



## Vanity Fea

José Ángel García Landa

A Person Is the Same, that an Actor Is —or,

### How to Make Artificial Persons

Hobbes' s Dramatistic Theory of Interaction and of Political Representation.

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Let us examine Thomas Hobbes' s theory of interaction and of political representation, as expounded in chapter XVI of Part I of *Leviathan*. Many aspects of the dramatistic theory of the self and of communication developed by [the symbolic interactionists](#), such as George Herbert Mead and [Erving Goffman](#), are prefigured in this chapter. Hobbes' s dramatism no doubt owes much to the dramatism of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but he takes it to a new level of explicit reflection, theorizing the notions of person both in everyday action and with reference to the conventionally created persons in legal fictions. This is a crucial notion in his political philosophy, as can be seen in the very notion of the Leviathan, the State as the giant made of many people, as [an artificial person](#). Dramatism is central, then, both to Hobbes' s psychology and to his political theory, which are of one piece. Political representation as an institutionalized role-playing is a cornerstone of Hobbes' s understanding of the political order.

#### Chap. XVI

##### *Of PERSONS, AUTHORS, and things Personated*

*[A Person what]* **A PERSON**, is he *whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of an other man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction.*

*[Persons Naturall, and Artificiall]* When they are considered as his owne, then he is called a *Naturall Person*: And when they are considered as representing the woers and actions of an other, then he is a *Feigned or Artificiall person*.

*[The word Person, whence]* The word Person is latine: instead whereof the Greeks have *prósopon*, which signifies the *Face*, as *Persona* in latine signifies the *disguise*, or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and somtimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Visard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to any Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters. So that a *Person*, is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himselfe, or an other;

*[Note well Hobbes' s move here: in being "natural persons" we*

are not bypassing the question of representation: instead, we are representing ourselves, somewhat like Shakespeare's King Harry on the stage of history, "playing himself", playing his own role in his own person, as Shakespeare says in the prologue to *Henry V*] and he that acteth another, is said to beare his Person, or act in his name; (in which sence Cicero useth it where he saies, *Unus sustineo tres Personas; Mei, Adversarii, & Judicis*, I beare three Persons; my own, my Adversaries, and the Judges; and is cal[81]led in diverse occasions, diversly; as a *Representer*, or *Representative*, a *Lieutenant*, a *Vicar*, an *Attorney*, a *Deputy*, a *Procurator*, an *Actor*, and the like. [Here Hobbes shows, on the one hand, that the spontaneous function of representation has given rise to these roles, institutions or professions, on the other, he also calls attention to our spontaneous theory of "personation" or representation, understood through common language and the ordinary social interaction in dealing with these professions, a pre-theoretical awareness which he brings to consciousness and makes fully theoretical here, partly by pointing out the historical genesis of the social function, buried in the etymology of these terms.]

Of Persons Artificiall, some have their words and actions Owned by those whom they represent. [Actor, Author,] And then the Person is the Actor; and he that owneth his words and actions, is the AUTHOR: In which case the Actor acteth by Authority. [Cf. here Erving Goffman's hierarchy of persons, in *Forms of Talk*: the principal, the author, and the animator—a slightly different division of roles: Goffman's 'principal' is the one invested with final authority, and hence equivalent to Hobbes's 'Author', e.g. the promoter or sponsor of a publication, or the producer of a film; the author of a text and its animators (narrators, 'actors', characters, etc.) are mere ghost writers or speakers, and thence 'Actors' acting by Authority.] For that which in speaking of goods and possessions, is called an Owner, and in latine *Dominus*, in Greeke *Kyrios*; speaking of Actions, is called Author. And as the Right of possession, is called Dominion; [Authority] so the Right of doing any Action, is called AUTHORITY. So that by Authority, is alwayes understood a Right of doing any act: and done by Authority, done by Commission, or Licence from him whose right it is.

[Covenants by Authority, bind the Author] From hence it followeth, that when the Actor maketh a Covenant by Authority, he bindeth thereby the Author, no lesse than if he had made it himselfe; and no lesse subjecteth him to all the consequences of the same. And therefore all that hath been said formerly, (*Chap. 14.*) of the nature of Covenants, between man and man in their naturall capacity, is true also when they are made by their Actors, Representers, or Procurators, that have authority from them, so far-forth as is in their Commission, but no farther.

And therefore he that maketh a Covenant with the Actor, or Representer, not knowing the Authority he hath, doth it at his own perill. For no man is obliged by a Covenant, whereof he is not Author; nor consequently by a Covenant made against, or beside the Authority he gave.

When the Actor doth any thing against the Law of Nature by command of the Author, if he be obliged by former Covenant to obey him, not he, but the Author breaketh the Law of Nature: for though the Action be against the Law of Nature; yet it is not his: but contrarily; to refuse to do it, is against the Law of Nature, that forbiddeth breach of Covenant. [Aquí le patina malamente la neurona a Hobbes, pues esto no se sostiene en buena lógica, si bien a veces se mantiene en la práctica, en aquellos sistemas que quieren dejar incuestionada la sumisión absoluta de las personas a las personas, antes que a la ley—JAGL.]

[The Authority is to be shewne] And he that maketh a Covenant with the Author, by mediation of the Actor, not knowing what Authority he hath, but onely takes his word; in case such Authority be not made manifest unto him upon



demand, is no longer obliged: For the Covenant made with the Author, it is not valid, without his Counter-assurance. But if he that so Covenanteth, knew before hand he was to expect no other assurance, than the Actors word; then is the Covenant valid; because the Actor in this case maketh himselfe the Author. And therefore, as when the Authority is evident, the Covenant obligeth the Author, not the Actor; so when the Authority is feigned, it obligeth the Actor onely; there being no Author but himselfe.

[*Things personated, Inanimate*] There are few things, that are incapable of being represented by Fiction. Inanimate things, as a Church, an Hospital, a Bridge, may be Personated by a Rector, Master, or Overseer. But things Inanimate, cannot be Authors, nor therefore give Authority to their Actors; Yet the Actors may have Authority to procure their mainte[82]nance, given them by those that are Owners, or Governours of those things. And therefore, such things cannot be Personated, before there be some state of Civill Government.

Likewise Children, Fooles, and Mad-men that have no use of Reason, may be Personated by Guardians, or Curators; but can be no Authors (during that time) of any action done by them, longer then (when they shall recover the use of Reason) they shall judge the same reasonable. Yet during the Folly, he that hath right of governing them, may give Authority to the Guardian. But this again has no place but in a State Civill, because before such estate, there is no Dominion of Persons.

[*False Gods;*] An Idol, or meer Figment of the brain, may be Personated; as were the Gods of the Heathen; which by such Officers as the State appointed, were Personated, and held Possessions, and other Goods, and Rights, which men from time to time dedicated, and consecrated upon them. But idols cannot be Authors: for an Idol is nothing. The Authority proceeded from the State: and therefore before introduction to Civill Government, the Gods of the Heathen could not be Personated.

[*The true God*] The true God may be Personated. As he was; first, by *Moses*; who governed the Israelites, (that were not his, but Gods people,) not in his own name, with *Hoc dicit Moses*; but in Gods name, with *Hoc dicit Dominus*. [*As happens elsewhere in Leviathan, here Hobbes enacts with his unquestioning acceptance of the British status quo and of the truth of the Christian religion, the principle he is explaining: that of the state's legitimacy to establish what is to be publicly believed, or published, and thus his treatise does what it preaches, Q.E.D.—JAGL*] Secondly, by the Son of man, his own Son our Blessed Saviour *Jesus Christ*, that came to reduce the Jewes, and induce all Nations into the Kingdome of his Father; not as of himselfe, but as sent from his Father. And thirdly, by the Holy Ghost, or Comforter, speaking, and working in the Apostles: which Holy Ghost, was a Comforter that came not of himselfe; but was sent, and proceeded from them both.

[*A Multitude of men, how one Person*] A Multitude of men, are made *One Person*, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that Multitude in particular. For it is the *Unity* of the Represented, that maketh the Person *One*. And it is the Representer that beareth the Person, and but one Person: and *Unity*, cannot otherwise be understood in Multitude.

[*Every one is Author*] And because the Multitude naturally is not *One*, but *Many*; they cannot be understood for one; but many Authors, of every thing their Representative faith, or doth in their name; Every man giving their common Representer, Authority from himselfe in particular; and owning all the actions the Representer doth, in case they give him Authority without stint: Otherwise, when they limit him in what, and how farre he shall represent them, none of them owneth more, than they gave him commission to Act. [*Who'd have expected Hobbes to theorize the best of possible worlds. In*

*practice, demagogical manipulation, propaganda, secret wheels behind wheels, and plain ignorance and irresponsibility on the part of the electors are the very substance of political representation—JAGL.]*

[*An Actor may be Many men made One by Plurality of Voyces*] And if the Representative consist of many men, the voyce of the greater number, must be considered as the voyce of them all. For if the lesser number pronounce (for example) in the Affirmative, and the greater in the Negative, there will be Negatives more than [83] enough to destroy the Affirmatives; and thereby the excesse of Negatives, standing uncontradicted, are the onely voyce the Representative hath.

[*Representatives, when the number is even, unprofitable*]. And a Representative of even number, especially when the number is not great, whereby the contradictory voyces are oftentimes equall, is therefore oftentimes mute, and incapable of Action. Yet in some cases contradictory voyces equall in number, may determine a question; as in condemning, or absolving, equality of votes, even in that they condemne not, do absolve; but not on the contrary condemne, in that they absolve not. For when a Cause is heard; not to condemne, is to absolve: but on the contray, to say that not absolving, is condemning, is not true. The like it is in a deliberation of executing presently, or deferring till another time; For when the voyces are equall, the not decreeing Execution, is a decree of Dilation.

[*Negative voyce*] Or if the number be odde, as three, or more (men, or assemblies;) whereof every one has by a Negative Voice, authority to take away the effect of all the Affirmative Voices of the rest, this number is no Representative; because by the diversity of Opinions, and Interests of men, it becomes oftentimes, and in cases of the greatest consequence, a mute Person, and unapt, as for many things else, so for the government of a Multitude, especially in time of Warre.

Of Authors there be two sorts. The first simply so called; which I have before defined to be him, that owneth the Action of another simply. The second is he, that owneth an Action, or Covenant of another conditionally; that is to say, he undertaketh to do it, if the other doth it not, at, or before a certain time. And these Authors conditionall, are generally called SURETYES, in Latine *Fidejussores*, and *Sponsores*; and particularly for Debt, *Praedes*; and for Appearance before a Judge, or Magistrate, *Vades*.

*[Hobbes does not contemplate a frequent case of party politics—when all the supposed "voyces" are really only so many counters to be manipulated by the leader of the faction to carry out a hidden programme, and the body of representatives is to decide through a few voices of unequal weight and uncertain solidity, not by a number of voices of the same weight].*

Hobbes's examination of political representation is of course central to his political theory. Political power rests (in Hobbes before Locke or Montesquieu or Rousseau) on a covenant or social contract. Therefore a theory of the contract is essential. The King (in his role as the Leviathan) represents the whole nation, and is therefore an "Artificial Man". Political power in a commonwealth requires this fundamental act of the delegation of power, or representation, the capacity to "personate" others, or to act for them and represent them. No wonder the political significance of this passage has attracted most of the attention of commentators.

But there is a more basic phenomenological phenomenon lying at the basis of this theory of political representation, one which is of a piece with Hobbes's theory of the world as a construction, as something actively constituted by the human mind, not merely passively absorbed or received by it. The very notion of the human subject is mediated by representation, by this active "playing ourselves". Perhaps this is the key insight to be found in Hobbes's dramatistic theory of society and of politics: "that a *Person*, is



the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himselfe, or an other." A simple yet profound insight. [We can play many parts in the social theatre](#). That we play ourselves as a matter of fact may be a common presupposition, but one which often requires clarification. In which capacity are we acting? As a King, or as a private citizen? In our office as one more member of the commonwealth, or with our magistrate's hat? We find here, *in nuce*, a theory of social life as role-playing. A person is not simply a person, even if one is trapped in the body of the actor: a person is a role to be played, and there are rules to the game of personating others, just as there are limits to one's own self-personation—at the very least, the mutual limits which these living theatres set to each other.

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This dramatistic theory of action and of personality (in which roles are available as something to assume, either in acting as one's own person, i.e. as a private individual, or in acting in representation of another person, is then developed into his theory of political representation. There are two passages which provide a major key to the whole book, as is evident from their explanatory allusion to the title. In many books, especially those with an enigmatic title, a crucial passage reveals, clarifies or underscores the meaning of the title. Here is *Leviathan*'s explanation of its title, *Leviathan*, which is also an explanation of a gigantic maneuver of "personation", a mode of dramatistic interaction. Developing the reasoning prepared from the very first words of [The Introduction](#) to the volume, Hobbes explains the making of a Gigantic Artificial Animal, a Leviathan (the one portrayed in the famous frontispice to the book).

From the Introduction:

"Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World) is by the *Art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal. (...) For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall, for whose protectio and defence it was intended; and in which ,the *Sovereignty* is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body (...)." (81).

And from II.17, "Of Common-wealth", another key passage. Note that the "personation" whereby the political power is constituted is a collective action, and that the role of the soul of the commonwealth may be performed by a monarch (the theory usually associated to Hobbes as a theorist of absolute monarchy) or by an "assembly", a body of representatives.

*The Generation of a Common-wealth.* The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of Forraigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their owne industrie, and by the fruites of the Earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly, is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or Assembly of men, to beare their Person; and every one to owne, and acknowledge himselfe to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person, shall Act, or cause to be Acted, in those things which concerne the Common Peace and Safetie; and therein to submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their Judgements, to his Judgement. This is more than Consent, or Concord; it is a reall Unitie of them all, in one and the same Person, made by Covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, *I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner.* This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS.

This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rrather (to speake more reverently) of that *Mortall God*, our peace and defence. For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Common-Wealth, he hath the use of so much Power and Strength (88) conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to forme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad. (*The Definition of a Common-wealth*). And in him consisteth the Essence of the Common-wealth; which (to define it.) is *One Person, of whose acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defence.*

And he that carryeth this Person, is called SOVERAIGNE, and said to have *Sovereigne Power*; and every one besides, his SUBJECT. (227-28)

And both are masks or "persons" that are worn, or dramatistic roles that are assumed, adopted—roles which are constitutive of political identities and political realities, in a social world whose dramatistic nature is thereby enhanced and intensified.

['Lo mismo despiertos, que soñando': Hobbes sobre la virtualidad de lo real](#)

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