

From Glory to Worship

Recognition in Thomas Hobbes's 'De cive'

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Abstract: This article is the first part of a comparison between Hobbes's and Spinoza's theories of recognition as they appear in *De Cive* and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. It examines the use of the concepts of glory and honor in *De Cive*, revealing two distinct levels of Hobbes's theory. In the first and second sections of *De Cive*, glory is presented mostly as a destabilizing passion that leads to competition, undermines social bonds, and challenges any moral or political solution to the problem of human conflict. In the third section, however, the Hobbes's discourse on worship makes explicit what had been implicit in brief, marginal passages in earlier sections, namely, the capacity of glory to function as a vector of cooperation and a source of individual and collective power. In doing so, this article challenges simplistic readings of Hobbes's theory of recognition, showing how glory is inextricably bound up in power dynamics that both enable and undermine social order, and thus lays the groundwork for the comparison with Spinoza's theory of recognition that will be developed in the second part of the comparison, published in the Journal of Spinoza Studies (issue 1/2025).

Keywords: Hobbes; Glory; Honor; Worship; Power.

Contemporary philosophy inherited the theme of recognition primarily from Hegel. However, as I have suggested, with Theophile Penigaud and Emmanuel Renault, in *La reconnaissance avant la reconnaissance*, and as Axel Honneth himself showed in his *Recognition: A Chapter in the history of European Ideas*, its genealogy is far more complex¹. In particular, the problem of what can anachronistically be called "recognition", not in the technical sense established by Hegel in the section of the *Phenomenology* on servant and master, but in the more general sense according to which recognition is "the construction or confirmation of one's self-image by the other", is central to the philosophies of Hobbes and Spinoza². In the light

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¹ Toto, Penigaud, Renault (2017); Honneth (2020).

² Toto, Penigaud, Renault (2017, 5).

of this problem, we can reread Hobbes's and Spinoza's analyses of passions such as esteem and contempt, glory and shame, pride and ambition, or of social and political phenomena such as honor and dishonor, worship and religious conflict, group or national identity, claiming rights and their protection by civil authorities and laws. These analyses, in turn, play a constitutive role in their anthropological, ethical, and political theories and in their conceptions of the relations between individuals or collectivities, sociality and conflict, emotions and morality, the constitution and contestation of political and religious power. An in-depth study of the problem of recognition is therefore a necessary condition for an adequate understanding of the two philosophies, the relationship between them, and their development and fortunes.

Despite a few articles devoted to it³, this question has not yet received the attention it deserves in specialized studies of the two authors and, more generally, in the history of modern philosophy or culture. Since I had already separately dealt with various aspects of Hobbes's and Spinoza's 'theories of recognition' elsewhere, what I initially had in mind here was a more complex approach. In fact, the relationship between Hobbes's and Spinoza's ideas of recognition is both theoretical, concerning the similarities and differences between two different conceptual models, and historical, concerning the internal development of each model and the potential influence of each model and development on the other. For this reason, my intention was to illustrate a quadrangular relationship. On the hypothesis that Spinoza composed at least a large part of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* after reading *De Cive* but before reading *Leviathan*, and that he deeply reworked his *Ethics* after completing the *Treatise* and reading *Leviathan*, my aim was to explain the differences between the *Ethics* and the *Theologico-Political Treatise* on the question of recognition, or the development of Spinoza's position on this subject, from the differences that a moderately attentive reader can notice between *De Cive* and *Leviathan*. Such a complex operation would, in my opinion, have clarified the overall meaning of the two theories, their relations and their changes. For reasons of time and space, however, I have been able to complete only three quarters of this project. In this issue of *Consecutio Rerum* and in issue 1/2025 of the *Journal of Spinoza studies*⁴, the reader will find the first and the second part of what, according to the original plan, should have been one half of the work, highlighting the dialogue between the *Treatise* and the *De Cive*. Although in issue 1/2025 of *Hobbes Studies* the reader will find a slightly

³ Lazzeri (2007; 2010); Tucker (2010).

⁴ Toto (2025a).

summarized form of the part devoted to *Leviathan*⁵, I failed to write the part devoted to the *Ethics*, its evolution from the *Treatise*, and its comparison with *Leviathan*, in which all the threads unraveled in the other parts should have been woven together. Yet even in the truncated form presented here and in the *Journal of Spinoza Studies*, the result still seems to me to be of some interest.

In the present article, devoted to the *De Cive*, I first reconstruct the meaning of the concept of glory (§1.1) and its uses in anthropology (§1.2), ethics (§1.3) and politics (§1.4). In each of these different contexts, I identify two levels of Hobbes' discourse: a more conspicuous one, in which the relationships of recognition, in their structurally comparative and competitive character, represent an engine of conflict and a factor in the crisis of the possible ethical and political solutions to the problem that this conflict represents, and a more discreet one, in which recognition seems to imply an intimately relational constitution of subjectivities and to assert itself as an autonomous factor of socialization, as a possible motive for moral action, and, if properly regulated, as an element of stability in the institutional fabric. In a second moment (§1.5), I will focus on the notion of worship, on the relationship between power and honor it implies, and on the way in which the theory of recognition suggested by this relationship allows us to better understand the first and, so to speak, 'official' level of Hobbes's discourse in the light of the 'unofficial' but more fundamental second level. The structure of the article published in the *Journal of Spinoza Studies*, which examines the theses presented in the *Treatise* and analyses their similarities and differences with those presented in *De Cive*, is designed to follow the structure of the present paper as closely as possible. After demonstrating the central role of the concept of admiration in Spinoza's account of human relations of recognition, both with the divine and with fellow human beings, and the similarity of this role to that played by Hobbes's concept of glory (§2.1), I examine the disruptive potential of recognition, showing that it must not be considered, as in Hobbes, an anthropological constant, but as the effect of a precise institutional framework (§2.2). I then move on to show its seemingly positive moral function, highlighting what is in fact its moral shortcomings (§2.3). Finally, I explore its function in legitimating or stabilizing, and in criticizing or destabilizing, political authority (§2.4 and §2.5). This approach allows me to emphasize the transformative, selective, and critical aspects of the dialogue between the *Treatise* and *De Cive*. The dialogue in question is transfor-

⁵ Toto (2025b).

mative in that it ascribes to an alternative concept, admiration, a function Hobbes previously ascribed to glory. It is selective in that Spinoza, like any only moderately attentive reader, focuses primarily on the comparative and conflictual aspects of Hobbes's concept of recognition, while largely ignoring the relational and cooperative implications inherent in Hobbes' discourse on worship. It is critical in that, while accepting Hobbes's thesis of the inextricable link between authority and recognition, it highlights the politically pernicious role that recognition can play in the maintenance of violent authorities and the politically salutary role that the pursuit of recognition can play in their contestation.

Thus, even without dealing with *Leviathan* and *Ethics*, the analysis and comparison of the theories of recognition employed in *De Cive* and the *Treatise* is of fourfold interest. First, focusing on the co-presence of different levels of discourse in—or different possible readings of—a single work allows us to consider a problem quite different from the standard one of the stability or evolution of Hobbes's concept of glory from the *Elements* to *Leviathan* (or *De homine*). It also allows for a valorization of the desire for recognition as capable of mediating social relations whose autonomous force can even overcome the power of the sovereign, in contrast to the standard view of Hobbesian individualism, on which it insists that conflicts can only be overcome with the intervention of a contract-based sovereignty. Second, the analysis of Spinoza's conception of recognition, and its debt to Hobbes', encourages a reexamination of standard narratives that oppose the two authors, making room for a reading of Spinoza as a 'left' Hobbesian. Third, the analysis shows that, with all their ambiguities, Hobbes' theory of recognition and to a lesser extent Spinoza's had a strong impact—positive and negative, direct and indirect—on authors such as Nicole, Mandeville, Helvétius and d'Holbach, or Rousseau, Hume and Smith, and thus that these theories represent an important chapter of the history of modern philosophy, and of the notion of recognition⁶. Finally, the current scholarly debate on recognition was born and has developed on a terrain closely intertwined with that of the history of ideas, starting from an actualization of Hegel but extending to a re-reading of other authors in the retrospective light of the Hegelian problematic⁷. Thus, the analysis of Hobbes and Spinoza could have a certain retroactive effect on contemporary critical theory itself, not only inviting it to reexamine the historiographical narrative out of which it has emerged and which it has produced

⁶ See, e.g. Blank (2025), Lazzeri (2022), Marquer (2022).

⁷ I am thinking in particular of Rousseau, see, among others, Carnevali (2004), Honneth (2013).

(think of the tripartite model of recognition sketched by Honneth and the simplification on which it is based), but also posing potentially uncomfortable problems (such as the ideological function of recognition).

Without further ado, let us begin with Hobbes.

1.1. Glory: Definition and Implications

Each of the three sections of *De Cive* (“Freedom”, “Power”, “Religion”) contains references to passions that can be traced back to recognition. In the first section, recognition appears as one of the factors that defines man as inherently asocial, the deactivation of which is thus prescribed by the laws of nature as a precondition for morality and the peace the laws seeks to achieve. In the second section, it reappears as one of the elements undermining the institutions designed to stabilize the internal peace that morality alone cannot guarantee. Finally, the third section shifts the focus to the seemingly exclusively theological theme of “worship”, through which man honors God. Thus, in the first and second sections, the desire for recognition seems reduced to a morally and politically nefarious engine of competition and conflict. On the contrary, understood not as an exposition of the specific relationship between man and God, but as the formulation of a general theory of recognition, Hobbes’s discourse on worship allows recognition to be considered as a vector of cooperation and a constitutive factor of individual and political power. This third aspect of recognition was present in the first two sections, but almost exclusively—to use Freudian terminology—in the form of its repression or undoing. What is the relationship between these different discursive contexts and conceptual levels? Do they contradict each other or do one illuminate the other? Which of the two levels is dominant and which is subordinate, both in terms of the internal logic of the arguments and the impact on an only moderately attentive reader? In order to answer this, we will begin with the texts that clarify the central term ‘glory’, before examining how this term functions in the various areas of Hobbes’ discussion.

In Hobbes’s writings from 1640 to 1651, glory and honor emerge as the dominant concepts of his theory of recognition. Despite the crucial role it will again play in the discourse on worship elaborated in Chapter XV, and despite the considerable number of references to it also present in other chapters (e.g., those on master/servant and parent/child relations), honor is relegated to the background in the first two sections of *De Cive*, as evidenced by the disappearance of the thematically dedicated sections pre-

sent in the *Elements*. The passion of glory, the sole remaining protagonist on the recognition scene, is then brought to the fore from the very first paragraphs of the work. “Every pleasure of the mind [*animi*],” as we read in the lengthy second paragraph of Chapter I, “is either glory (or a good opinion of oneself) or relates ultimately to glory”: glory, therefore, is a “pleasure of the mind”, as distinct from “sensual” pleasure⁸. Unlike Hobbes’s other works, *De Cive* does not offer a detailed analysis of the relationship between these different pleasures. In particular, Hobbes does not explain the relationship that binds sensual pleasure to mere sensibility, and thus to the present moment, and pleasure “of the mind” to imagination, and thus not only to the future, but also to one’s own power—both necessary conditions for enjoying any future pleasure, and which, moreover, is the specific object of honor. Nonetheless, the philosopher does not fail to note that “all the heart’s joy [*voluptas*] and pleasure [*alacritas*],” and thus also glory as a pleasure of the mind related to the “good opinion of oneself”, “lies in being able to compare oneself favorably with others and form a high opinion of oneself [*magnifice sentire de se ipso*],” and that “like honor”, therefore, “glorying [...] consists in comparison and preeminence”⁹.

The bluntly self-reflexive terms in which glory is defined as a “good” opinion or “high” feeling (*sentire*) about oneself, which some interpreters take to show that glory for Hobbes is not an “intersubjective relation” but a “purely subjective” mental state, make its connection to the question of recognition elusive¹⁰. Of course, we can say that glory is an “intrinsically relational” passion¹¹. We can say this, however, provided we note that the only relation explicitly considered in the passages we read is that of comparison, which makes glory a “comparative concept” and a “positional” good¹². A subject A cannot have a good opinion or a high feeling of himself without looking at another subject B, because this opinion and this feeling, as many interpreters since Strauss have noted, coincide with a sense of superiority and imply a worse or lower opinion and feeling of others¹³. “Everyone”, in fact, “takes most pleasure [*maxime perplacere sibi*]” in those

⁸ DC (I, 2).

⁹ DC (I, 5 and 2). The *Elements* did not merely note the link between glory and superiority, but explained it by connecting glory itself and power, by equating any power that fails to prevail over a contrary power with a power that is null, and by drawing out the structural contrariety among men generated by conflict. A power less than superior to all competing ones is a null power, in which it is therefore not possible to glory.

¹⁰ Abizadeh (2020, 267, 273).

¹¹ Field (2020, 31).

¹² Slomp (2000, 110), Pettit (2008, 94).

¹³ Strauss (1963², 51).

things by which “he may come away with a better idea of himself in comparison with someone else’s embarrassment [*turpitudinis*]¹⁴ or weakness”¹⁵. The image that each person has of himself is therefore always dependent on the image that he has of the other, but the relationship between A and B is an imaginary relationship, internal to A himself. Thus, glory appears as a “purely subjective pleasure”, linked to a form of self-knowledge, or—given that “opinion” doesn’t imply truth—self-narrative, which does not require the subject to step outside himself, or other subjects to lend their complicity¹⁶.

But the relevance of glory to the question of recognition becomes clear when we consider how this first form of relation to others, explicit but still internal to the subject, is complicated by a second, implicit but intersubjective one. Let us take, in this sense, the passage according to which it is impossible for those who glorify themselves “to avoid sometimes showing hatred and contempt for each other”, and this hatred and contempt are for them the greatest *animi molestia*, which in those who experience it triggers the strongest “impulse to hurt” those who have inflicted it on them¹⁷. One may wonder why on Earth a comparatively high opinion of oneself should be *molesta* (i.e., troublesome, annoying) and cause an “impulse to hurt” those who manifest it. To answer this question, we must assume not only that the manifestation of a good opinion of oneself coincides with the manifestation of a comparatively low opinion of others and is thus perceived by them as an expression of contempt, but also that this perception prevents them from enjoying an equally good opinion of themselves. According to the tacit logic of argumentation, then, how each person sees himself is conditioned not only by how he sees others, but also by how he thinks others see him: as remarked by Lloyd, “one’s sense of self-worth is not entirely self-contained, but instead depends at least in part on other people’s perception of one’s worth”¹⁸. An ordinary subject A, therefore, cannot look at himself without worrying about the gaze that the other, B, is directing at him, and about the way B will worry over the gaze that he himself is directing at him. The relationship between A and B, in short, cannot simply be internal to either A or B, because the interiorities of both condition and constitute each other in the very act of manifesting

¹⁴ “Turpitude” is the opposite of “honestas”: it relates here to moral devaluation, as distinct from the devaluation of mere power or ability (“weakness”).

¹⁵ DC (I, 2).

¹⁶ Abizadeh (2020, 267, 273).

¹⁷ DC (I, 5).

¹⁸ Lloyd (2020, 55).

themselves to each other. From this perspective, as Carnevali noted, “intersubjectivity”, or “the system of reciprocal relations between individuals and the difficult interaction of their egos”, becomes, if not *the*, at least *a* crucial problem of Hobbes’s conception of glory¹⁹.

Although it remains implicit in the passages we have just read, and would probably escape even a more than moderately attentive reader if the term “glory” did not contain an inescapable reference to the applause or acclamation of an audience, the transition from an internal or intra-subjective dimension to an external and intersubjective one is made explicit in at least one passage, though not from Chapter I but—not by chance, as we shall see—from Chapter XV. This passage makes the connection between glory, power and honor, to which it had previously only been compared (“like honor...”). Glory is here identified, on the one hand, with the “enjoyment” experienced by the subject “in the contemplation of his own virtue, force, science, beauty, friends, wealth or any other *power* which he has or regards as his own [*potentiam suam, vel tanquam suam*]”, and, on the other hand, with the “feeling of triumph as he reflects that he is being honored”²⁰. While the first claim is compatible with understanding the glorifying subject as capable of a solitary enjoyment of his own image in the mirror, and consequently with the widespread reading of the Hobbesian subject as “psychologically self-contained, autonomous, independent, self-sufficient”, the second shows that the subject always glories in the image of himself restored to him by others, in a dimension in which the way it relates to itself or to others and the way others relate to themselves or to it condition each other²¹.

Without going into the relationship that unites reflexivity, intersubjectivity, and power in glory, to which it will be necessary to return when studying Hobbes’s notion of worship, what emerges at this level is above all the tension between the intimately intersubjective constitution of subjectivity revealed by the passion for glory and the internally comparative and conflictual character of this passion. On the one hand, the self cannot relate positively to itself, have a good opinion and a high sense of itself, except to the extent that others relate positively to it, have a good opinion and a high sense of it: It cannot affirm or value itself without being the object of the affirmation or valorization of others, who should therefore also be affirmed and valorized by it, at least as the source of the pleasure associated with glory. Glory, on the other hand, “like honor”, consists in

¹⁹ Carnevali (2013, 56).

²⁰ DC (XV, 139).

²¹ Slomp (2000, 109).

the “triumph” of the soul of the one who believes himself to be honored, and thus in “comparison and preeminence”. No one can, therefore, glorify himself inwardly, believe in his own superiority and in the recognition of this superiority by others, without also feeling entitled to manifest this passion or belief outwardly and to devalue the other. But this manifestation or devaluation will have a negative effect on the other’s opinion or sense of self, harassing the other and creating in him an “impulse to hurt”. Thus, self-glorification necessarily provokes a generalized struggle for recognition. But this seems to imply that A cannot affirm himself without also denying other subjects, on whose affirmation his self-affirmation depends, that A cannot have a positive relationship with himself without having a contradictory, negative relationship with B, on whose support or positive relationship A’s positive relationship with himself depends. For why, one might ask, should we value one who despises us, exalt one who humiliates us, confirm one who denies us? To answer these questions, it is necessary to follow the traces of glory in each of the different contexts in which Hobbes problematizes it.

1.2. Anthropology and Recognition: Sociality and Conflict

The first context, as we know, is anthropological. Unlike the *Elements* and *Leviathan*, *De Cive* does not provide a detailed account of the faculties of the body and mind or of the passions of man. As the *Sectio tertia* of *Elementa philosophiae*, this work is intended to be a discourse not simply *de homine* but specifically, as its title makes clear, *De Cive*. In accordance with this systematic purpose, the anthropological problem is reabsorbed here within the framework of the polemic against the Aristotelian conception of man as *zoon politikon*²², and the danger of suppressing the difference or specificity of the citizen in relation to man. From this point of view, it is not irrelevant that the paragraphs of the first section, thanks to which it has been possible to recover the general meaning of the concept of glory, are the same ones in which this passion is questioned as the main reason for considering the state of nature as a state of “war”. To fully understand Hobbes’s theoretical move, however, it is necessary to observe how his argument is logically articulated in two distinct moments.

Against the backdrop of the presupposed distinction between utility (related to a “sensual” pleasure that ultimately refers to “the organs”) and

²² More precisely, as Gooding and Hoekstra (2020), and Ceron (2023) have recently emphasized, against the Aristotelian conception of friendship.

glory (conceived as “pleasure of the mind [*animi*]”), Hobbes in a first moment rules out the possibility that man can love his fellow man “naturally”, that is, “as his fellow man”²³. If such a love were possible, he argues, “there would be no reason [...] why [one] would rather seek”, as everyone actually does, “the company of men whose society is more prestigious and useful [*defertur honor & utilitas*] to him than to others”²⁴. “By nature”, the philosopher concludes, “we are not looking for friends [*socios*] but for honor or advantage [*commodum*] from them”²⁵. Despite the recent revaluation of “other-regarding” sentiments by Hobbes studies²⁶, the fact remains that “all society [...] exists for the sake either of advantage or of glory, i.e. it is a product of love of self, not of love of friends”²⁷. In this way, Hobbes proves that man is not naturally sociable insofar as sociability is understood as love of one’s associates and their company, or “mutual [...] benevolence”: association is a source of pleasure not in itself, but for the profit or glory derived from it²⁸. But he does so by admitting that self-love—and thus not only the pursuit of usefulness or *commoda*, but also the desire for glory and honor—is the driving force of a form of sociality without sociability, of a pursuit, albeit instrumental but no less natural, of acquaintances and associates. One does not seek recognition (or utility) in order to have associates, but one nevertheless seeks associates in order to have recognition (or utility), that is, out of a motive that can be hardly defined, in Gauthier’s words, as the “purely asocial” motive typical of *homo oeconomicus*, or as one of those “goals that do not require social life for their formulation”²⁹.

If, with Sagar, we ask why “man has two drives for to society”, but he is “nonetheless ‘not an animal born fit to society’”, the answer is clear: “by substituting the desire for recognition for Aristotle’s natural love of others (*philia*)”, Hobbes shows that one of the desires that lead “us to seek society necessarily precludes its realization”³⁰. In fact, the second moment of the argument seeks to deconstruct this margin of sociality as well by

²³ DC (I, 2).

²⁴ *Ibidem*. It is unclear in what way Hobbes imagines that one can derive glory from dating. An assimilable case is perhaps this: “all men, by natural necessity, favor those from whom comes to them honor and glory, rather than others; each, when dead, receives honor and glory more from the power of his sons than from that of anyone else” (DC, X, 5).

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ See Lloyd (2009, 79), Slomp (2019).

²⁷ DC (X, 5).

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Gauthier (1986, 319, 312).

³⁰ Sagar (2018, 28), Haara, Stuart-Buttle (2020, 181).

showing that the desire for fame undercuts the stability, if not the possibility, not only of associations based “on the pursuit of glory”, but also of those based on the pursuit of utility, or on “mutual need” and “mutual help”³¹. Society is a “voluntary arrangement”, and cannot be formed without a common “object of will [...] which seems to each one of the members to be good for himself”³². Although the desire for glory may be shared, and glory may thus appear to each person as “good for himself”, the social bond that it is capable of motivating is not sustainable, because its object cannot really be enjoyed in common, and its pursuit cannot promote the formation of social ties without at the same time promoting the competition that destabilizes them: glory, which consists in superiority, “belongs to nobody when it belongs to all”, and cannot therefore, as Herbert reminds us, “be acquired except at the expense of others”³³. As brilliantly shown by Blank, moreover, when men “meet for entertainment and fun”, hoping to gain a more pleasing image of themselves thanks to “someone else’s embarrassment and weakness”, their *hilaritas* and sense of superiority cannot be “harmless and inoffensive” unless, as civility seems to require, they are carefully concealed³⁴. But civility makes its own discontents, and this concealment cannot last long, if it is true, as we have seen, that it is impossible for those who glorify themselves—through “microaggressions” like rude gestures, uncharitable censure, “witty scorn”—not to show signs of “hatred and contempt”, not to offend each other, not to attempt to hurt each other³⁵. On the other hand, the desire for glory does not fail to undermine even those forms of sociality that are produced by the apparently more solid motive of common utility. Hobbes, it is true, does not rule out the existence of “modest” men, who have “a true estimate of [their] own capacities [*vires*]”, and who, thanks to this correct self-assessment, are prepared to recognize their equality with their fellow men and to allow them everything which they allow themselves³⁶. At the same time, he believes that there will never be a shortage of men of “aggressive character” animated by “vainglory”, who will not accept “equal conditions, without which society is not possible”, but will arrogate to themselves “more honor [...]

³¹ DC (I, 29).

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ DC (I, 2); Herbert (2011, 147-8).

³⁴ *Ibidem*; Blank 2025. Any outward manifestation of it would become offensive, and would constitute a provocation, an incitement to harm to the perpetrator of the offense.

³⁵ DC (I, 5 and 23); Bejan (2017, 87).

³⁶ DC (I, 4).

than others have”, i.e., greater wealth or rights³⁷. Even a spontaneous association based on the common pursuit of advantages is therefore doomed to implode under the force of the “impulse to hurt”, to which not only people of “aggressive character” succumb because of their “over-valuation of [their] own strength”, but also the most modest because of their “need to defend [their] property and liberty against” the former³⁸. Most importantly, in a society based on *mutuum auxilium*, disagreements about the definition of the common good tend to arise. But in any “intellectual dissension”, as stressed by Frilli, disagreement is experienced as “offensive”³⁹. To demand that one’s own opinion of what should be done be adopted by all to the exclusion of any other opinion is to vaingloriously claim a right while denying it to all others, and to assert one’s own superiority and the inferiority of others.

This movement, in which the same margin of sociality is first admitted and then deconstructed, is—not coincidentally—the same that animates the analysis of the desire for recognition that afflicts what we might call ‘intellectuals’. If men meet in general “for entertainment and fun”, those who “profess to have more wisdom than other men” meet *philosophiae gratia*, to find their—perverse—fun in philosophizing⁴⁰. Far from loving each other for the specific form of entertainment they mutually provide, these ‘philosophers’ all “actively pursue their resentments” against each other in their gatherings, for everyone “lectures everyone else” and “wants to be thought a Master”⁴¹. Thus, “intellectual dissension [...] is extremely serious” and “inevitably causes the worst conflicts”, since “the mere act of disagreement is offensive” even in absence of “open contention”⁴². In short, the philosophical meeting is a form of *spontaneus congressus*, but peace between its participants, as it is immediately apparent, rests on fragile foundations. For, like glory, the satisfaction of being recognized and honored as a master cannot be shared by all at the same time, because it implies that someone recognizes himself as a disciple: anyone can enjoy it in the phantasmic and anticipatory form of hope, but not in that of actual “triumph”. If “people cannot disagree gracefully”, as Laerke observes, and if “civil disagreement” is, more radically, “a contradiction in terms”, as Bejan states, it is not only, as Abizadeh suggests, because dissent is, or is perceived

³⁷ DC (I, 4 and 2, note).

³⁸ DC (I, 4).

³⁹ DC (I, 5); see also (DC V, 4); Frilli 2025.

⁴⁰ DC (I, 2).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² DC (I, 5).

to be, an insult and a sign of undervaluation. It also happens, more fundamentally, because the dissenter, by claiming a privileged relationship with truth, not only enjoys the glory associated with the superior position of teacher and the consequent right to teach, but also denies to the one with whom he disagrees the same glory and right of which he considers himself the monopolist, or his “equal dignity”⁴³.

The fact that the paragraphs in which glory is defined are the same ones in which Hobbes criticizes the conception of man as a political animal reveals its significance. Glory is defined as the natural object of desire of a subjectivity that is at once constitutively relational and tendentially conflictual. From an anthropological point of view, on a certain level of discourse, it also opens the door to the possibility of that spontaneous social bond, independent of any sociability, which, on another level, is not denied but severely destabilized. The correspondence between the sections defining glory and those identifying man's natural condition with an ultimately warlike state suggests that the desire for recognition, as an anthropological constant, elevates conflict to the rank of a meta-historical problem that must always be confronted. It also suggests, however, that the various and always provisional solutions to this problem must both exploit what in glory—and thus in human nature itself—points towards relationality and sociality as a resource to be strengthened and stabilized, and oppose what in the same passion tends to undermine peace.

1.3. Recognition and Natural Laws: Moral Overcoming of Conflict and Its Nullification

The link between glory, claims to superiority, and conflict does not cease to be central when we move from the anthropological perspective, which identifies the desire for recognition both as a vector of sociality and as a factor in the crisis of social bonds, to the moral perspective, in which the desire for recognition appears both as a moral motivation and as a force that nullifies the possibility of a purely moral solution to conflict or as a pathology that morality demands be overcome. Certainly, some of the argumentative paths of *De Cive* suggest a possible positive moral function of glory, which Lloyd has recently emphasized and which I have pointed out elsewhere⁴⁴. Praise, as the proclamation of someone's “goodness”, is closely

⁴³ Laerke (2021, 159), Bejan (2017, 90-1), Abizadeh (2011, 308-9).

⁴⁴ Lloyd (2020, 63-4), Toto (2016).

related to virtue, as respect for moral laws⁴⁵. Along with “*megalunsi*” and “*makarismos*”, that is, the proclamation of someone’s “present power”, or of someone’s “felicity or power as secure also for the future”, it is for Hobbes one of the three distinct speech acts by which one can honor another⁴⁶. But praise cannot be a way of honoring the agent’s virtue without also being a source of his glory, without thus linking glory and virtue and making the desire for glory a motive for practicing the virtues. Although the relationship between virtue and glory established by praise often goes unnoticed or is only mentioned in passing⁴⁷, Hobbes is thus fully justified when he says in the *Praefatio ad lectorem* that he did not write the *De Cive* “to win praise”, only to add immediately that if he had done so, he could still “use the defense that few, except those who love praise, do anything to deserve it [*laudabilia faciunt*]”⁴⁸. In another passage, he describes as “vain” the glory we can derive from revenge, which “considers only the past”, does not aim at correcting those who have offended us, is therefore aimless, and, by harming the other “without reason”, can only provoke war⁴⁹. He thus distinguishes this “vain” glory from an implicit, non-vain glory derived from virtue, that is, from the observance of those natural or moral laws which reason dictates as so many conditions of a useful peace (e.g., moderation of punishment within its usefulness for correcting the offender). These passages seem to suggest that the love of praise and the desire for glory and honor, when illuminated by a rational and non-impressionistic consideration of future utility, can promote praiseworthy or morally good behavior. Peace is a common good because it serves the preservation of all, but it is not possible without a common respect for the natural laws. Since everyone praises or calls good that which pleases him or is useful to him, no one can refrain from praising those who, by respecting these laws, contribute to the peace which is useful to all as the condition of the security without which the enjoyment of other goods becomes precarious. In line with its relational and unsocially social nature, according to which the self depends on the other and therefore cannot take care of itself without taking care of those on whom it depends, the desire for recognition at this level seems to constitute a sufficient motive to ensure, if not just people, at least just actions, that is to say, the external practice of all the virtues: a motive capable of leading subjects to keep their word to one another, to

⁴⁵ See Lloyd (2019, 104-5).

⁴⁶ DC (XV, 10).

⁴⁷ See Slomp (2007, 184).

⁴⁸ DC (209).

⁴⁹ DC (III, 11).

give what is superfluous to those who need it most, to be merciful, to be grateful to those who help them, to be fair to all, and so on.

The possibility of interpreting the practice of moral virtues as motivated by desire for recognition is complicated by two sets of considerations. The first concerns the way in which the theme of recognition is invoked in Chapter III, which is devoted to the laws of nature and where the desire for recognition is understood as the source of a struggle for distinction and affirmation of one's superiority. This is why the desire for recognition appears here not as a vector of morality, but as something that morality requires us to leave behind in order to make room for the shared and no longer competitive enjoyment of peace, and the recognition of the equality on which it is based⁵⁰. Consider the seventh and eighth laws, which regulate conducts that we have already encountered in the previous section. The first prohibits insolence, the manifestation of those signs of "hatred and contempt" which are "more provocative of quarrels and fighting than anything else", and make "most men prefer to lose their peace and even their lives rather than suffer insult"⁵¹. The connection between the desire for recognition and insolence is obvious: despite the objections raised by Mark against similar interpretations⁵², insolence *is* a provocation to con-

⁵⁰ The need to overcome the competitive and conflicting desire for recognition is visible when Hobbes lists "vainglory" as one of the *perturbationes animi* that "impede one's ability to grasp the laws of nature": the morality unfolded by this knowledge thus requires that the "disturbance" constituted by "vainglory" be overcome (DC III, 26). This may initially seem to again confirm the possibility of a morally positive function of the desire for glory, as the disturbance to be overcome here is not glory as such, but only "vain" glory. That this is otherwise, however, seems to me to be proved by the sixth law. This law certainly seems to affirm that there is a morally legitimate vengeance or punishment, one that aims at the future, corrects the sinner, and can thus stand up as helpful to peace. When a few lines later it argues that revenge, insofar it "considers only the past", is simply triumphing and glorying to no purpose," and is therefore, as such, vain, it seems at first glance merely to equate illegitimate revenge with that which aims at vainglory, distinguishing it from revenge that aims at a glory that is not vain, and thus confirming the possibility of a morally valid desire for glory (DC III, 11). Reading it more carefully, however, one realizes that when he speaks of revenge insofar as it has regard only for the past, and affirms that, as such, revenge is but "triumphing and glorying [*gloriam*]" Hobbes disqualifies not only vain vengeance, as opposed to supposedly non-vain vengeance, but vengeance as such, as opposed to punishment aimed at overcoming vengeance and its vanity in favor of the useful, of peace. To oppose utility and peace, and thus to be vain, is not only the glory associated with revenge, but glory *tout court*.

⁵¹ DC (III, 12).

⁵² Mark (2018) offers several arguments against interpretations which, in his view, confuse the reason why the insult is so "inflammatory" with the "negative comparison" it implies, or with the "comparative glory" or claim to superiority of which it is a manifestation. He concludes, rather surprisingly, that what is truly inflammatory about

flict because, by showcasing his consideration of spectators as inferior, an insolent actor also claims the right—which he is unwilling to recognize in spectators—to express his contempt, or, in Bejan’s words, not to show due, complaisant “sensitivity to the sensitivities of others”⁵³. For the provocateur, provocation is an opportunity for recognition. The provoked party can either avoid the challenge or accept it. In the first case, he shows his fear and thus acknowledges his own inferiority. In the latter case, he will certainly want to prove, through the triumph of revenge, that he is not inferior to the provocateur. But his effort, the insolent believes, will only condemn him to certain defeat, and to the recognition of his rival’s superiority. Moreover, the desire for recognition (e.g., the desire to defend one’s image by taking revenge for the insult inflicted by contempt) is also implicitly referred to as a potentially stronger desire than the desire for self-preservation, which, properly indulged, is the premise of all morality, since the laws of nature are peace clauses, and peace is to be sought as a means of self-preservation. But how can those who do not care about their own lives, such as those engaged in the noble and potentially deadly struggle for recognition, care about the petty utilities, and therefore the no less petty virtues, that are necessary for peace?

The eighth law makes explicit what was already implicit in the seventh and prohibits pride as the misrecognition of equality that characterizes those who believe themselves “better than others” and express “that belief with the demand to be treated differently than others”⁵⁴. “If [...] men are equal by nature”, says Hobbes, “we must recognize their equality”⁵⁵. Even if they were not equal, as they are, peace would require them to consider each other “as equals”: any refusal to do so leads to the “struggle for power” and the recognition of superiority⁵⁶. If, as we have seen, glory is one and the same with this recognition, then the prohibition of insult (any assertion of another’s inferiority) and pride (any assertion of one’s supposed superiority) prohibits the pursuit of glory *tout court*. The same conclusions are confirmed in later laws. The Ninth and the Tenth, in fact, prescribe modesty and equity, that is, the granting to others of the same rights that one claims for oneself, and the distribution of rights “equally to both par-

the insult is not claiming superiority but denying equality. Although the contextual references in the article are of great interest to the reader of Hobbes, it is not given to understand how a person who denies the other’s equality is doing anything other than asserting his own superiority or engaging in a “negative comparison”.

⁵³ Bejan (2024, 259).

⁵⁴ Johnson Bagby (2009, 107).

⁵⁵ DC (III, 13).

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

ties", avoiding the "insult" of favoring one over the other⁵⁷. In this way, they proscribe "arrogance" and "discrimination"⁵⁸. These laws are, therefore, mere corollaries or appendices to the previous ones. They express the same prohibition of pride, contempt and, therefore, of glory, understood as a sense of superiority. The distinction already made between the "modest", who acknowledge their equality with others and thus renounce the triumph of glory, and men of "aggressive character", who instead assert their own superiority, is suspect to say the least. To indiscriminately attribute to "men", as Hobbes does not fail to do, a "natural tendency [...] to exasperate [*laccendum*] each other, the source of which is the passions and especially an empty self-esteem", is in fact to make any modesty based on correct self-assessment unthinkable⁵⁹. Nonetheless, the point of view of the "modest" person (in whose eyes the arrogant is the one who denies equality and not, as probably in the eyes of the arrogant person himself, the one who affirms it⁶⁰) seems to be precisely that which is favored by natural law. We may even say, with Strauss, that "the spirit of Hobbes's philosophy" can be summed up in the formula "reason is modesty": as Cooper points out, the natural law that prescribes modesty—that is, the recognition of our equal physical, epistemic, and moral frailty as opposed to any imaginative self-deception about our superior strength, wisdom, and worth—is identified by DC IV, 12 as the law that, by commanding equity, "encompasses all the others within itself"⁶¹. True, there are passages that ascribe a potentially moralizing, and therefore pacifying, function to the desire for recognition; nevertheless, this desire is regarded in Hobbes's ethics primarily as an obstacle to be overcome.

The second set of considerations that speaks against taking the desire for recognition as a moral motive capable of leading individuals to realize the common good of peace concerns the problems afflicting any purely moral solution to the problem of conflict. Of course, we can admit that virtues such as fidelity to one's word, gratitude, generosity, forgiveness, respect, modesty, etc., insofar as they are conducive to peace, and indeed to the preservation not only of the actor but also of the spectator, are the object of general praise, and that the agent is thus moved by his own desire

⁵⁷ DC I(II, 14 and 15).

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ DC (I, 12).

⁶⁰ As noted by Hoekstra (2013, 100), "Some who believe in their natural superiority will not recognize that they are demonstrating contempt when they act or speak according to that belief".

⁶¹ Strauss (1965, 97), Cooper (2010, 250-1).

for recognition to give proof of them. Taking Hoekstra's argument about equality a bit further, we can go so far as to imagine that once natural equality is recognized, other inequalities, such as those that may lead to more recognition for the more virtuous, no longer necessarily lead to war: because they are based on criteria that are equal for all, established and applied by common consent, either through what one might anachronistically call "public opinion" or through the mediation of the sovereign representative, they cannot be or legitimately be perceived as offensive or discriminatory⁶². But how can virtue animated by the pursuit of glory not turn respect for the law of nature, which demands a moral renunciation of glory itself, into a violation of that same law? In other words, how might this morality, which should consist among other things in the rejection of all distinctions, not itself trigger a new and immoral race for distinction and superiority? And how can people who perceive any disagreement as an insult agree on equal standards for an unequal distribution of moral recognition? This is not an arbitrary problem, foreign to Hobbes's thought, but a difficulty that Hobbes himself does not fail to discuss, noting that the morality by which conflicts for recognition are to be silenced becomes itself that in whose name new conflicts are created.

According to Tuck, "it was conflict over what to praise, or morally to approve, which Hobbes thus isolated as the cause of discord, rather than simple conflict over wants"⁶³. According to Wolin, the main problem of the state of nature is the "disagreement concerning common and fundamental meanings", or the absence of a "universe of unequivocal meaning" and the "hopeless confusion of private [moral] standards" by which it is characterized⁶⁴. Critically confronting these interpretations, Abizadeh identifies disagreement over what ought to be praised and done, or the insult and attack on the opinions with which each person most closely identifies that disagreement implies, as the main Hobbesian source of war⁶⁵. The textual basis for these readings is well known, and it is the same basis from which Skinner was able to draw attention to Hobbes's critical engagement with the ancient and modern rhetorical tradition, and to the dangers to civil peace posed by rhetorical manipulation of language in general and paradiastolic discourse in particular⁶⁶. Setting aside the intervention of an external authority, "no one can distinguish right reason from false except

⁶² See Hoekstra (2013, 109).

⁶³ Tuck (1989, 55).

⁶⁴ Wolin (2004, 231-233).

⁶⁵ Abizadeh (2011).

⁶⁶ Skinner (1991).

by making comparison with his own", and "each man's own reason must be regarded not only as the measure of his own actions, [...] but also as the measure by which to judge the reasoning of others in his affairs"⁶⁷. Since everyone's reason is conditioned by passions, but "men's desires differ", it happens that though all agree in praise of the virtues mentioned above, they still "disagree on their nature"; that "what one man *praises*, i.e. calls *good*, the other *abuses* as *bad*"; that "whenever someone dislikes another person's good action, he applies the name of some related vice to it" or, conversely, that "wickedness that pleases is given the name of a virtue"; that people "condemn in others what they approve in themselves", "seeing their own actions reflected in others as in a mirror where left becomes right and right becomes left"⁶⁸. This divergence of evaluative orientations may be caused by passions other than the desire for recognition, but it is necessarily connected to that desire. To assert that the objects of my passions, but not those of other people's passions, are to be praised is to assert that others are obliged to praise me, not only because of my ability to adopt the best criteria of evaluation, but also because those objects are precisely those which I am determined by my passions to realize. The logic of the passions leads each person to claim that only that which is a source of pleasure and an object of desire *for her* should be called good by everyone and, for that very reason, that she should be the privileged object of universal praise. Although the desire for recognition is supposed to be the passion capable of motivating compliance with universal and rational moral laws from which the particularistic logic of the passions is suspended, then, this logic is so strong that it finds confirmation in the very moment of its suspension, instrumentalizing the laws and reason by which it should be contained and bending them to its own service.

This instrumentalization thus redefines the meaning and scope of the struggle for recognition, disclosing the political meaning implied already in its seemingly merely moral dimension, and so making it difficult to accept the reduction of disagreement to an identity problem proposed by Abizadeh. Everyone recognizes or ought to recognize the same universal criterion of recognition, that is, the natural laws by which the virtues that represent the conditions of peace are defined, but each struggles to specify that criterion in one way rather than another, to have the conduct to which he is driven by his own passions recognized as virtuous, and thus to have himself or his reason recognized as alone capable of correctly determining

⁶⁷ DC (II, 1, note).

⁶⁸ DC I(I, 31 and 32); DC (II, 1); (DC praef, 2).

the meaning and application of the rules to which everyone accedes or ought to submit. In the moral field, natural law seems to guarantee the reconciliation of honor and utility, making the possibility of gaining the esteem of others dependent on the practice of virtues that promote the common good of peace. On the contrary, the desire for recognition leads everyone to violate the laws of nature in the very act of claiming to be their guardian: claiming a right to determine what is to be praised or blamed while denying it to others—showing an immodest and insulting pride—is, on closer examination, claiming sovereignty, one of the essential rights of which is to establish common rules and to enforce them, or to judge the common good and the useful means of achieving it. In this condition of generalization of the same struggle for recognition for the monopoly of truth that had appeared to be typical of the ‘intellectuals,’ the desire for recognition seems incapable of motivating respect for natural law without at the same time being an incentive for violating it: the complicity of glory and conflict proves to be so strong that it triumphs at the very moment of its supposed annulment, turning the moral flag of peace into the proto-political flag of ideological conflict between incompatible morals, and the moral victory over the desire for glory into a new occasion for glory.

Thus, the tension between relationality or sociality and conflict, which we have already seen running through the definition of the concept of glory and its anthropological application, manifests itself in the moral sphere as well. For those who know Hobbes only through *De Cive*, the failure of the purely moral solution to conflict lies precisely in the difficulty of transforming the desire for recognition from an agent of contention into a vector of cooperation. “In the state of nature”, in fact, “the measure of right is interest [*utilitas*]”, or self-preservation⁶⁹. The first and fundamental law of nature, on which all others depend, is “to seek peace” as the only condition conducive to self-preservation⁷⁰. The moral law seems for a moment to guarantee the possible reconciliation of recognition and utility, making virtue an object of universal praise precisely insofar as it is useful to all. However, the absence of any explanation of the relationship between glory or honor and utility or *commodum*, or between “pleasures of the spirit” and “sensual pleasures”, in the passages on ‘spontaneous gatherings’ we have already read, invites us to understand this relationship in terms of at least an apparent dualism, if not, as Reale and Stauffer would say, of a real “aut-aut” or “bifurcation”⁷¹. On the one hand, the “aristocratic” desire for

⁶⁹ DC (I, 10).

⁷⁰ DC (II, 2).

⁷¹ Reale (2023², 101), Stauffer (2018, 196).

distinction or honor, that is, for a good that can belong only to the few; on the other, the potentially “egalitarian” desire for the useful, for that peace that is supremely useful and that cannot be enjoyed by anyone without being enjoyed by everyone⁷². Emancipated from the “measure” of utility and an inexhaustible source of the conflicts that undermine any *spontaneus congressus*, the pursuit of glory thus inevitably proves to be contrary to both right and “duty”.

1.4. Politics: Crisis and Revolt

Finally, the link between glory and conflict is also confirmed in the transition from the purely moral sphere to the political sphere, where morality should finally find its own conditions of viability and where, therefore, the explosive potential of the struggle for recognition should finally and definitively be defused. If the inadequacy of any purely moral solution to the problem of conflict is due to its inability to impose a common interpretation and application of natural law, the institution of civil state should overcome the conflicts which, in a hypothetical pure state of nature, turn out to be insurmountably linked to the desire to be recognized. Within it, civil laws enacted by the sovereign in its capacity as the “Great Definer”, “dispenser of common meanings” and supervisor of “moral consensus”, determine and enforce natural laws, and the equal subordination of citizens to a higher authority leaves no room for any glory other than that of the sovereign himself, or that which conforms to the standards of recogni-

⁷² In the *Elements* the pleasures “of the mind,” which were already summed up in glory, were not radically opposed to those “of the body” or “of the senses,” which in *De Cive* define the sphere of the useful. The two kinds of pleasure, it is true, were already distinct from each other in the same way that a “present pleasure” is opposed to the pleasure to be derived from the present expectation of a “pleasure to come” (EL I, vii, 9 and EL I, viii, 2-3). However, this opposition was configured, thanks to the mediation of the notion of power, as relative: present enjoyment linked to the expectation of future enjoyment coincided in fact with the enjoyment of a power that was natural or acquired but in any case capable of guaranteeing, in the eyes of those who believed themselves endowed with it, future sensual enjoyment (EL I, viii, 4). Insofar as acquired power was thus linked to the possession of “means” whose “use” ensures the “end” of sensual pleasure (such as wealth, authority, friendships), the useful was subsumed, and not excluded, from the sphere of glory. Those familiar with the *Elements*, as indeed with the *Leviathan*, can thus relativize this distinction, for they know that the pleasure of the mind, or glory, is linked to power, to the possession of present means capable of securing future access to ultimately sensual pleasures, and thus to self-preservation. In the absence of any explanation for this, those who knew only the *De Cive* could not make this connection.

tion set by the sovereign⁷³. But it is precisely the natural and indissoluble character of the desire for recognition that seems to frustrate the ability of public reason (*ratio civitatis*) to succeed where private reason (*ratio singulorum*) was destined to fail⁷⁴. The same implicitly political desire to be recognized as a subject with the right to establish moral and universally valid criteria of recognition continues to operate within the civil state as the desire to be recognized as a sovereign or as a participant in sovereignty.

As in anthropology and morality, there is no lack of references to a politically positive function of recognition in politics. In two contexts, it is precisely the dynamic of recognition that governs the choice of rulers by the originally sovereign people, who elect either a “man who is distinguished from all the rest” to the throne or “men who are distinguishable from the rest” as members of the optimate curia⁷⁵. Moreover, the *De Cive* already hints at a theme that would be more fully developed in *Leviathan*, and of which Boyd rightly stressed the importance and connection to sovereign power, understood not only as power capable of determining the passive submission of subjects, but also as governance, the ability to make them internalize the sovereign’s commands and spontaneously make their active contribution to the political goal of the common good as defined by the sovereign⁷⁶. “By a consistent employment of rewards and punishments”, Hobbes claims, the sovereign could ensure that “good men” respecting laws and rights were constantly distinguished “with honors” and that “the factious” were branded “with contempt”⁷⁷. In this way he could redirect the desire for recognition, transforming it from a factor of disunity into a vector of cohesion and institutional solidity. The fact that recognition is the ratio for the choice of the future sovereign, formalized by the covenant, raises the question of whether recognition will not continue to be a necessary support for the sovereignty already established. The legal management of recognition also seems to guarantee a political response to the anthropological, relational need that desire for recognition expresses and to its moral vocation: I need others to approve of me and of my virtues in order to feel good about myself, this approval is only possible if I and others share the same moral standards, but respect for the civil law is the form in which the recognition of one’s contribution to the common good of peace can legitimately claim to be publicly guaranteed. Apart from the brief hints just

⁷³ Wolin (2004, 232), Tuck (1989, 58).

⁷⁴ DC (II, 1 note); DC (XIV, 17); DC (XV, 17).

⁷⁵ DC (VII, 11 and 8).

⁷⁶ Boyd (2015).

⁷⁷ DC (XIII, 12).

given, however, the desire for recognition is essentially mentioned as a crisis factor which, in democracies as well as in non-democratic governments, works incessantly towards the dissolution of the institutional fabric and the peace it is supposed to guarantee, and almost ends up transforming the civil state, which is supposed to be the opposite of the state of nature, into a continuation of the latter by other means.

In fact, the preference for democracy is often motivated by “the love of praise [which is] innate in human nature” and the illusion, nurtured by “all those who excel [...] or think they excel” in such virtues, that “to publicly display [one’s] prudence, knowledge and eloquence in deliberations” is “the most attractive of all things”⁷⁸. Is not the hope of acquiring “a reputation for intelligence and good sense”, the only reason why men “prefer to spend [their] time [...] on public affairs” rather than “on his private business”⁷⁹? In reality, the structural competitiveness of relations of recognition dooms this hope to frustration, for it will inevitably happen “to see the proposal of a man whom we despise preferred to our own; to see our wisdom ignored before our eyes; to incur certain enmity in an uncertain struggle for empty glory”⁸⁰. Moreover, the rationality of the democratic deliberative process tends to be compromised by the role that desire for recognition assigns to rhetoric: “in order to win a reputation”, each “has to make a long [...] speech to express his opinion” and deploy all his eloquence “to make it as ornate and attractive as possible”, even at the cost of making “the Good and the bad, the useful and the useless, [...] appear greater or less than they really are”, or, as outlined by Kapust, of flattering the people by appealing to their prejudices⁸¹. The effectiveness of rhetoric also favors the formation of a circle of “orators who have influence with the people”, who use their skills to manipulate political decisions “to make their families rich, powerful and illustrious, so far as they can”, and whose struggle “for honor and dignity” ends up protecting blatantly particular interests under the banner of the common good, making democracy not only a form of *de facto* aristocracy, but “the worst kind of aristocracy, an ‘aristocracy of orators’”⁸². Finally, desire for recognition tends not only to tear apart the unity of the people, as suggested by the allusion to the “certain enmity” aroused by the “uncertain struggle for empty glory”, but also to undermine the successful outcome of the people’s decisions. When

⁷⁸ DC (X, 9).

⁷⁹ DC (X, 15).

⁸⁰ DC (X, 9).

⁸¹ DC (X, 11); Kapust (2011).

⁸² DC (X, 6); DC V, 6; Flathman (1993, 141).

demagogues “confront each other with conflicting proposals and adversarial speeches”, the vanquished “resents the victorious speaker and with him all those who accepted his point of view, as if they had despised his own advice and good sense”, and strives “to ensure that his opponent’s policy works out badly for the country, for so he sees that his opponent will lose his glory and he will recover his”⁸³.

This conflictual tendency of the desire for recognition that drives citizens participating equally in democratic sovereignty to reproduce, within the civil state and in a collective and political mode, the same contrasts that made the hypothetical pre-political state untenable, also manifests within non-egalitarian forms of government as a series of threatening democratic impulses. In non-democratic regimes, those who have “won the battle against hunger and cold”, who are therefore “least distracted by worry about ordinary necessities”, and who, in their idleness, have time to devote to a “superficial reading of books of history, oratory, politics” and to “discuss politics with each other”, consider themselves not only to be “cleverer than the rest” but also, for this very reason, to be “more fit to govern than the present ministers”⁸⁴. As the ‘intellectuals’ who wanted to lecture everyone else, they feel “insulted” by their own exclusion from political power and indignant at the preference given to less worthy people, being moved by “ambition and longing for honor” to try “change things” and overthrow the existing order⁸⁵. The subversive nature of this outraged indignation, of which I spoke elsewhere, is quite clear⁸⁶. For Hobbes, the names of “*kingdom* and *tyranny*”—but the same can be said of *aristocracy* and *ochlocracy*, *democracy* and *anarchy*—do not express “different kinds of commonwealth [...], but different sentiments on the part of the citizens about the ruler”, because “the same monarch is given the name King to honor him, the name of Tyrant to damn him”⁸⁷. If it is true, as Hoekstra notes, that “Hobbes does provide arguments for why someone whom we recognize as sovereign cannot be resisted as a tyrant”, it is also true, as I have suggested in the same vein, that Hobbes never provides arguments against resisting who we, in our private judgements, collectively regard as a “tyrant” and do not “recognize as sovereign”⁸⁸. By deluding himself into believing that the road to power and honors lies through “criticism of the

⁸³ DC (X, 12).

⁸⁴ DC (V, 6); DC (XII, 10); DC (XIII, 12).

⁸⁵ DC (XIII, 12); DC (V, 6).

⁸⁶ Toto (2023).

⁸⁷ DC (VII, 2 and 3).

⁸⁸ Hoekstra (2001, 437); see Toto (2019).

current régime [...], through factions and popular favor”, the ambitious man can then propagate or adopt the seditious doctrine that tyrannicide and, more generally, the overthrow of any legal order deemed illegitimate, “is not only licit, but deserves the highest praise”⁸⁹. Consistent with Baumgold’s or Kapust’s and Turner’s reading of the role of ambition (which, however, is not to be understood as a mere desire for power, but also as a desire for public recognition, expressed for instance in the power associated with political offices), a sovereign deprived of recognition encounters resistance not only from ambitious leaders who wish to take his place and seize his lost recognition, but also from those who, out of discontent, accept the identification of the sovereign with a tyrant, and whose discontent the leaders manage to mobilize⁹⁰. In fact, rebellion is triggered as soon as ideological conditions meet, under certain circumstances, material conditions. It explodes when the disquiet of the many, who find themselves deprived of “the essentials for the preservation of life and dignity [*dignitatem*, i.e. rank]”, or “hurt and exasperated by injuries and insults from those in authority”, meet the democratic, anti-tyrannical rhetoric of the ambitious élite, and the citizens, “as steeped as may be in opinions inimical to peace and civil government”, nourish, thanks to their numbers, a “hope of winning”⁹¹. The loss of recognition of established authorities is overshadowed by a seditious “leader”: the rebels gather under a *dux* “whom they willingly obey, not because they are obligated by having submitted to his command (for [...] men in this situation do not know that they are obligated beyond what seems right and good to themselves), but because they value his courage and military skill”⁹². Thus, revolts “more often split [the state] into factions and waste it with fire than reform it”⁹³. Consistent with the relational and socializing aspect of glory, the capacity of the struggle for recognition to convey forms of cohesion different from the union embodied by the state, to stand in opposition to the existing institutions and at the origin of new institutions, cannot be ignored: in its absence, as I have underlined elsewhere, there could be neither factions nor revolts (Toto 2018). Even if not outright denied, the socializing force of desire for recognition is marred by its tendency to conflict: the very cooperation realized by the faction at the moment of revolt is not unrelated to the

⁸⁹ DC (VII, 12); DC (XII, 3).

⁹⁰ Baumgold (1990), Kapust and Turner (2013).

⁹¹ DC (XII, 9 and 11).

⁹² DC (XII, 11).

⁹³ DC (II, 13).

conflict for recognition, but an internal moment of it, an instrument of its divisive vocation.

1.5. Worship: The Second Level of Hobbes's Theory of Recognition

What has emerged so far through the study of Hobbes' notion of "glory" and of its uses is a predominantly negative reading of relationships of recognition, and of the links that unite the image the subject has of itself, the image it has of the other, the image the other has of itself, and the image it has of the subject. Examining these relationships, particularly when involving 'intellectuals', has demonstrated, on the one hand, their inwardly comparative and outwardly conflictual character, making them incompatible with the moral and political goal of peace, and, on the other hand, their inherent resistance to any moral or political attempt at moderation or repression. As we have seen, this reading rests on Hobbes's momentary sidelining of a number of recalcitrant details: the capacity of the desire for recognition to mediate spontaneous, if unstable, associations; its ability to promote morally sound or politically effective behavior; its effectiveness in contributing not only to crises but also to the formation and consolidation of legitimate institutions. This simplification is reversed, however, by the treatment of the problem of worship in the final section of Hobbes's work. *De Cive*, as we know, omits the sections that in the *Elements* already outlined the general theory of the power-honor relationship that would become central in *Leviathan*. Even if worship appears there only as one particular way of honoring, the treatment of this theme in the theological section of *De Cive* is sufficient to grasp the theory of which its discussion is a part, if not in its totality, at least in its essential elements.

Indeed, Hobbes defines worship as "an external act", or "sign of internal honor", by which we endeavor to win the "favor" of those we honor "or to placate them when they are angry"⁹⁴. Honor is "internal" because it "is not in the person honored, but in the person who honors"⁹⁵. In fact, "properly speaking", it is "nothing other than the opinion one has of the union of power and goodness in another person [*opinio alienae potentiae, coniunctae cum bonitate*]"⁹⁶. "To honor someone", therefore, "is the same as

⁹⁴ DC (X, 9).

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*. The Latin text assigns power a central role, and goodness a possibly ancillary one, while the translation puts the two terms on an equal footing, making them two equally necessary conditions of honour.

to put a high value on him"⁹⁷. In this sense, honor, which consists in simple opinion, is necessarily followed by three passions: "Love, which relates to goodness, and hope and fear which relate to power"⁹⁸. These interior opinions and passions are expressed in words (such as the attribution of moral virtues, or of present or certain power, but also such as prayer or thanksgiving) and external actions (such as gifts and obedience) which are their "natural signs", and which are aimed at making the powerful "placated and propitiated"⁹⁹. The condition of the possibility of worship as an external manifestation of internal honor, through words or deeds capable of appeasing the powerful and making them "propitious", is clearly stated in the passage defining glory as the "enjoyment" he who thinks himself honored experiences when he considers any virtue or power "he has or regards as his own [*suam, vel tanquam suam*]"¹⁰⁰. Superficially, worship makes sense because the powerful man, who "enjoys being worshipped", becomes favorable to those who honor him: the worship contributes to his glory and to the jubilation that accompanies it¹⁰¹. In fact, this passage points to a crucial and hitherto hidden aspect of recognition. "Since men believe that a man is powerful when they see him honored, i.e. regarded as powerful by others", we read, "it comes about that honor", and glory with it, "is enlarged by worship; and real power accrues from a reputation for power"¹⁰². How could it be otherwise, when not only prayer and thanksgiving, but obedience itself, along with "services and assistance", is counted among the "natural signs" of honor and among the forms of worship¹⁰³? As proven by the fact that "in ordering or allowing himself to be worshipped", one's "purpose is to make as many people as possible obedient to him", the honored person enjoys the esteem of others not so much as confirmation of an otherwise uncertain idea of "his own" *potentia*, but as a source of an increase in his "real power" itself, because with esteem comes the power of the esteemers, which can then be considered "as his own"¹⁰⁴. In this perspective, Field is quite right to emphasize that in the thought of the "late" Hobbes, as opposed to the "early" Hobbes of *Elements* and *De Cive*, power is no longer reducible to the internal faculty of a subject, but

⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁰ DC (XV, 13).

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰² *Ibidem.*

¹⁰³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem.*

has an intrinsically relational nature. Her only mistake is to not also see this relational view of power at work in *De Cive*¹⁰⁵. In this sense we can't say, with Lloyd, "we desire good opinion of others largely as evidence for a case we are trying to build in our own mind for our own value", because what we are interested in, in the other person's good opinion of us, are not only the effects it produces "in our mind", but also those that this opinion lets us foresee, outside our mind, in the social world and power networks of which we are a part¹⁰⁶. If honor and glory contribute to "real power", it is difficult to argue, with Foisneau, that "true glory is the ability to be satisfied with one's own judgment in the estimation of one's own worth", whereas all glory depending on the judgment of others can only be "vain"¹⁰⁷. The reason is not, as Herbert believes, that "there is no necessary correlation between the glory one enjoys and his actual power", since "one sees one's power" not as one sees an external object in front of him, but "only in the eyes or opinions of others, that is, in the public manifestation of honor"¹⁰⁸. In matters of honor, of course, we may say with Slomp, "it is not one's 'objective power' that matters, but the 'subjective opinion' of people about one's power"¹⁰⁹. But what matters is this "subjective" opinion precisely because, far from "reducing honor to a consequence of power", as Johnson Bagby believes, Hobbes makes "subjective opinion" a source of "objective" or "actual" power¹¹⁰. Herein, for individuals, lies "the significance of their visibility and of [...] people's perceptions of their power": power does not resolve itself to a simple spectacle, arousing the passions of spectators without producing any change in their real lives, but theatricality is nevertheless one of its essential aspects, since it does not exist apart from its representation and the audience's participation in this¹¹¹.

As might be expected, the theme of worship is destined to play a decisive role in the third section of *De Cive*, where the natural worship of God is identified with the observance of natural laws, and the right to determine public worship with an essential aspect of sovereignty. Notwithstanding their theological-political aim, the passages we have read present what we can legitimately consider a *general* theory of the relations of recognition that parallels—apparently refuting it but perhaps clarifying it—the the-

¹⁰⁵ Field (2020, 25-41). But, for a partially changed point of view, see also Field (2025).

¹⁰⁶ Lloyd (2019, 138).

¹⁰⁷ Foisneau (2016, 89).

¹⁰⁸ Herbert (1989, 149).

¹⁰⁹ Slomp (2000, 40).

¹¹⁰ Johnson (Bagby 2009, 38).

¹¹¹ Frost (2009, 142). On visibility see also Pye (1984).

ory at work in the preceding sections of the text. Ambiguities certainly remain in this theory. In particular, as Holden argues, the meaning of the 'connection' between power and virtue or goodness is unclear¹¹². Are there forms of worship that honor an impotent goodness or a malignant and evil power, or can worship be directed only to a good and virtuous power, manifesting itself as love and hope, and as fear only to the wicked who fear its just wrath? Beyond these and similar questions, the dynamic reconstructed by Hobbes forces us to look back from a different perspective on the whole course already taken. For one thing, it shows that the effects of recognition are not invested solely in the mental, internal plane of ideas, which is impossible in a materialist thinker like Hobbes, where ideas are bodily modifications, and each body exists solely in relation with others. In the relationships of recognition, what is at stake is not only the idea or feeling that I have of myself or that you have of yourself, and their relation to the idea or feeling that you have of me or that I have of you, but the same power that constitutes the core of (what we consider) our identity. The subject who has a "good opinion" and a "high feeling" of himself because of the high esteem in which he holds his own power is a subject who identifies himself intimately with his power and who finds in the recognition of others not the mere confirmation of power in itself independent of recognition, but a way of gaining access to the power of other, that is, a source of augmentation of the power with which, not only in his eyes, his own being coincides. In keeping with the idea of a constitutive "interdependence" of powers highlighted by Frost, whereby power is never "self-originating", identities are not closed in themselves but are constituted in the circulation of external signs that bring interiorities into communication¹¹³. For this reason, the dynamic brought to light by the theory of honor and worship allows a better understanding of two aspects which were implicit in the definition of glory elaborated in Chapter I, and which could only be confirmed by recourse to a passage taken from Chapter XV: on the one hand, the relationship between the explicitly reflexive and the implicitly intersubjective dimensions of glory, and on the other hand, the relationship that links the "self" of which the glorified subject has a "good opinion" to the power that it enjoys attributing to itself, as well as this very power to the honor the subject imagines he receives from others. The subject's self-image is inseparable from the image that others have of him, but this inseparability is, as it were, a reflection of the inseparability of the

¹¹² Holden (2023, 93-5).

¹¹³ Frost (2009, 135, 141).

subject himself from the relationships in which he is involved, or rather of the power that he has or is able to attribute to himself from the power attributed to him by others. Glory comes from esteem and is removed by contempt, because my power is never mine alone, but always that which is lent to me by those who honor and support me. If, for this very reason, glory is only the triumph of the soul of those who believe they are honored, this also means that in Hobbes's discourse the logically dominant level is not the textually most conspicuous one, because glory, with its comparative and conflicting nature, is only conceivable from the composition of powers conveyed by honor.

Moreover, the dynamic of empowerment conveyed by recognition is reciprocal and cooperative: one who receives and accepts worship directed to him is undoubtedly empowered by the gifts, services, and obedience he receives as a sign of honor, but those who worship and honors him are also empowered by the fact that, by recognizing the worship as such, that is, as an appropriate form of recognition, the one who receives it also accepts to be "favorable" to the one who worships him. From this point of view, it makes little sense to speak of power in terms of a "zero sum" game, as Read and many others do: even in the state of nature, each of the partners of recognition-mediated cooperation sees his or her power increased by the cooperation itself¹¹⁴. Thus, the "spontaneous" cooperations realized through the exchange of power and honor, independently of the formalization of a pact or the imposition of an external power, go beyond the apparent dualism between utility and glory, because the surplus of power that they give to all those who participate in them is both useful, at least in their opinion, and transmitted through recognition. This is not to say that the social bond formed through mutual exchange of power and recognition is not morally problematic and unstable, both because of its far from obvious coherence with the moral imperative of equality and its recognition, and because of the frustration necessarily experienced by those who, in unequal relationships, find themselves in a subordinate position. As both *Elements* and *Leviathan* show in different ways, the exchange of power and honor is equally compatible not only with symmetrical relationships of friendship, to which I have drawn attention elsewhere, and which have recently been the subject of a more systematic analysis by Slomp and Lépan, but also with asymmetrical relationships of servitude¹¹⁵. Nevertheless, the privileged link that connects recognition not only to power but also to

¹¹⁴ Read (1991).

¹¹⁵ Tòto (2018), Slomp (2022), Lépan (2024).

mutual empowerment speaks against regarding, as Johnson Bagby does with honor, as completely “separable from morality”¹¹⁶. The connection of power-honor relationships with morality is double. On a general level, the first of the moral laws commands not only to “seek peace when it can be had”, but also, “when it cannot be had, to look for aid in war”, and thus, even when peace cannot be “had”, to make peace anyway, at least with allies who can help to win the war¹¹⁷. Thus, regardless of whether those who are honored are honored only because of power, or because of power combined with goodness understood in a properly moral sense, the exchange of power for honor seems to provide both the one who honors (and receives the “favor” of the honoree) and the honoree (who in exchange for his favor receives the gratitude or obedience of the one who honors) with an albeit precarious self-interested motivation (in terms of symbolic recognition and of material benefits) for the pursuit of the common good of peace or of alliance against the common enemy, as well as for the observance of the moral rules that the solidity of this peace or alliance presupposes. On a more general level, the words and deeds that make up worship—such as prayers, thanksgivings, offerings—are largely related to a form of transfer of rights, gifting, that is different from the (at least explicit) contract, and the only morally appropriate reaction to which is that gratitude without which any form of undue help would be meaningless. He who honors by giving does so in the hope of receiving gratitude; he who honors by praying does so in the hope of receiving gifts; he who honors by thanking does so in the hope of encouraging the donor to persevere in his generosity. In each case, however, the mutual and successful matching of offer and demand is coherent with a specific moral need. Giving, as *Leviathan* will better illustrate¹¹⁸, is an ambivalent act, for it both unites and binds, creating the chains of friendship or servitude, but in both cases the strength of the bonds to which it gives rise is precisely the same moral strength of the obligation of gratitude, the importance of which Smith correctly stressed¹¹⁹.

The political strength of (moral) relationships of power/recognition exchange should not be underestimated. Sedition is a good example, if seemingly paradoxical, of how the mutual exchange of power and honor in a state of war can contribute to the observance of the first law of nature. In fact, sedition is a case of cooperation based on the recognition of the leader of the rebellion to whom the rebels pay homage through an obedience

¹¹⁶ Johnson Bagby (2009, 41).

¹¹⁷ DC (II, 2).

¹¹⁸ Hobbes (2012, 136, 204-8).

¹¹⁹ See Smith (2003).

they are in no way bound to give, and on the mutual recognition of the rebels themselves, implied in their mutual trust: a case in which mutual esteem allows a multitude of men to help each other, as prescribed by the first law of nature, to win their war against the state. A good example, though apparently no less paradoxical than that of sedition, of how the reciprocal exchange of power and honor can provide an incentive to obey the first law of nature is the relationship between citizen and sovereign. If obedience is one of the forms of honor, it is difficult, as noted by Boyd, to imagine a sovereignty without this specific form of worship, which can only be practiced in so far as citizens recognize the sovereign's goodness or power, or insofar as citizens love the sovereign, hope to receive his gratitude for the gift of sovereignty they have given him, and fear his wrath¹²⁰. We can ask ourselves: What would happen if the citizens recognized the power of the sovereign but not his goodness, if they were unable to see his power as an extension of their own, if they feared him without being able to love him or hope for anything from him? Either way, the reciprocity realized by the covenant, with its combination of equality between the contracting parties and inequality with the sovereign, marks a path of socialization that is different from, but not necessarily incompatible with, that based on honor, which implies a common, but not necessarily equal, recognition and empowerment between the partners. The relationship of recognition presupposed by the political institution represents in a sense the combination of the two different forms of reciprocity that the exchange of power and honor can take: the egalitarian one of friendship and the inegalitarian one of the master/servant relationship. In this perspective, we may even say that the sovereign has a relationship with the citizens that is different from, but not contrary to, that which a leader has with rebels who unite under his leadership in the struggle against established power, or that a master has with his servants: like the servants or the rebels, the citizens recognize themselves as equal, but this equality is that determined by their equal subordination to the sovereign, leader, or master, who is such, however, only as long as his power is recognized, and he can thus count on the support of the citizens, rebels, or servants. A final good example of the political significance of relations of power and recognition is that of the prophets, for whose *sententiae* the Israelites had "so much respect [*tantum honoris*]" that they considered them "the word of God". The Israelites attributed to prophets a faith that different from "opinion" and mere concession or profession, just as a belief "based on the reputation [*existimationi*]"

¹²⁰ Boyd (2015, 42).

of others” is different both from one “based on our own reason” and from the entertaining of propositions “we do not accept in our own minds”. Thus, they finally “submitted” to them, as the rebels do to the leader of the rebellion, because of the “high regard [*existimationem*]” they had for them¹²¹. I cannot go into detail, but the political significance of prophecy is clear. The fact that the sovereign is also the supreme prophet (one who, like Moses, has the right to decide the conditions under which others can be considered prophets, bearers of God’s word, and the right to distinguish between true and false prophets) does not exclude the possibility that those who illegitimately challenge his authority and his ability to convey the divine message may present themselves as prophets, and that in the event of conflict the people will recognize these challengers’ will as the will of God.

The theory of recognition reconstructed on the basis of the first two sections of the *De Cive* thus shows that it is linked by a complex relationship to the one set out in the third section. The formulation put forward in the discussion on worship does not conflict with that developed in the discussion on *spontaneus congressus*, the laws of nature and the crisis of the institutions, but rather helps clarify both some of the aspects of this discussion that are out of tune and their marginalization. It does, however, contradict the mainstream reading of the passions related to recognition, which unilaterally valorizes the passages devoted to their comparative and conflictual character to find in them further confirmation of clichés about Hobbesian individualism, the war of all against all, and the artificiality of social bonds. Of course, to dismiss this kind of reading as simply arbitrary would not do it justice: far from bearing no relation to the texts, it emphasizes precisely those theoretical elements on which Hobbes already insists most strongly and which are therefore most conspicuous in the overall economy of the work. Such an interpretation, however rooted in and partly justified by Hobbes’s expository strategy, is unsatisfactory for several reasons. I cannot do more than mention them here. First, from the point of view of an internal reading of *De Cive* itself, it is forced to remove parts of the discussion that are far from irrelevant. Moreover, from the point of view of the development of Hobbes’s thought, it condemns to oblivion precisely those theoretical elements which, as I show in the article that was to form the third part of the four-part project I had in mind, will find greater development in *Leviathan*, particularly in Chapter X¹²². Finally, from the point of view of the history of the reception of Hobbes’s thought, this

¹²¹ DC (XVII, 18); DC (XVIII, 4); DC (XVI, 15).

¹²² Toto (2025b).

removal prevents us from connecting Hobbes's thought with some of the most interesting and relevant developments in the history of moral and political philosophy. In particular, it obscures the influence of Hobbes's theory of recognition on British authors such as Mandeville, Hume, and Smith, or on French authors such as Montesquieu, Rousseau, Helvétius, and d'Holbach.

Given the tension between the apparent simplicity and the real complexity of the theory of recognition presented in *De Cive*, the problem that will be addressed in the article published in issue 2025/1 of the Journal of Spinoza Studies is as follows. To what extent is the theory of recognition found in Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* in dialogue with that of *De Cive*? Which theses does the dialogue touch upon? Is it only the most prominent ones, or also those that are sidelined by the economy of the text and obscured by common readings of it? What are the results of this dialogue? Can we or cannot we speak of Spinoza's Hobbesianism in relation to these questions?

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