While his book bears relation to the discussion, it introduces and then focuses on the range of previously unnoticed questions and problems. Finally, there were attempts to put Hobbes’ thought in the context of the contemporary analytical philosophy of language, first of all, through the prism of John Austin’s and John Searle’s ideas⁵.

Despite the undoubted importance and productivity of this research and its interpretative strategies, mostly all of it focuses on the political implications of Hobbes’ views on language. To put it differently, they are primarily *linguistic*. Even if Hobbes made the linguistic turn in

³ (Skinner, 1996); (Johnston, 1986), (Whelan, 1981)

⁴ (Pettit, 2008)

political philosophy, as Terence Ball states, it does not mean that Hobbes himself was a philosopher of language. Hobbes' great impact on European political thought makes us wonder about the linguistic implications of his political system. It is true that language plays an extremely important role in Hobbes' philosophy and that politics is conceptually (through the language) determined. But it is the sovereign – the referent of politics *per se* – that allows language to be as it must be.

Thus, in the article I will show the dependence of language on the structural elements of Hobbes' political philosophy and draw conclusions from this position. For this end, firstly, the epistemological value of language for political science, as it was ideated by Hobbes, is analyzed (*Natural and Political Philosophy: the Role of Language*). Secondly, the analysis of ways (or modes) of functioning of language in the state of nature and in the commonwealth is proposed (*Two Languages in Hobbes and Language and the Sovereign*). Finally, the consideration of the difficulties, connected with the hypostasis of theoretical presuppositions of Hobbes philosophy, is given (*The Paradox of the Social Contract*).

Natural and Political Philosophy: the Role of Language

The connection between Hobbes' political philosophy and his other philosophical explorations is extremely important to contemporary Hobbesian studies. Generally speaking, there are two incompatible strategies of interpretation in the research literature. The first posits that the political writings of Hobbes should be considered in the wider context of his thought, and that his body of works is something integral. The second considers political and moral philosophy as a specific intellectual phenomenon, and in relation to it arguments of natural philosophy are forceless⁶. Both strategies have famous and authoritative supporters⁷, as well as the foundation in Hobbes' texts⁸. However, I believe, the role of language in this question is usually underestimated.

It is important to understand that the discussion is not (or not completely) about the correct hermeneutic position, but about fundamental difference between two branches of knowledge. According to Hobbes, there are two types of knowledge about the world – absolute and conditional⁹. Absolute knowledge is nothing more than the content of human memory and

⁵ (Ball, 1985), (Parry, 1967).

⁶ (Filippov, 2009a: 105 ff).

⁷ E.g., Y. Ch. Zarka and Q. Skinner act for the holistic view (Zarka, 2001), (Skinner, 2004), while L. Strauss and H. Warrender are on the other side of 'political reductionism' (Strauss, 1952), (Warrender, 1957).

⁸ Cf. "For man is not just a *natural body*, but also a part of the state, or (as I put it) of the *body politic*; for that reason he had to be considered as both man and citizen, that is, the first principle of physics had to be conjoined with those of politics, the most difficult with the easiest" (M&C, p. 35; in Latin: DH, *Epistola Dedicatoria*) and "Nevertheless, what is to be understood about men insofar as they are men, is not applicable insofar as they are citizens" (M&C, p. 68; DH, p. 116).

⁹ (Lev., p. 60).

sense. Conditional knowledge is any knowledge derivable by inference: “And therefore, when the discourse is put into speech, and begins with the definitions of words, and proceeds by connexion of the same into general affirmations, and of these again into syllogisms, the end or last sum is called the conclusion; and the thought of the mind by it signified is that conditional knowledge, or knowledge of the consequence of words, which is commonly called science”¹⁰. It is significant that Hobbes rejects the possibility of achieving absolute knowledge in physics: “No discourse whatsoever can end in absolute knowledge of fact, past or to come. For, as for the knowledge of fact, it is originally sense, and ever after memory”¹¹. Only God – as the creator of the physical world – can have the absolute knowledge of nature. The destiny of men is conditional knowledge and nothing more. This idea has a very interesting resonance with the introduction to the *Leviathan* where Hobbes states that just as God creates nature, so man creates an artificial animal – the state. In other words, as God has absolute knowledge about his creation, so does man about the state.

Thus, the science about the state is pure: “Finally, politics and ethics (that is, the sciences of just and unjust, of equity and inequity) can be demonstrated *a priori*; because we ourselves make the principles – that is, the causes of justice (namely laws and covenants) – whereby it is known what justice and equity, and their opposites, injustice and inequity, are”¹². According to Hobbes, a political thinker deals with analysis of pacts and laws¹³, thus his knowledge is always conceptually conditioned (the same is true for moral philosophy). And obviously it is language that gives the opportunity to have absolute knowledge in the sphere of politics, because man himself creates the criterion of truth for the main principles of the political (and moral) sphere. In other words, the conceptual conditionality of the political sphere is the foundation for its deeper understanding and absolute knowledge about it¹⁴.

Hobbes’ claim to construct political philosophy on the model of geometry is useful here – “the only science that it hath pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind”¹⁵. In this case, it is not quite fair to say that political and moral philosophy bear no resemblance to the natural

¹⁰ (Ibid, p. 47–48).

¹¹ (Ibid, p. 47).

¹² (M&C, p. 42–43; DH, p. 94). See also: “Of arts, some are demonstrable, others indemonstrable; and demonstrable are those the construction of the subject whereof is in the power of artist himself, who, in his demonstration, does no more but deduce the consequences of his own operation. The reason whereof is this, that the science of every subject is derived from a precognition of the causes, generation, and construction of the same; and consequently where causes are known, there is place for demonstration, but not where the causes are to seek for. Geometry therefore is demonstrable, for the lines and figures from which we reason are drawn and described by ourselves; and civil philosophy is demonstrable, because we make the commonwealth ourselves. But because of natural bodies we know not the construction, but seek it from the effects, there lies no demonstration of what the causes be we seek for but only of what they may be” (EW, VII, p. 183–184).

¹³ (Lev., p. 32).

¹⁴ It is important to notice, that in this way of thinking Hobbes wasn’t alone: Mersenne M. *Harmonie universelle*, III: «it should not be surprising if we cannot discover true causes, and the way in which they act and are acted upon, seeing that we can know the true causes only of things we can make with our hands or minds, and since, of all the things which God has made, we can make none of them...» (Cit. by: (Hanson, 1991, p. 637).

sciences. The similarity of political and natural philosophy reveals itself in a uniform method of research – both should be constructed on the basis of pure mathematics. However, Hobbes has a different motivation for the advocacy of the special status of geometry in contrast with the rationalistic tradition going from Descartes.

For Descartes, mathematics reveals the hidden structure of the world, and the language of mathematics is common both to human reason and to the book of nature¹⁶. In contrast, for Hobbes the demonstrative character of geometry is not related to its versatility and universality, but only to the correlation with our own will and action: “Since the causes of the properties that individual figures have belong to them because we ourselves draw the lines; and since the generation of the figures depends on our will; nothing more is required to know the phenomenon peculiar to any figure whatsoever than that we consider everything that follows from the construction that we ourselves make in the figure to be described. Therefore, because of this fact (that is, that we ourselves create the figures), it happens that geometry hath been and is demonstrable”¹⁷. Thus, pure mathematics is demonstrative because it depends only on our own will. We can reach an understanding of nature as far as our own mathematical models of it are accurate. Still, it is just knowledge about models, not about the world itself. As it was shown above, the situation with the political and moral worlds is quite different.

Interestingly, language – as a guarantor of absolute political and moral knowledge – could be the main obstacle to the progress of civil science at the same time. Unlike animals, man is endowed with a language ability and, as a consequence, he has reason: “[Hobbes] connects reasoning with science, as that is exemplified in mathematical calculation; and it emphasizes the fact that reason is a skill that is learned on the basis of language, not an innate faculty that comes on stream, ready-made, at a certain point of development”¹⁸. Unlike animals, man can act not according to his instincts, but in accordance with the concepts of honor, pride and glory.

On the one hand, Hobbes sees the close correlation between rationality and language ability¹⁹. But on the other, he knows that language could stimulate irrational behavior, which contradicts common sense and natural laws²⁰. Hobbes considers the will for self-preservation as the first law of nature, but he says that vanity, desire for power and glory force people to act against this natural law. And it is obvious that such irrational behavior is conceptually conditioned: “[I]ronically it is language – the medium of reason itself – which feeds vanity and inflames the passions. To reason with loose and imprecisely defined concepts just is to act in

¹⁵ (Ibid. 28).

¹⁶ (Descartes, 1983).

¹⁷ (M&C, p. 41–42; DH, p. 93).

¹⁸ (Petit, 2008, p. 145).

¹⁹ (Lev., p. 36; 53; etc).

inflammatory irrational and self-destructive ways”²¹. This is the peculiar feature of man: in opposition to animals, man can lie, deceive and pretend. Therefore, the political thinker must consider, first, the fact that people can be guided in their activities by phenomena (i.e. concepts) which are uncharacteristic for the world of nature; and secondly, they can, in the words of Wittgenstein, disguise their thoughts and actions through language.

Hobbes states that political and moral philosophy appears only after the emergence of the state²². This is because only laws and covenants could be considered as a measure of good and evil, right and wrong. Thus, the main political and moral concepts demand authority capable of ensuring their stable existence. In other words, the appearance of the conditions for rational discourse depends on the acquisition by the language its own ontological grounds. And these grounds are political. To clarify this idea, the functioning of language in the state of nature and in the civil state should be considered.

Two Languages in Hobbes

Certainly, language is an essential prerequisite for the emergence of the state. As Hobbes states it: “[T]hat we can command and understand commands is a benefit of speech, and truly the greatest. For without this there would be no society among man, no peace, and consequently no disciplines; but first savagery, then solitude, and for dwellings, caves”²³. Nevertheless, this obviousness should be analyzed as carefully as the most obscure fragments of Hobbes’ philosophy.

First of all, it is important to pay attention to the fact that Hobbes himself does not consider language as a special kind of reality, through which the truths about the world can be discovered. The idea that the names are given to things according to their nature Hobbes describes as a “childish”²⁴ opinion. From Hobbes’ point of view, words are just labels – “marks, or notes” – which people arbitrarily, and only in accordance to their own will, assign to things²⁵. Criticizing the ancient and medieval idea that the name indicates the nature of thing, Hobbes ironically notices: “For words are wise men’s counters; they do but reckon by them: but they are the mony of fooles, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, or a Thomas, or any other doctor whatsoever, if but a man”²⁶. In fact, the existence of a plurality of languages

²⁰ (Lev., p. 88).

²¹ (Ball, 1985, p. 748).

²² (Lev., p. 110–111).

²³ (M&C, p. 39–40; DH, p. 91). Also see: (Lev., p. 25).

²⁴ (M&C, p. 39; DH, p. 90).

²⁵ (M&C, p. 39; DH, p. 89–90).

²⁶ (Lev., p. 28–29).

suggests that man names things arbitrarily. Thus, there is nothing in common between words (i.e. sounds) and things (i.e. bodies) that man can derive from experience²⁷.

However, there are some passages which raise some questions about Hobbes' position. For example, he remarks that, "it is incredible that men once came together to take counsel to constitute by decree what all words and all connexions of words would signify. It is more credible, however, that at first there were few names and only of those things that were the most familiar"²⁸. The meaning of words does not always depend on the will of man, but it conforms the power of tradition and language usage²⁹. Moreover, in accordance with the fundamental similarity between human beings³⁰, it can be assumed that Hobbes "... almost certainly supposes that they will naturally form the same conceptions in response to the same stimuli"³¹. Thus, experience tells us that language is completely dependent on the will of man, but deductive reasoning shows that language is protected from the tyranny of human will by tradition and the nature of man.

Nevertheless, as it was mentioned above, deductive reasoning is much weaker ground for science than experience and memory. It is important to consider the so-called "inconstant names". By these Hobbes means, "the names of such things as affect us, that is, which please and displease us, because all men be not alike affected with the same thing, nor the same man at all times"³². In this case, the names of all the virtues and vices – and eventually all the political and ethical concepts – are inconstant. Where everyone tries to find his own benefits and has the right to everything, there is no protective cover of the traditional usage for any of words. There is no support in the nature of man, too, because the existence of multiple languages is a consequence of the "need (the mother of all inventions)"³³. Obviously, where there is the need, there is an interest. Therefore, all words of all languages could be considered as inconstant names. Even the meanings of the most common and familiar words are under the threat of change, because "for the constitution of man's nature, is of it self subject to desire novelty"³⁴.

Once again, this "voluntarism" is not a question of abstract concepts such as "good" or "justice", etc., but is an issue for all words of any language. If in the state of nature "every man has a right to every thing, even to one another's body" and everyone "is governed by his own reason"³⁵ it is obvious that man names the things only in accordance with his own will. The state of nature can be equaled to the confusion of Babylon, when separated by language, people are

²⁷ (M&C, p. 39; DH, p. 90).

²⁸ (M&C, p. 38; DH, p. 89).

²⁹ (EW, IV, p. 23).

³⁰ (Lev., p. 10; 86–87).

³¹ (Petit, 2008, p. 40).

³² (Lev., p. 31).

³³ (Ibid, p. 25).

³⁴ (Ibid, p. 225).

unable to cooperate: "... to speak in a more modern idiom, the tragedy of the state of nature is that although its inhabitants are linguistically competent (in Chomsky's sense) they are not yet communicatively competent (in Habermas' sense). They have the capacity to speak, to construct and utter well-formed sentences but they are still apt to speak insincerely, self-interestedly, untruthful"³⁶. But the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes deals not only with the state of nature – social life and the state are taken into consideration next and here Hobbes suggests an alternative vision for language.

While language is dependent on the will and needs of individuals, it cannot perform its most important communicative function: it is devoid of performativity. However, where there is no common language, there cannot be communication, and consequently, community or commonwealth. It is not Hobbes' idea, but it is an idea which Hobbes knew very well. Thus, Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (the translation of this was the first published work of Hobbes³⁷) describes the revolution at Corcyra as the revolution which was conditioned by language (precisely, conceptual) changes. Thucydides describes the horrors of changing the conventional meaning of words, leading to the incapacitation of civil life. New word usage fed the lust for power and produced more and more problems, which eventually led to the division of society "into camps in which no man trusted his fellow. To put an end to this, there was neither promise to be depended upon, nor oath that could command respect"³⁸. As Terence Ball notices: "Point for point, feature for feature, Hobbes' state of nature parallels Thucydides' description of the Corcyraean revolution. More striking still, Hobbes follows Thucydides' account of the essentially conceptual character of political conflict"³⁹.

Language and the Sovereign

As it was noticed above, there cannot be community without common language. The necessity of a common language implies one of the most important demands on a citizen: prohibition of arbitrary naming and word usage, which is contradicted with the fixed meanings. The frequent Hobbesian claim that it is necessary to clarify different concepts⁴⁰ gives relevance to the sphere of science as well as civil life. Here the question could be raised: who is responsible for assigning meaning to different words? Because in every case could be personal interest determining the definitions of man, the existence of a judge or arbitrator is crucial. Once the role of a judge is weakened, a state is under the threat of destruction: "In the second place [after the

³⁵ (Ibid, p. 91).

³⁶ (Ball, 1985, p. 749).

³⁷ About Hobbes' connections with the Ancient tradition see: (Strauss, 1952).

³⁸ (Thucydides, 1910: 3.82).

³⁹ (Ball, 1985, p. 747).

⁴⁰ (Lev., p. 28; 33; etc).

lack of the absolute power], I observe the *Diseases* of a Common-wealth that proceed from the poyson of seditious doctrines, whereof one is *That every private man is Judge of Good and Evil actions*. This is true in the condition of meer Nature, where there are no Civil Laws; and also under Civil Government in such cases as are not determined by the Law. But otherwise, it is manifest that the measure of Good and Evil actions is the Civil Law; and the Judge the Legislator, who is always *the Representative* of the Common-wealth. From this false doctrine, men are disposed to debate with themselves and dispute the commands of the Common-wealth; and afterwards to obey or disobey them, as in their private judgments they shall think fit. Whereby the Common-wealth is distracted and *Weakened*”⁴¹.

Hobbes examines in great detail the necessity of “language regulation”. Because it is necessary to use the right words, he calls the sovereign for the strict censorship. For example, the books of Greek and Roman authors would be prohibited. They could call into question the meanings of some concepts, unless these books were correctly commented on by the experienced connoisseurs who have immunity from poison of these books⁴². It also implies control over the educational process. Without it, the state risks being weakened: “the Instruction of the people, dependeth wholly on the right teaching of Youth in the Universities”⁴³. In fact, education is one of the first duties of the sovereign⁴⁴ and it should concern as wide a sphere of human life as possible: “The sovereign power, in this case, interferes not only in the sphere of the law but in the sphere of morality itself. In the state, there are not just rules, but the interpretative authority which gives authoritative judgments on what should be considered as modesty, mercy, compassion, etc.”⁴⁵. It is important to remember that for Hobbes “the Common-peoples minds, unless they be tainted with dependence on the Potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their Doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Public Authority shall be imprinted in them”, and it is necessary to be aware of what is written on this “paper”: it should be only correct definitions and judgments, i.e. fixed by the sovereign, rather than random opinions of “pusled philosophers”⁴⁶.

There is a legitimate question: do the meanings of words in the civil society depend only on the will of the sovereign? This is unlikely because the meanings of words depend on “our discourse which being derived from the custom and common use of speech representeth unto us not our own conceptions. It is therefore a great ability in a man, out of the words, contexture, and other circumstances of language, to deliver himself from *equivocation*, and to

⁴¹ (Ibid, p. 223).

⁴² (Ibid, p. 226).

⁴³ (Ibid, p. 237).

⁴⁴ (Ibid, p. 231; 233–235).

⁴⁵ (Filippov, 2009b, p. 118).

⁴⁶ (Lev., p. 30).

find out the true meaning of what is said: and this is it we call *understanding*⁴⁷. Thus, the sovereign here is limited by the norms and rules of everyday language. And understanding is a central concept here because without understanding the state is impossible.

It is significant that in the 4th chapter of *Leviathan*, Hobbes says that such words as “justice” or “good” have no stable meaning. In the 15th chapter, he says that these meanings become stable only with the beginning of coercive power. In the 30th chapter, he states with typical flatness: “As I have heard some say, that Justice is but a word, without substance; and that whatsoever a man can by force, or art, acquire to himself, (not only in the condition of warre, but also in a Common-wealth,) is his own, which I have already shown to be false [...]”⁴⁸. To overcome this contradiction, I believe, it is necessary to admit that there are serious differences between language in the state of nature and language in civil society.

The arbitrariness in naming ends only with the appearance of the state. It means that the sovereign has more influence on language than the traditions of word usage. Hobbes notes that in the everyday usage of language the meanings of the words are often wrested from the original meanings, even when they “have certain and defined signification by constitution”⁴⁹. In this case, the change in the meanings of seemingly traditional or common words is just a question of time. There is no power of tradition which can govern the life of language.

Despite the fact that the sovereign has more power than tradition, language itself has a great importance in civil life. And language is so powerful that Philip Pettit defines civil society in Hobbes as the “Worded Nature”⁵⁰. To understand this, the concept of contract should be considered. As it was shown in the state of nature, words are just “counters” and nothing more: they do not have any real power over people and they cannot obligate man to do or not to do something⁵¹. In other words, they do not have power over the future and therefore do not provide the ground for contracts and consequently, the state. The most important feature of the contract is that it can regulate the future for the present, but if nobody can be sure that the contract terms will be fulfilled, then the contract itself is impossible⁵².

Words are powerless and there are only two ways to strengthen them. The first is an inevitable punishment for noncompliance, presupposing coercive power. The second is the qualities of a person, such as honor or pride⁵³. However, these inner qualities are not able to create and maintain an environment in which infringement of contracts will not occur, because

⁴⁷ (EW, IV, p. 23).

⁴⁸ (Lev., p. 232).

⁴⁹ (M&C, p. 374).

⁵⁰ (Pettit, 2008, p. 98).

⁵¹ (Lev., p. 94).

⁵² (Ibid, p. 92–96).

⁵³ (Ibid, p. 99).

they relate to phenomena “too rarely found to be presumed on”⁵⁴. Thus, the sovereign is the source of power which gives words a real force to determine the future of people: “The sovereign uses the law to establish constitutive rules that determine the meanings of just and unjust, mine and yours, thereby enabling subjects to reason unequivocally and profitably about what should or should not obtain in relevant areas. But equally, the sovereign uses the law to establish regulative rules that impose sanctions on the breach of private contracts, making it possible for subjects to give their words to one another and make them stick”⁵⁵. By virtue of the authority of sovereign, language is endowed with performative qualities, giving citizens the opportunity to promise, to forgive, to give thanks, etc.⁵⁶ – and to do it, as if the word is not just a sound, but the “real money”⁵⁷.

The Paradox of the Social Contract

A particular linguistic reality appearing in the society as a consequence of sovereign power provides an interesting paradox. The state is a result of a social contract. However, the contract itself is possible only if there is a state authority. Of no less importance is the fact that the contract is possible only if all participants understand what it is about, i.e. there is a common language⁵⁸: “Each side must know that the other side is a body capable of making a promise or authorized to make one [...] The promiser must be understood to be speaking to the promise”⁵⁹. But a common language can appear only when the meanings of words are set and guarded by a sovereign. In this case, the transition from the state of nature to civil society implies that *before* the conclusion of the contract, there must be agreement about the meanings of general terms. Therefore, *before* the sovereign there must be a ‘sovereign’ who implements an agreement⁶⁰.

Two points are important here. First, it seems that the subject of the social contract is not sophisticated concepts or inconstant names; it deals with the question of life and death, i.e. the fundamental elements of Hobbes’ anthropology (fear of death; desire for peace; authority as a condition for normal existence). A social contract presupposes the rejection of natural rights in accordance with the laws of nature. And Hobbes is very scrupulous in this idea: “For though they that speak of this subject, use to confound *Jus*, and *Lex*, *Right* and *Law*; yet they ought to be distinguished; because RIGHT, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear; Whereas LAW

⁵⁴ (Ibid).

⁵⁵ (Petit, 2008, p. 152–153).

⁵⁶ (Lev., p. 62–69). Geraint Parry supports the idea of the principle ‘state’ or ‘civil’ performativity of language: (Parry, 1967, p. 246–252).

⁵⁷ This idea about the state governing through the governing of language gained popularity in the contemporary critical theories of state. E.g.: (Mitchell, 1999) and especially (Bourdieu, 1994).

⁵⁸ About the impossibility of the covenants with animals or God see: (Lev., p. 97).

⁵⁹ (Parry, 1967, p. 251).

⁶⁰ Kinch Hoekstra points this paradox. According to him, the paradox could be explained if we consider the state of nature and the war of all against all as a post-politic phenomenon, i.e. not at the level of individuals, but on the level of corporate bodies (i.e. states or associations): (Hoekstra, 2007, p. 117–119). Hoekstra’s position conflicts with the interpretation of performativity of

determineth, and bindeth to one of them: so that Law and Right differ as much as Obligation and Liberty, which in one and the same matter are inconsistent”⁶¹. Thus, the contractors understand the essence of the contract even in situations of linguistic anarchy typical for the state of nature, just because they make an agreement about something which is a part of human nature. Nevertheless, as shown earlier, sometimes language becomes a cause of irrational behavior. Conceptually determined human passions can force a person to violate even the laws of nature and, therefore, the universality of these laws cannot be regarded as a guarantee for the understanding and fulfillment of a social contract.

The second point is more important to overcome the paradox: the state of nature is considered by Hobbes only as a theoretical construct, rather than historical reality: “It was clear long time ago for many people that the natural state of war of all against all shouldn’t be understood historically specific, but that it is an idealization. But this idealization is an idealization of the process, and this process is genetic, which is generating something new. What does this idealization means by the ‘natural state’? It means no more than the ideal structure, a kind of ultimate state of the sociality: some kind of anti-sociality as the other of the political and social life; and it is overcome with the ideal social contract which is also, therefore, is conceived only as a kind of pure theoretical hypothesis”⁶². Hobbes’ provisos that there is no sense to search for analogues of the war of all against all in the real history ⁶³ are akin to his comment that there had never been a “meeting” where people agreed on the meaning of words⁶⁴. The distinction between “natural” and “civil” usage of language must be understood only as a theoretical principle, but not as a real history in the development of language. Consequently, language in the state of nature does not differ in its phonetics, grammar, and other characteristics from language in civil society. And the emergence of the state does not imply the invention of a fundamentally new language. The meaning of this difference is that only in civil society language can fully actualize its potentialities: “This would present a problem if Hobbes means to prohibit all society in the natural condition. In the most extreme sentence of his characterization of the natural condition he does say that there are ‘no arts, no letters, no society’, but there are many indications that society may be found there”⁶⁵. The sovereign has great power over language, and language can actualize its own nature only in the civil state, but then, language does have priority over the sphere of politics and social potency is immanent in language itself.

language in Hobbes given by Geraint Parry: (Parry, 1967, p. 249). At the end of the article Perry comes to considered paradox.

⁶¹ (Lev., p. 91).

⁶² (Filippov, 2009a, p. 111).

⁶³ (Lev., p. 89–90).

⁶⁴ (M&C, p. 38; DH, p. 89).

⁶⁵ (Hoekstra, 2007, p. 119).

Bibliography

- Filippov, A. (2009a), “The Relevance of Hobbes’ Philosophy. The First Article”, *Sociologicheskoe obozrenie*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 102–112.
- Filippov, A. (2009b), “The Relevance of Hobbes’ Philosophy. The Second Article”, *Sociologicheskoe obozrenie*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp.113–122.
- Ball, T. (1985), “Hobbes’ linguistic turn”, *Polity*, Vol. 17, No 4, pp.739–760.
- Bell, D. R. (1969), “What Hobbes does with words”, *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 19. No. 75, pp. 155–158.
- Biletzki, A. (1997), *Talking wolves: Thomas Hobbes on the language of politics and the politics of language*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Cady, D. L. (2005), *Moral vision: how everyday life shapes ethical thinking*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bourdieu, P. (1994), “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field”, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No 1, pp. 1–18.
- Descartes, R. (1983), *Principia philosophiae (Principles of Philosophy)*, Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Gert, B. (2010), *Hobbes: prince of peace*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hobbes, T. (1840), *English works [EW, IV]*, Vol. 4, London: John Bohn.
- Hobbes, T. (1845), *English works [EW, VII]*, Vol. 7, London: John Bohn.
- Hobbes, T. (1839), “De Homine” [DH] in G. Molesworth, ed., *Latin Works*, Vol. 2, London: John Bohn, pp. 1–157.
- Hobbes, T. (1972), *Man and Citizen [M&C]*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.
- Hobbes, T. (2003), *Leviathan, Or The Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil [Lev.]*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoekstra, K. (2007), “Hobbes on the natural condition of mankind” in P. Springborg, ed., *The Cambridge companion to Hobbes’ Leviathan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 109–128.
- Johnston, D. (1986) *The Rhetoric of ‘Leviathan’: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mitchell, T. (1999), “Society, Economy, and the State Effect” in G. Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, pp. 76–98
- Parry, G. (1967), “Performative utterances and obligation in Hobbes”, *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 68, pp. 246–252.

- Pettit, P. (2008), *Made with words: Hobbes on language, mind, and politics*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Skinner, Q. (1996), *Reason and rhetoric in the philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skinner, Q. (2004), *The vision of politics, Vol. 3: Hobbes and civil science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, L. (1952), *The political philosophy of Hobbes: its basis and its genesis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stewart, D. (summer 2013 edition), "Thomas Hobbes" in E. N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/hobbes/>.
- Thucydides (1910), *The Peloponnesian war*, trans. by R. Crawley, London: J. M. Dent; New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Warrender, H. (1957), *The political philosophy of Hobbes: his theory of obligation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Whelan, F. (1981), "Language and its abuses in Hobbes' political philosophy", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 75. № 1. P. 59–75.
- Zarka, Y. Ch. (2001), "Hobbes and modern political thought" in Skinner Q. & Zarka Y. Ch., eds., *Hobbes: The Amsterdame debate*, Hildesheim: Olms.

Alexey A. Pleshkov

National Research University the Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). The Poletaev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI). Junior Research Fellow;

E-mail: apleshkov@hse.ru, Tel.: +7 (495) 6214693

Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE.

© Pleshkov, 2014