

THE PROBLEM OF VANITY IN THOMAS HOBBS'S LEVIATHAN

O PROBLEMA DA VAIDADE NO LEVIATÃ, DE THOMAS HOBBS

EL PROBLEMA DE LA VANIDAD EN LEVIATÁN, DE THOMAS HOBBS

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ABSTRACT : This paper investigates the role of vanity in the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, taking as its main reference the work Leviathan. It starts from the observation that the traditional reading of Hobbesian philosophy privileges fear, the war of all against all, and sovereign power as explanatory axes of the institution of the State, leaving in the background an equally decisive element: the exaggerated evaluation that the individual makes of himself, which Hobbes called vainglory. The research problem that guides this work can be formulated as follows: why does vanity constitute a problem for human coexistence in

Leviathan? The central hypothesis argues that vanity is not presented merely as a private moral vice, but as a political problem, since the individual who imagines himself to possess more power, wisdom, or importance than he actually does begins to demand from others a recognition corresponding to this image; when such recognition does not occur, the absence is interpreted as contempt or offense, generating rivalries that can lead to conflict. Methodologically, bibliographic research is used, with readings of Hobbes's text and specialized commentaries. The article is divided into eight parts, which cover the theory of passions, the meaning of glory and vainglory, the relationship between vanity and self-opinion, the links between vanity, honor and recognition, vanity as a cause of conflict and, finally, the political response offered by Hobbes to the problem. It concludes that the institution of a common power is, in Hobbes, also a response to the impossibility of resolving, by exclusively moral means, the problem generated by human vainglory.

Keywords: Thomas Hobbes; Leviathan; vanity; vainglory; passions; conflict.

RESUMO: O presente trabalho investiga o papel da vaidade na filosofia política de Thomas Hobbes, tomando como referência principal a obra *Leviatã*. Parte-se da constatação de que a leitura tradicional da filosofia hobbesiana privilegia o medo, a guerra de todos contra todos e o poder soberano como eixos explicativos da instituição do Estado, deixando em segundo plano um elemento igualmente decisivo: a avaliação exagerada que o indivíduo faz de si mesmo, denominada por Hobbes de vanglória. O problema de pesquisa que orienta o trabalho pode ser formulado da seguinte maneira: por que a vaidade constitui um problema para a convivência humana no *Leviatã*? A hipótese central sustenta que a vaidade não é apresentada apenas como um vício moral privado, mas como um problema político, pois o indivíduo que imagina possuir mais poder, sabedoria ou importância do que efetivamente possui passa a exigir dos demais um reconhecimento correspondente a essa imagem; quando tal reconhecimento não ocorre, a ausência é interpretada como desprezo ou ofensa, gerando rivalidades que podem conduzir ao conflito. Metodologicamente, recorre-se à pesquisa bibliográfica, com leitura do texto hobbesiano e de comentadores especializados. O

artigo está dividido em oito partes, que percorrem a teoria das paixões, o significado da glória e da vanglória, a relação entre vaidade e opinião sobre si mesmo, os vínculos entre vaidade, honra e reconhecimento, a vaidade como causa de conflito e, por fim, a resposta política oferecida por Hobbes ao problema. Conclui-se que a instituição de um poder comum é, em Hobbes, também uma resposta à impossibilidade de se resolver, por meios exclusivamente morais, o problema gerado pela vanglória humana.

Palavras-chave: Thomas Hobbes; Leviatã; vaidade; vanglória; paixões; conflito.

RESUMEN: Este trabajo investiga el papel de la vanidad en la filosofía política de Thomas Hobbes, tomando como referencia principal la obra *Leviatán*. Parte de la observación de que la lectura tradicional de la filosofía hobbesiana privilegia el miedo, la guerra de todos contra todos y el poder soberano como ejes explicativos de la institución del Estado, dejando en segundo plano un elemento igualmente decisivo: la exagerada autoevaluación que el individuo hace de sí mismo, a la que Hobbes denominó vanagloria. El problema de investigación que guía este trabajo puede formularse de la siguiente manera: ¿por qué la vanidad constituye un problema para la convivencia humana en *Leviatán*? La hipótesis central sostiene que la vanidad no se presenta simplemente como un vicio moral privado, sino como un problema político, ya que el individuo que se imagina poseer más poder, sabiduría o importancia de la que realmente tiene comienza a exigir de los demás un reconocimiento que corresponda a esta imagen; cuando dicho reconocimiento no se produce, la ausencia se interpreta como desprecio u ofensa, generando rivalidades que pueden conducir al conflicto. Metodológicamente, se emplea la investigación bibliográfica, con lectura del texto de Hobbes y comentarios especializados. El artículo se divide en ocho partes que abarcan la teoría de las pasiones, el significado de la gloria y la vanagloria, la relación entre vanidad y autoimagen, los vínculos entre vanidad, honor y reconocimiento, la vanidad como causa de conflicto y, finalmente, la respuesta política que Hobbes ofrece al problema. Concluye que la institución de un poder común es, para Hobbes, también una respuesta a la imposibilidad de resolver, exclusivamente por medios morales, el problema generado por la

vanagloria humana.

Palabras Clave: Thomas Hobbes; Leviatán; vanidad; vanagloria; pasiones; conflicto.

1 INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy is often presented, both in teaching and in specialized literature, based on three central elements: the fear of violent death, the state of war of all against all, and the need for the institution of a sovereign power capable of maintaining peace among men. This reading, while correct, tends to downplay an aspect of Hobbesian anthropology that is equally relevant to understanding discord among individuals: vanity, understood in its most precise expression as vain-glory, that is, the exaggerated assessment that the subject makes of his own power, wisdom, or importance.

Leviathan, originally published in 1651, offers a meticulous treatment of human passions before moving on to the description of the state of nature and the justification of the social contract. In this process, Hobbes dedicates specific attention to glory and vainglory, situating them among the passions that move men to action and, more specifically, among the causes that lead them to dispute and conflict. The choice of Leviathan as the main work for this study is justified by its being the most mature and systematic formulation of Hobbes's political thought, in which the psychology of passions, the theory of knowledge, and the theory of the State appear articulated more explicitly than in the author's earlier works.

The research problem guiding this article can be formulated directly: why does vanity constitute a problem for human coexistence in Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan? In a more academic way, the question can be reformulated as follows: in what way does vainglory, understood as an exaggerated conception of one's own power or worth, contribute to discord among individuals in Leviathan?

The hypothesis that this work intends to support is that, in Leviathan, vanity is not presented

merely as a private moral vice, but as a properly political problem. By imagining themselves to possess more power, wisdom, or importance than they actually do, individuals begin to demand from others a recognition corresponding to this exaggerated self-image. When this recognition does not occur, they tend to interpret the conduct of others as contempt or offense, which creates rivalries capable of leading to generalized conflict. This argument is the guiding thread that runs throughout the development of the article.

The overall objective of this work is to analyze the problem of vanity in *Leviathan*, demonstrating how vainglory and an exaggerated assessment of one's own worth contribute to discord among individuals. More specifically, it aims to: identify the place of vanity in Hobbes's theory of passions; examine the meaning of glory and vainglory; investigate the relationship between vanity, power, honor, and reputation; demonstrate how vanity makes an individual susceptible to contempt; analyze the contribution of vainglory to human conflicts; and understand the political response offered by Hobbes to this problem.

From a methodological point of view, this article relies on bibliographic research, through a reading of Hobbes's text, especially chapters VI, X, XI, and XIII of *Leviathan*, in dialogue with commentators who have dedicated themselves to the study of Hobbes's anthropology and political philosophy. It does not intend to exhaust the entirety of Hobbes's work, nor to carry out a complete study of the theory of sovereignty, but to concentrate the analysis on the specific problem of vanity and its implications for human coexistence.

The relevance of investigating this topic is not limited to the historical interest in the accurate recovery of Hobbesian thought. Understanding how a seemingly personal passion, such as vanity, can take on political dimensions also helps to illuminate contemporary discussions about social recognition, honor, and conflict, even though this article is limited to examining Hobbesian texts and does not intend to extend the analysis to current debates in political theory.

The work is divided into eight parts. After this introduction, the second section situates vanity within Hobbes' theory of human passions. The third section specifically examines the meaning of glory and vainglory, as well as differentiating vanity, pride, and presumption. The fourth section investigates the subjective dimension of vanity, that is, the relationship between vanity and the individual's self-opinion. The fifth section analyzes the links between vanity, honor, and social recognition. The sixth section, central to the article's argument, examines vanity as a cause of conflict among men. The seventh section discusses the political response Hobbes offers to the problem of vanity, through the institution of a common power. Finally, the eighth section presents the work's concluding remarks.

2. HUMAN PASSIONS IN LEVIATHAN

Before specifically addressing vanity, it is necessary to situate this passion within the broader framework of Hobbesian psychology, primarily expounded in the early chapters of *Leviathan*. Hobbes conceives of man as a system of movements, in which so-called voluntary movements are preceded by internal movements that he calls appetite or desire, when they impel the individual towards something, and aversion, when they distance him from something. This mechanistic conception of human action is highlighted by Silva (2013), who observes how Hobbesian anthropology seeks to explain human behavior based on natural causes, and not on previously given moral purposes.

From desire and aversion, Hobbes derives other fundamental passions, such as pleasure, understood as the appearance or sensation of good, and displeasure, understood as the appearance or sensation of evil. According to Pogrebinschi (2003), this reformulation of traditional moral language in terms of movement and sensation is one of the most original aspects of the Hobbesian project, since it removes from the notion of good any objective foundation external to the subject who desires or rejects something.

Two passions deserve special mention in this context: hope and fear. Hope corresponds to

the appetite accompanied by the expectation of obtaining what is desired, while fear corresponds to the aversion accompanied by the expectation that the feared evil will come to pass. Ribeiro (2002) emphasizes that fear occupies a central place in Hobbes's political philosophy, insofar as it is from the fear of violent death that men are led to consent to the institution of a common power capable of guaranteeing their security.

Among the passions listed by Hobbes is also deliberation, understood not as an autonomous rational faculty, but as the alternation of desires and aversions that precedes voluntary action, until one of them prevails and becomes will. Santana (2021) draws attention to how this conception of deliberation is linked to human corporeality described in *Leviathan*, since, for Hobbes, even the processes that we usually call rational originate in bodily movements.

Another pair of passions relevant to understanding the overall picture in which vanity is situated is formed by confidence and mistrust, understood by Hobbes as constant hope and fear in relation to the same thing. Silveira (2017) observes that, although conceptually distinct from vainglory, these passions frequently combine with it in the Hobbesian explanation of human behavior, since the vainglorious person tends to nurture excessive confidence in their own abilities, while at the same time distrusting the real willingness of others to recognize them.

Hobbes also describes passions associated with direct social comparison, such as emulation, defined as the desire to equal or surpass another in a certain quality, and hatred, which can arise when this emulation is frustrated. Dutra (2023) relates this description to the broader theme of envy in Hobbes's work, suggesting that vainglory and envy share the same comparative root, even though they manifest themselves in different directions: one in the exaggerated affirmation of oneself, the other in resentment towards the merit of others.

It is within this set of passions that glory appears, defined by Hobbes as the satisfaction or triumph of the mind that results from the consideration of one's own power or abilities.

Silveira (2017) observes that glory, taken in isolation, would not necessarily be harmful to social coexistence, as it can correspond to a correct evaluation that the individual makes of himself; the problem arises when this evaluation becomes detached from reality and turns into vainglory.

The importance of situating vanity within this theory of passions lies in understanding that, for Hobbes, no human passion exists in isolation. Vogt (2010) highlights that experience and memory play a relevant role in the formation of passions, so that vainglory, examined in the following sections, should be understood as a result of imaginative processes that rely on past experiences, often reinterpreted in a way that is favorable to the subject himself.

It is also worth highlighting the Hobbesian notion of power, defined as the present means at a man's disposal to obtain some apparent future good. Ribeiro (2002) observes that this definition includes both natural capacities, such as physical strength and prudence, and instrumental capacities, such as wealth, reputation, and friendships, which makes power a relational and cumulative concept, subject to constant comparisons between individuals.

It is precisely this comparative dimension of power that establishes the link between the theory of passions and the problem of vanity. Silva (2009) notes that, by defining power in a comparative way, Hobbes makes a certain competition between men inevitable, since the position of each one can only be evaluated in reference to the position of others, a condition that, associated with vainglory, increases the probability of conflict.

Thus, vanity does not appear in isolation in *Leviathan*. It arises within a conception according to which human actions are driven by desires, aversions, and expectations related to the acquisition or loss of power. Bevilaqua (2005) summarizes this aspect by stating that the pursuit of power is, for Hobbes, a constitutive trait of the human condition, and it is precisely in this context that vainglory acquires its political relevance.

3. The Meaning of Vanity in *Leviathan*

This section constitutes one of the central cores of the article, as it seeks to clarify precisely what Hobbes understands by glory, vainglory, vanity, pride, and presumption—terms that sometimes appear interchangeably in Brazilian translations of *Leviathan*, but which have distinct meanings in Hobbesian vocabulary.

3.1 The Glory

Hobbes defines glory as the satisfaction, contentment, or triumph of the mind that an individual experiences when considering their own power and abilities, especially when these abilities are confirmed by the opinion of others. Silveira (2017) explains that glory, in this sense, is associated with the idea of comparative superiority, since man tends to constantly compare himself with others, deriving satisfaction from the perception that he excels in some aspect.

By introducing the notion of glory, Hobbes breaks with previous traditions that treated the pursuit of recognition as a virtue to be cultivated without reservation, proposing instead a more cautious analysis of its effects on coexistence. Nascimento (2023) observes that this more cautious stance regarding the passions associated with self-love is taken up, with significant variations, by later authors of modern contractualism, which gives Hobbes's treatment of glory a relevant place in the history of political philosophy.

It is important to note that Hobbes describes glory as one of the ways in which pleasure manifests itself within the realm of self-esteem, alongside other satisfactions linked to the senses and imagination. Pogrebinschi (2003) observes that this inclusion of glory among pleasurable passions shows that Hobbes does not treat it as something intrinsically negative, but as a natural part of human affective life, whose problem arises only when it becomes disconnected from reality.

This satisfaction, however, does not stem exclusively from the actual possession of power or qualities, but can also derive from the mere imagination of possessing them. Dutra (2023)

observes that Hobbes distinguishes, albeit not always in a perfectly systematic way, between glory founded on effectively demonstrated abilities and glory supported only by the subjective belief of possessing them, a distinction that will be decisive in understanding the transition from glory to vainglory.

Glory, taken in its simplest form, still fulfills a relevant function in social life, as it stimulates men to action, to the improvement of their abilities, and to the pursuit of recognition through effective achievements. Ribeiro (2002) highlights that this competitive dimension of human nature is, for Hobbes, a constitutive part of the incessant pursuit of power that characterizes the human condition.

Hobbes further distinguishes between glory felt internally and that which depends on the testimony of others, observing that even the memory of past deeds, when revisited by the imagination, can produce satisfaction and glory similar to that experienced at the moment the deeds occurred. Vogt (2010) relates this observation to the role of historical memory in Hobbes's work, emphasizing that the reconstruction of the past is always, to a certain extent, a selective operation carried out by the imagination of the subject himself.

3.2 Vainglory

It is worth situating this distinction within the broader context of Hobbes's critique of traditional sources of epistemic authority, especially the authority of customs and opinions received without critical examination. Silva (2009) observes that, for Hobbes, much of human error stems from the imprecise use of language and the uncritical acceptance of others' opinions, conditions that also favor the formation and maintenance of vainglory, insofar as they hinder the correction of an exaggerated self-image through rational examination.

Vain glory, in turn, corresponds to a satisfaction based not on real abilities, but on an exaggerated assessment of one's own power. Pogrebinschi (2003) explains that Hobbes uses the term vain-glory precisely to designate this imbalance between the subject's self-image

and their actual condition, that is, an empty glory, without correspondence to reality.

This imbalance may originate from past experiences interpreted in a fantastical way, when the individual reconstructs in memory deeds and successes in a more favorable manner than they actually occurred. Vogt (2010) associates this phenomenon with the role that experience plays in the formation of judgment, highlighting that, for Hobbes, imagination frequently distorts past experience to the benefit of the subject's self-esteem.

Vainglory can also derive from the flattery of others who, out of self-interest or mere social courtesy, reinforce in the individual an image of themselves that is superior to reality. Silva (2009) notes that this relational dimension of vainglory shows how the formation of self-image, in Hobbes, is not a strictly internal process, but largely depends on the recognition and opinion of others.

Vainglory manifests itself with particular intensity when an individual claims abilities or merits without any concrete proof to support them. Santana (2021) observes that this lack of proof is precisely what makes vainglory, in Hobbes, a potentially dangerous passion for coexistence, since the subject begins to demand recognition for qualities that he cannot effectively demonstrate.

Hobbes also associates vainglory with reckless behavior, observing that vainglorious men, by excessively trusting in their own abilities, tend to expose themselves to risks that a more realistic individual about their limitations would avoid. Ribeiro (2002) relates this observation to the broader context of the state of nature, in which the recklessness stemming from vainglory can further aggravate the insecurity already existing among men.

It is worth noting that Hobbes does not treat vainglory as a rare or exceptional phenomenon, but as a widespread tendency among men, which exacerbates its political relevance. Pogrebinschi (2003) observes that this widespread dissemination is decisive for the Hobbesian argument, because if vainglory were a trait of a few isolated individuals, the

problem could be treated as an exception; being, on the contrary, a common tendency, it becomes a structural element to be considered by any realist theory of human coexistence.

3.3 Vanity, pride and presumption

Brazilian translations of *Leviathan* do not always employ uniform terminology for the terms vain-glory, pride, and presumption, which requires some conceptual care. Bevilaqua (2005) warns that, depending on the edition consulted, vainglory, pride, and presumption may appear as synonyms or as distinct concepts, making it necessary to observe the context of each passage to understand which psychological phenomenon Hobbes is referring to.

In general, it can be said that vanity, taken in a broad sense, designates the individual's tendency to overvalue themselves; vainglory more specifically designates the satisfaction resulting from this overvaluation; pride tends to designate the subject's resistance to admitting any decrease in their perceived value; and presumption designates the expectation of privileged treatment based on this exaggerated self-image. Silva (2013) argues that this distinction, although subtle, is relevant to understanding why Hobbes treats vanity not only as an error of judgment, but as a source of specific social behavior.

At this point, it is also useful to consider Hobbes's warning regarding the rhetorical use of language to simulate qualities one does not possess, which brings vainglory closer to a kind of socially constructed self-deception. Santana (2021) observes that, for Hobbes, this rhetorical dimension of vanity is potentially dangerous because it can contaminate not only the self-image of the vainglorious subject, but also the perception that others form about him, broadening the social reach of the problem.

It is important to note that Hobbes contrasts vanity with self-confidence based on real abilities, which is compatible with peaceful social life. Dutra (2023) argues that the Hobbesian problem is not self-esteem itself, but the mismatch between the individual's self-image and their actual condition, a mismatch that generates expectations of recognition that

social reality can hardly satisfy.

In short, vanity arises when there is a difference between an individual's real power and the image of power they construct for themselves. It is this difference, and not self-esteem in general, that Hobbes identifies as potentially disruptive to coexistence among men, an issue that will be examined in more detail in subsequent sections.

From a terminological point of view, it is also relevant to note that different Brazilian translations of *Leviathan* adopt distinct solutions for the English terms vain-glory and glorying, which can generate slight variations in the reading of certain passages. Bevilaqua (2005) therefore recommends that any more detailed conceptual analysis of Hobbes's vocabulary of passions should be accompanied, whenever possible, by consulting the original English text, in order to avoid misunderstandings arising solely from translation choices.

Nascimento (2023), although primarily dedicated to Kantian political philosophy, observes in his analysis of the contractualist tradition that Hobbes inaugurates a way of treating human passions as a given to be managed by politics, and not as a flaw to be simply condemned by morality, which helps to historically situate the originality of Hobbes's treatment of vanity in relation to later authors of the same tradition.

4. Vanity and Self-Opinion

Hobbes observes, remarkably for a 17th-century author, that most men tend to consider themselves wiser than experience actually allows, a phenomenon manifested above all in the ease with which each person judges their own opinions to be correct and dissenting opinions to be mistaken. Silveira (2017) relates this observation to the Hobbesian idea that men, with rare exceptions, presume to possess more ingenuity than the common people, even while recognizing the superiority of a few specific individuals.

This tendency toward favorable self-evaluation is associated with the difficulty of recognizing

one's own limitations. Silva (2009), when examining critical readings of Hobbes's work, observes that this difficulty does not stem from mere isolated individual vanity, but from a structural trait of human cognition described by Hobbes, for whom the mind tends to value what is its own, including its own opinions and judgments.

The exaggerated assessment of intelligence is, in this sense, a specific manifestation of vainglory, in which the individual attributes to himself a degree of wisdom superior to what he actually possesses. Pogrebinschi (2003) notes that this kind of intellectual vainglory is particularly relevant to Hobbes's political philosophy, since it is precisely the pretension of each person to judge for himself what is just, honest, or true that, under conditions of disagreement, fuels discord among men.

Another relevant aspect of this subjective dimension is the relationship between vanity and language, since it is through discourse that the boastful individual publicly manifests the exaggerated evaluation he makes of himself, whether through direct statements about his own qualities or through indirect signs of self-affirmation. Silva (2009) observes that Hobbes, when dealing with language in the initial chapters of *Leviathan*, already anticipates the possibility that words are used not only to communicate truths, but also to promote the speaker's self-image before others.

The opinion that an individual has of himself, however, is not formed entirely autonomously, but depends to a large extent on the opinion of others about him. Dutra (2023) observes that, for Hobbes, the value of a man is, to a large extent, what others attribute to him, so that the vainglorious self-image needs external confirmation to sustain itself, even though, in the absence of this confirmation, the vainglorious individual tends to reinterpret reality in his own favor.

It is also worth mentioning that Hobbes relates the intensity of vainglory to the age and life experience of the individual, suggesting that younger people, having less comparative

experience, are more subject to exaggerated assessments of their own abilities than more experienced men. Vogt (2010) observes that this observation, although specific to Hobbes's text, reveals the author's attention to the concrete conditions that favor the formation of vainglory, and not just to an abstract description of passion.

In this context, it is possible to observe that vainglory tends to intensify in social environments where the individual has few opportunities for effective comparison with others of similar ability, since the absence of concrete contrast facilitates the maintenance of an exaggerated self-image. Bevilaqua (2005) suggests that this observation is compatible with the Hobbesian emphasis on the natural equality between men, since, for Hobbes, even small real differences in ability tend to be amplified by the imagination of those who consider themselves superior.

This aspect leads to the distinction between real power and imagined power, which is central to understanding vainglory. Ribeiro (2002) explains that Hobbes conceives of power as the present capacity to obtain some future good, and that this capacity can be correctly evaluated or distorted by the subject's imagination, and it is precisely this distortion that characterizes vainglory in the strict sense.

Imagination therefore plays a decisive role in the formation of vainglory, as it allows the individual to project onto themselves qualities and abilities that actual experience does not confirm. Vogt (2010) associates this imaginative process with the way Hobbes treats memory and experience throughout *Leviathan*, emphasizing that human imagination tends to selectively reconstruct the past, preferentially retaining what favors self-esteem.

It is worth noting that Hobbes does not consider this tendency toward exaggerated self-evaluation as something restricted to individuals with little education; on the contrary, he points to it as a phenomenon equally present among those who hold positions of authority and among the literate, capable of rationally sophisticating the defense of their own vanity.

Silva (2013) observes that this finding reinforces the structural, and not merely individual, character of the problem, as it suggests that no social stratum is immune to the distortion of self-image.

The relationship between vanity and self-opinion is also manifested in the difficulty of accepting correction from others, since recognizing an error would be equivalent, for the vain person, to admitting a decrease in their value. Bevilaqua (2005) observes that this resistance to correction is one of the reasons why, in the state of nature described by Hobbes, disagreement between particular opinions tends to perpetuate itself, in the absence of a common instance capable of deciding controversies with authority recognized by all.

From this set of observations arises an important argument for the overall economy of the article: the vain person not only believes they possess certain qualities, but expects others to attribute to them the same value they attribute to themselves. Santana (2021) highlights that this demand for external recognition is the link that connects the subjective dimension of vanity, examined in this section, to the properly social and political dimension of the problem.

5. Vanity, Honor, and Recognition

If vanity originates from an exaggerated subjective evaluation, its most relevant effects for Hobbes's political philosophy manifest themselves in the realm of honor and social recognition. Hobbes defines honor as the external manifestation of the value attributed to a person, a value expressed through signs such as respect, obedience, precedence, or praise. Bevilaqua (2005) observes that this conception of honor is closely linked to the Hobbesian conception of power, since honoring someone is, ultimately, publicly recognizing the power that person possesses or appears to possess.

It is also pertinent to observe that Hobbes treats valorization and contempt as correlative movements: to valorize someone is to recognize their power; to despise them is to deny them that recognition, even if only implicitly. Silva (2013) highlights that this correlation

explains why the simple omission of habitual signs of deference can be received by the boastful as active contempt, even if there is no hostile intention on the part of the one who omits such signs.

Hobbes further distinguishes different sources of honor, such as natural honor, derived from personal qualities, and artificial honor, conferred by acts of sovereign power, such as the granting of titles and offices. Ribeiro (2002) observes that this distinction is relevant to understanding how political authority can intervene in the social distribution of honor, a theme that will be revisited in the analysis of the political response to the problem of vanity.

Reputation, in turn, functions in *Leviathan* as a kind of derived power, insofar as the fame of possessing power attracts the adherence and cooperation of others, reinforcing the effective power of the reputed individual. Ribeiro (2002) emphasizes that this cumulative characteristic of power, according to which power attracts power, helps to explain why men intensely compete for reputation, and not just material goods.

Given this scenario, it is understandable why the boastful individual desires public recognition, seeking to obtain from others signs of honor compatible with the exaggerated image they construct of themselves. Silva (2013) notes that this pursuit of public recognition explains seemingly disproportionate behaviors, such as the struggle for precedence in situations of little practical relevance but great symbolic weight for those involved.

The pursuit of precedence is, in this sense, a concrete manifestation of the search for recognition, since prominent positions in ceremonies, titles, and forms of address function as public signs of honor. Silva (2009) observes that Hobbes, attentive to the social practices of his time, recognizes that these signs, although they may seem trivial, carry relevant political significance, as they publicly express hierarchies of power and value among individuals.

Consequently, the vain individual reacts with particular sensitivity to signs of disregard, interpreting them as a denial of the value he attributes to himself. Dutra (2023) argues that

this sensitivity to contempt is at the heart of Hobbes's analysis of human rivalry, since it is precisely the perception of being treated with less consideration than one believes one deserves that triggers intense emotional reactions, capable of turning into hostility.

It is also worth highlighting Hobbes' observation that the comparison of value between men often occurs indirectly, through third parties who witness and comment on social interactions, which broadens the public reach of any dispute over honor. Pogrebinschi (2003) notes that this dimension of publicity is crucial to understanding why the boastful person reacts not only to direct affronts, but also to the possibility that an affront might be witnessed by others, compromising their reputation before a wider audience.

It should also be noted that the pursuit of recognition is not limited to relationships between isolated individuals, but also extends to relationships between groups, families, and factions that collectively compete for prestige and precedence. Silva (2013) suggests that this collective extension of vanity helps to understand why, for Hobbes, disputes over honor can quickly escalate from interpersonal conflicts to conflicts involving multiple individuals who are in solidarity with each other.

This process highlights the transformation of individual vanity into social dispute, since the demand for recognition, when frustrated, ceases to be a merely internal problem for the boastful subject and begins to involve third parties, insofar as the satisfaction of vanity depends, by definition, on the conduct of other people. Pogrebinschi (2003) emphasizes this relational character as one of the elements that make vainglory, for Hobbes, a politically relevant passion, and not just a trait of individual character.

In this context, it is also worth highlighting how Hobbes describes the reaction to laughter and mocking comparison, associating sudden laughter with the sudden perception of superiority over others or with one's own past weaknesses. Vogt (2010) observes that this analysis, although brief in Hobbes's text, illustrates how even seemingly mild manifestations

of social interaction can carry, for Hobbes, content related to the dispute of honor and the assertion of superiority.

It is also worth noting that, in Hobbes, honor is not a fixed attribute, but depends on the context and the circumstantial evaluation of others, which makes its possession always precarious and subject to contestation. Silva (2009) notes that this structural precariousness of honor is one of the reasons why boastful individuals remain in a state of constant vigilance regarding the signs of deference they receive, ready to react to any perceived variation in this treatment.

Faced with the guiding question of what happens when the value an individual attributes to themselves is not recognized by others, the Hobbesian response leads to conflict: the individual may interpret the lack of recognition as contempt, dishonor, or affront. Silveira (2017) summarizes this mechanism by stating that the perception of contempt functions, in Hobbes, as an emotional trigger capable of transforming symbolic disputes into effectively violent ones.

6. Vanity as a Cause of Conflict

Hobbes identifies three main causes of conflict in human nature: competition, mistrust, and glory. Silveira (2017) explains that these three causes, although distinct, often intertwine in practice, so that a dispute initiated by competition for goods can quickly turn into a dispute over honor, and vice versa.

Competition leads men to invade what belongs to others for the purpose of gaining something; distrust leads men to attack preemptively to ensure their own safety. Ribeiro (2002) observes that these two causes would already be enough, according to Hobbes, to make human coexistence precarious under conditions of equality and scarcity of resources, but it is the third cause, glory, that gives the Hobbesian conflict its dimension more specifically linked to vanity.

Glory, as a cause of discord, leads men to conflict for reasons that, at first glance, might seem small: a word, a gesture, a dissenting opinion, a demonstration of contempt, or an offense directed at oneself or someone connected to oneself. Dutra (2023) highlights that Hobbes pays particular attention to this third cause precisely because it reveals the most psychologically complex face of human nature, in which violence does not stem from material need, but from the defense of a self-image.

This dynamic can be related to Hobbes's famous argument that, in the state of nature, there is no place for stable notions of just and unjust, of mine and yours, precisely because there is no common instance capable of establishing, with authority recognized by all, the criteria for evaluating the value of each individual. Ribeiro (2002) observes that this absence of stable criteria is aggravated by vanity, since each person tends to unilaterally establish the criteria that are most favorable to them.

Furthermore, Hobbes suggests that vanity can manifest itself particularly acutely among individuals who occupy positions of authority or social prominence, since the expectation of deference is usually proportional to the position held, making any deviation from this expectation more visible and more likely to be interpreted as an affront. Silva (2009) notes that this observation helps to explain why disputes over precedence among authorities, mentioned by Hobbes in different passages of *Leviathan*, tend to be especially intense.

Hobbes illustrates this dynamic by observing that, in the state of nature, even the strongest man cannot feel completely secure in relation to others, since any combination of weaker individuals, united by common resentment, can overcome him. Bevilacqua (2005) notes that this observation reinforces the idea that vanity, by generating widespread resentment, contributes to making the condition of insecurity described by the author universal, and not restricted to a few individuals.

It is precisely here that the central thesis of this article is articulated: vanity makes

individuals especially sensitive to any behavior that could be interpreted as diminishing their value. Silva (2013) argues that this extreme sensitivity stems from the fact that, for the vain person, the public diminution of their value is equivalent to a kind of loss of power, since, in Hobbes, honor and power are intimately associated.

It is not merely a matter of disputing material goods, but of disputing the public interpretation of who possesses more power, honor, intelligence, or importance. Pogrebinschi (2003) observes that this symbolic dispute is, in a certain sense, more difficult to resolve than the dispute over material resources, since resources can be divided or shared, whereas precedence and honor are, by nature, positional and comparative, so that the satisfaction of one may imply the frustration of another.

Santana (2021) adds that this comparative dimension of honor helps to explain why Hobbes considers vanity a permanent threat to peace, even among individuals who do not compete for scarce goods with each other: it is enough for one of them to perceive, or imagine perceiving, a sign of disregard on the part of the other for rivalry to take hold.

Vogt (2010) further observes that this Hobbesian reading of vanity as a cause of conflict is not merely speculative, but is supported by historical examples and observations of human behavior in different social contexts, which gives the analysis of passions in *Leviathan* an empirical character that reinforces its political relevance.

Finally, Bevilaqua (2005) underlines that the association between vanity and conflict is one of the elements that justify, in Hobbesian argumentation, the need for the submission of all individuals to a common power capable of arbitrating disputes of honor and reputation, since, left to the free course of individual passions, such disputes tend to multiply and worsen, compromising the possibility of peaceful coexistence.

It is also worth highlighting that, for Hobbes, even men rationally capable of perceiving the ultimate futility of conflict over honor do not refrain from engaging in it, since the logic of

vainglory is not governed by a rational calculation of costs and benefits, but by an emotional demand for recognition. Silva (2013) observes that this not strictly rational dimension of vanity is what differentiates it from the other causes of discord pointed out by Hobbes, making it, in a certain sense, more difficult to contain through arguments.

It is also worth relating this analysis to Hobbes's famous characterization of life in the state of nature as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short, since vanity specifically contributes to the brutalizing dimension of this condition, insofar as it transforms everyday social interactions into potential occasions for violent dispute. Dutra (2023) suggests that this specific contribution of vainglory is frequently underestimated in readings that emphasize only material scarcity as the cause of the war of all against all.

Another relevant aspect is that vanity, by generating conflicts for reasons seemingly disproportionate to their immediate cause, contributes to making coexistence in the state of nature unpredictable, since no social interaction, however trivial it may seem, is exempt from the risk of being interpreted as an affront. Ribeiro (2002) associates this unpredictability with the generalized insecurity that, for Hobbes, characterizes the life of men outside the scope of a common power.

It can be argued that vanity, as analyzed in previous sections in its subjective and relational dimension, finds its most radical expression in this section: the conversion of a private passion into a permanent source of social instability, which projects the problem of vainglory into the political domain proper.

7. The Political Response to the Problem of Vanity

Having acknowledged the role of vanity as a cause of discord, it is necessary to examine how Hobbes conceives of a response to this problem, without needing to undertake an exhaustive study of the theory of sovereignty. The first point to highlight is that, for Hobbes, vanity cannot be completely eliminated, as it stems from constitutive characteristics of human

nature, such as imagination, social comparison, and dependence on the opinions of others. Silva (2009) observes that this anthropological premise is crucial for understanding why Hobbes does not rely on purely moral or educational solutions to the problem of discord.

It is also worth mentioning that Hobbes, in different passages of *Leviathan*, uses examples drawn from ancient history and his own context to illustrate how disputes of honor between rulers and between nations can escalate from seemingly minor motives. Vogt (2010) observes that this recourse to history is consistent with Hobbes's method of seeking empirical confirmation for the conclusions derived from his analysis of the passions in the accumulated experience of humanity.

Also worthy of note is Hobbes' observation that the natural equality of abilities among men, however approximate, contributes to sharpening the dispute generated by vainglory, since no difference in ability is great enough for an individual to accept, without resistance, subordinating himself to the self-image of superiority of another. Silveira (2017) observes that this combination of relative equality in fact and imagined inequality of value is one of the drivers of social instability that the institution of common power seeks to correct.

Moral advice aimed at moderating vanity, while desirable, proves insufficient because it lacks a coercive mechanism capable of guaranteeing its widespread observance. Pogrebinschi (2003) highlights that this Hobbesian distrust of the isolated effectiveness of morality is one of the traits that distinguishes his political philosophy from previous traditions founded on civic virtues, since, for Hobbes, only the fear of an effective coercive power is capable of reliably containing disruptive passions.

It is precisely here that the institution of a common power acquires its specific function in relation to the problem of vanity: by concentrating in a single instance the force necessary to impose decisions, sovereign power limits private disputes of honor and reputation, removing from individuals the prerogative to judge and avenge for themselves the offenses they

believe they have suffered. Ribeiro (2002) explains that this shift of personal vengeance to the sovereign instance is one of the central legal elements in the construction of the Hobbesian state.

In this context, civil law plays a complementary role to that of sovereign power, as it establishes public and uniform criteria of conduct, replacing the particular judgment of each individual about what is honorable or dishonorable with parameters defined by the sovereign authority. Silva (2013) emphasizes that this standardization of criteria is essential to reduce the margin of interpretative disputes surrounding honor, disputes that, in the absence of such authority, would tend to multiply indefinitely.

In this way, the State, as conceived by Hobbes, replaces personal vengeance with institutional punishment, removing from the hands of individuals the definition and execution of sanctions applicable to perceived offenses. Bevilaqua (2005) observes that this substitution is also a condition of possibility for the exercise of law, since only when the application of force is concentrated in a common instance is it possible to properly speak of a stable legal order.

For the purposes of this article, a complete study of Hobbesian sovereignty is not necessary; it suffices to recognize that vanity helps explain why men cannot live peacefully without a common power, insofar as, even after overcoming disputes over material goods, the struggle for honor and recognition would remain an inexhaustible source of conflict. Dutra (2023) summarizes this point by stating that the Hobbesian Leviathan can be read, to a certain extent, as an institutional response to the problem of human pride, insofar as only a power superior to all is capable of containing the claims of superiority of each individual in relation to others.

Silveira (2017) concludes, in a convergent manner, that the analysis of vanity in Leviathan is not an accessory digression of Hobbes's political philosophy, but an integral part of the

justification for the necessity of the State, since it reveals a dimension of human discord that would not be adequately resolved only by regulating the possession of goods or by repressing direct physical violence, also requiring public regulation of disputes over honor and reputation.

Additionally, it is possible to observe that Hobbes's response to the problem of vanity is not limited to the sphere of coercion, but also includes the symbolic regulation exercised by the sovereign through the granting and withdrawal of honors, which allows for adjusting, within certain limits, the public distribution of recognition to the abilities and services effectively rendered by individuals to the political body. Silveira (2017) observes that this symbolic dimension of sovereign power is, in Hobbes, as relevant as its coercive dimension for maintaining peace among subjects.

It is also worth noting that, by attributing to the sovereign power the prerogative of granting titles, offices, and public signs of distinction, Hobbes offers an institutional way to channel the pursuit of honor that would otherwise remain dispersed and conflictual among individuals. Vogt (2010) notes that this centralization of signs of honor around the sovereign figure is consistent with Hobbes's project of unifying the criteria for social evaluation in a single instance, reducing the space for private disputes over precedence.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the effectiveness of this institutional response ultimately depends on the capacity of the sovereign power to consistently and predictably enforce the public criteria of honor and reputation it has established, since an arbitrary or inconsistent application of these criteria would tend to reproduce, even under sovereign authority, some of the instability that the institution of the State aims to overcome. Ribeiro (2002) associates this requirement of coherence with the more general idea, present in *Leviathan*, that sovereign authority must be exercised in a way that preserves the subjects' trust in the established legal order.

It should be noted that the political response to the problem of vanity does not eliminate passion itself, but only its most destructive effects on coexistence, insofar as vainglory remains latent in individuals even under the authority of a common power. Santana (2021) observes that this persistence is consistent with Hobbesian anthropology, for which no human passion is suppressed by the political institution, but only contained and disciplined by it.

8. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The path taken in this work allows us to summarize, in a synthetic way, the main conclusions reached. By vainglory, Hobbes understands the satisfaction that an individual experiences when considering their own power or worth when this satisfaction does not correspond to effectively proven abilities, thus distinguishing it from glory founded on real achievements. This notion can be directly related to vanity in a broad sense, understood as the tendency to overvalue oneself and to expect from others a recognition corresponding to this exaggerated self-image.

It is demonstrated that vainglory arises from the exaggerated opinion that an individual has of themselves, an opinion formed by imaginative processes that favorably reconstruct past experiences and that often rely on the flattery of others and the absence of concrete evidence of the alleged abilities. Because it depends, even if partially, on external confirmation, vainglory requires recognition from others, manifesting itself through the pursuit of honor, precedence, and reputation.

The absence of this external recognition, in turn, generates conflict, since the boastful individual tends to interpret any sign of disregard as contempt, dishonor, or affront, reacting to this perception with hostility. It is for this reason that the problem takes on a political dimension: vanity, by converting symbolic disputes of honor into permanent sources of rivalry, reveals a facet of human discord that cannot be resolved solely by the distribution of

material goods or the repression of violence, requiring the institution of a common power capable of arbitrating, in a stable and impartial manner, disputes over recognition among men.

It is worth noting that the reading proposed here does not intend to reduce Hobbes' entire political philosophy to the problem of vanity, but only to highlight a dimension of the text that, although explicitly present in Chapter XIII and related passages of *Leviathan*, usually receives secondary treatment in relation to the fear of violent death. Recognizing the role of vainglory as an autonomous cause of discord does not diminish the importance of fear in Hobbesian argumentation, but complements the overall picture of the passions that, according to Hobbes, make the institution of a common power necessary.

In this sense, this article joins a broader body of studies on *Leviathan* that seek to recover, in its different legal, anthropological, and political dimensions, the complexity of the Hobbesian argument in favor of the institution of the State, demonstrating that this institution responds not to a single isolated cause of conflict, but to an articulated set of human passions, among which vanity occupies a prominent place.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this work, which deliberately focused on *Leviathan* and did not systematically delve into Hobbes' other political works, such as *De Cive* and *Elements of Law*, in which the treatment of vanity and passions related to honor presents variations that could enrich the analysis developed here. This delimitation, although necessary given the length of this article, points to possibilities for continuing the research.

This study seeks to show that vanity, in the architecture of *Leviathan*, follows a path that goes from the individual psychology of passions to the political justification of sovereign power, passing through the formation of self-image, the pursuit of honor and recognition, and the conversion of these symbolic disputes into effective conflict. This trajectory confirms that a reading of Hobbes focused exclusively on the fear of violent death, while correct in its own

terms, is incomplete if it is not complemented by the consideration of vainglory as an autonomous and relevant cause of discord.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the hypothesis presented in the introduction of this article finds support in the text of Leviathan and in the specialized literature consulted: vanity, taken in its Hobbesian expression of vainglory, constitutes not only a private moral vice, but a political problem of the first order, the understanding of which is indispensable for a complete reading of Thomas Hobbes's political philosophy. Future studies may further explore the comparison between Hobbes's treatment of vanity and the treatment given to similar passions by other authors in the modern contractualist tradition, broadening the scope of the conclusions reached here.

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