Elias in the Footsteps of Hobbes?

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ABSTRACT: *It is not uncommon for links to be drawn between the work of Norbert Elias and that of a slightly earlier German sociologist, Max Weber, to whom Elias owes a great deal. In this paper we go back much further and explore some similarities between, on the one hand, Elias's work on the connection between the development of the state and the development of constraints on individual behaviour, which he refers to as a civilising process, and, on the other hand, the seventeenth century work of the English political thinker Thomas Hobbes on the connection between the development of sovereignty and the development of more disciplined subjects. We also seek to source these similarities in the two thinkers' common debt to the early modern intersection between neo–Epicureanism and neo–Stoicism. None of the similarities we discuss are straightforward or certain – Elias rarely mentions Hobbes in his published work – so we make a point of highlighting differences between them as well as similarities, which is to stress the question mark in our title.*

KEYWORDS: *Elias, Hobbes, civilising process, constraints on individuals, calming of passions*

Introduction

It is not uncommon for links to be drawn between the work of Norbert Elias and that of a slightly earlier German sociologist, Max Weber (see, for example: Breuer 1994; Goudsblom 2004; Kaven 2006; Turner 2004), to whom Elias owes a great deal. In this paper we go back much further and explore some similarities between, on the one hand, Elias's work on the connection between the development of the state and the development of constraints on individual behaviour, which he refers to as a civilising process, and, on the other hand, the seventeenth century work of the English political thinker Thomas Hobbes on the connection between the development of sovereignty and the development of more disciplined subjects. Our aim is not to reveal a secret Hobbesian garden in Elias's house; Elias mentions Hobbes in his published work only twice – once in *The Germans* (Elias 1996: 365) and once in 'On the Sociogenesis of Sociology' (Elias 2009: 61) – and each time very briefly. [1] [#N1] Instead, we seek to offer one more interesting possibility to an audience well versed in Elias's work and well versed in considering possible links between his work and that of other important thinkers; as well as the attempts to make links to Weber's work, attempts have been made to link Elias's work to that of Foucault (for example: Dolan 2010; Huges 2010; Smith 2001; van Krieken 1990a), to Bourdieu (for example: Paulle, van Heerikhuizen, and Embirbayer 2011), and to Freud (for example: Cavaletto 2007; Scheff 2004). To the best of our knowledge, the only other writer to consider a connection between Elias and Hobbes is Pieter Spierenburg (2001: 101), but this turns out to be no more than a passing comment offered in the context of Spierenburg's analysis of the work of another scholar with whom he disagrees.

In our first section we offer a summary of Elias's work on the connection between the development of the state and the development of constraints on individual behaviour before offering a discussion of Hobbes's work on the connection between the development of sovereignty and the development of more disciplined

subjects. In the second section we concentrate on the way each thinker sets out the processes by which individuals are trained to avoid violence towards one another and live a more peaceable existence. In the third section we explore the common debt the two thinkers owe to the early modern revival of certain Epicurean and Stoic currents of thought (Osler 1991). In all three sections, emphasising the question mark in our title, we attempt to capture both the similarities and the differences between Elias and Hobbes. If on some occasions we say less about Elias than about Hobbes, this is only because we assume that the readers of this journal are on the whole more familiar with Elias than with Hobbes.

Elias on the state as the backbone of the civilising process and Hobbes on the sovereign state as the backbone of the training of wills

In the second volume of his monumental *The Civilizing Process* (2000) Elias seeks out the roots of the social processes driving the psychical changes that he regarded as the core of the civilising process – that is, the actual changes in individuals from dangerous passionate creatures to restrained participants in the intricacies of social life. He finds these roots in the increasingly centralised early modern state, defined in terms of its monopolisation of the means of violence:

> The peculiar stability of the apparatus of psychological self–restraint which emerges as a decisive trait built into the habitus of every 'civilised' human being, stands in the closest relationship to the monopolisation of physical force and the growing stability of the central organs of society (Elias 2000: 369).

As Goudsblom (1983) puts it, for Elias 'state formation was a precondition for the spread of more "civilised" conduct'.

Elias's formulation of the state's role in the civilising process has been challenged by a number of Eliasian scholars. Robert van Krieken, for example, argues that Elias was wrong to omit bureaucracy from his account of state formation. For Van Krieken (1989: 209) 'the bureaucratic form or organisation has built into it a specific logic which defines us more clearly than other social forms as distinct and separate individuals with rights, duties, obligations, responsibilities'. Van Krieken (1989: 204) also argues that 'state formation itself can and does encourage the controlled expression of sadism, cruelty and aggression'. Taking a different tack, other scholars have argued that Elias is wrong to make the formation of a strong central authority a condition of more restrained individual behaviour. In his study of 'the Djuka civilisation' in the Surinams, for example, H. U. E. Thoden van Velzen (1984: 88) points out that even though there was no distinct central authority in this culture all adults were 'expected to behave with a high degree of restraint in social relationships. Aggressive or irascible behaviour [was] strongly censured'.

These challenges, while not without merit, do not disturb the furniture of Elias's account of the importance of a strong state to the process through which individuals learn to check their excesses and thus contribute to a wider social peace. We will return to the detail of the process as Elias sees it in the next section, after we have discussed Hobbes's account of the role of the sovereign in disciplining the unbalanced passions of fractious subjects.

In *Leviathan* Hobbes works to overturn the dominance of the scholastic Aristotelian account of human nature, especially as it was developed by Thomas Aquinas. By this account, human nature 'shares the rational

nature of God', inasmuch as humans must use their natural reason to seek the perfection that a perfect God has set for them. According to Aquinas it is through the 'intellection of the natures of things' that 'God imbues … [humans] with the law of the "perfection" or completion of their own nascent essences or "goods"', such that 'human nature is inclined by the law of its perfection to know the truth about God and to live in society' (Hunter 2010: 477).

Hobbes acknowledges humans' natural capacity for 'sociality' – that is, their natural tendency to interact with one another for protection and procreation – 'the inclinations of all men … tend … not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life' (Hobbes 1845: 85) – but he totally disagrees with the scholastics' view that humans interact towards perfection. For Hobbes this view is wrong, because it does not take into account the fact that human passions are very rarely balanced. The vanity and quarrelsomeness produced by unbalanced passions, maintains Hobbes, means that when humans are left alone to seek perfection, instead of living peaceably they form into rival communities around rival accounts of perfection and fight to the death (more on balanced and unbalanced passions shortly). As he puts in a famous passage:

> And because the condition of man … is a condition of war of every one against every one: in which case every one is governed by his own reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemies; it followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a right to every thing; even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, how strong or wise soever he be, of living out the time, which nature ordinarily alloweth men to live. And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of reason, *that every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it*; *and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre* (Hobbes 1845: 117, emphasis in original).

In other words, humans cannot be left to rule themselves, for this will certainly lead to civil war, they need strong rule by a strong ruler – the rule of a sovereign.

As part of his response to the scholastics, Hobbes insists that while human reason is important, it is nowhere near as important as the scholastics say it is. [2] [#N2] For Hobbes, reason at its most productive is a type of 'reckoning' (Hobbes 1845: 30). If carefully developed and allowed to work in conjunction with 'experience' (Hobbes 1845: 35, 664), Hobbes argues that despite humans having very little of it (Hobbes 1845: 36), reason-as-reckoning can lead them to recognise their need for rule by a sovereign, whether individual or assembly, for it is the sovereign who is charged by God to discipline subjects and it is the sovereign whose laws are consistent with God's laws and so must be obeyed (Hobbes 1845: 359, 378–80).

This brings us back to Hobbes's understanding of the passions and the will. In line with his commitment to the revival of Epicurean and Stoic currents of thought, Hobbes thinks of individual humans as bodies which, like celestial bodies, are in the normal course of events always in motion: 'when a thing is in motion, it will be eternally in motion, unless somewhat else stay it' (Hobbes 1845: 3–4). His account of human nature, then, focuses especially on humans' 'voluntary motions … commonly called the passions' (Hobbes 1845: 38). The will is especially important to Hobbes because of its potential for directing motions. He calls each attempt to direct motions an 'endeavour', either towards an 'appetite' (something desired) or away from an 'aversion' (something feared) (Hobbes 1845: 39, n. 13). The passions are balanced by the will when excessive desires are checked by appropriate fears. In this way, the will can lead the passions to actions which promote human life.

But if the passions are not balanced in this manner then the passions will lead to actions which destroy human life.

This is to say that in the unbalanced state, which, as noted above, occurs all too frequently, the passions are the source of humans' capacity for seemingly limitless violence, even up to the point of civil war (Hobbes 1845: 40–8). In this condition, humans 'live, as it were, in the precincts of battle continually' (Hobbes 1845: 165), they 'hold the sword' themselves or 'hire others to fight for them' (Hobbes 1845: 333). Furthermore, in this prevalent condition humans are hot blooded (Hobbes 1845: 314), much more passionate than they are reasonable (Hobbes 1845: 173), incapable of maintaining 'a constant civil amity' with one another (Hobbes 1845: 701), and driven by 'a perpetual and restless desire of power after power' (Hobbes 1845: 85–6).

We have not yet said enough about the crucial role of the will in Hobbes's account of the training of subjects. At its simplest the will for Hobbes is the final deliberation before an action (Hobbes 1845: 48–9), a primal force possessed by animals ('the beasts') as much as it is by humans (Hobbes 1845: 48). Consistent with the tenets of Epicurean cosmology and physics, Hobbes thinks that in being nearly always in motion objects have an inbuilt tendency to avoid collisions with other objects. As such, all animals, including humans, have an instinctual capacity to use their wills to help them survive. This means, for Hobbes, that in each human the will is able to promote what is 'good to himself' (Hobbes 1845: 241).

The sovereign is able to make use of the will's natural inclination toward self–preservation, that is, the will can be trained to balance the passions. Subjects, Hobbes contends, are reined in by the fear of an absolute ruling force with the power of life and death over them (Hobbes 1845: 86–129). Under this arrangement, then, subjects pursue self-preservation in a manner quite different to that they adopt when the passions are unbalanced – by killing anyone they regard as a threat, not just to their survival alone but also to their survival as believers in this or that 'true' path towards perfection. Hobbes is going so far, we suggest, as to say that the system of rule by a sovereign is not only capable of breaking a cycle of killing once it has begun, it is also capable of preventing new cycles from beginning.

As we indicated earlier, while Hobbes understands that unbalanced passions are against the will of God (Hobbes 1845: 352) he does not propose that balancing the passions is done by God himself. Instead, he insists that God charges the sovereign with the task: only the 'monarch, or the sovereign assembly … hath immediate authority from God, to teach and instruct the people' (Hobbes 1845: 228).

Hobbes is not bothered about whether the sovereign is a man, woman, or an assembly. What matters is that the sovereign is a public common power who or which keeps 'private men' from the brink of a 'war … of every man, against every man' by keeping 'them all in awe' (Hobbes 1845: 112–13). In this way, the sovereign becomes sovereign via the covenants of the subjects (Hobbes 1845: 161) and once this is done the individual or assembly immediately becomes a (singular) public 'person' – the 'commonwealth' or '*civitas*' ('the state') (Hobbes 1845: 158). From this point onwards the sovereign is the 'representative of all and every one of the multitude', the 'person' who or which always carries the force of the multitude (Hobbes 1845: 171).

From what we have said so far we think it reasonable to conclude that, regarding the importance of the state, Elias is treading a path very similar to that trod by Hobbes. While Elias of course uses a twentieth–century understanding of the state where Hobbes uses an early modern understanding, using the terms of the 'commonwealth' or *civitas*, in taking the state to be the driving force of the process aimed at maintaining peace by restraining the passions of individuals Elias is, at least in broad outline, a straightforward Hobbesian. But when we turn away from broad outline and towards the detail of each writer's account of the process, differences between them become more apparent.

Elias on the operational details of the civilising process and Hobbes on the operational details of the sovereign's disciplining of subjects

In detailing the historical role of the state Elias argues that the 'special and unique character' it gained from winning a monopoly on the means of violence, with its concomitant monopoly on tax collection (Elias 2000: 379), led to a situation in which 'many of the previously freely competing regions and groups gradually grew together into a more or less unified, better and worse balanced human web of a higher order of magnitude' (Elias 2000: 436). This in turn eventually produced a social and economic environment 'in which all opportunities' came to be 'controlled by a single authority', resulting in a dependence on the victors (Elias 2000: 269).

To be more specific, Elias argues that in Europe in the Middle Ages violent elimination contests associated with the quest to gain a monopoly on the means of violence were plentiful, resulting in the decimation of competitors and the enlargement of ruled territories, both of which helped to prepare the ground for the emergence of the modern state. As the state's rule grew stronger 'not every strong man' could continue to 'afford the pleasure of physical attack', which was increasingly 'reserved to those few legitimised by the central authority ... and to larger numbers only in exceptional times of war or revolution, in the socially legitimated struggle against internal or external enemies' (Elias 2000: 169–170).

The shift to the central authority of the state, Elias is saying, brought with it a shift in individuals' behaviour, away from regular recourse to violence and towards the development of carefully cultivated non–violent means of achieving one's goals. This at first affected only the courtiers close to the centre of monarchical rule – 'the transformation of warriors into courtiers' (Elias 2000: 386–397) – but then slowly spread to those further and further from the elites. To put this another way, while the option of violent hostility towards one's opponents did not disappear it did become a less attractive option – 'every action taken against an opponent also threatens the social existence of its perpetrator; it disturbs the whole mechanism of chains of action of which one is a part' (Elias 2000: 318). Gradually people adjusted their conduct to that of others such that 'mutual consideration' became the norm: 'the web of actions must be organised more and more strictly and accurately, if each individual action is to fulfil its social function. Individuals are compelled to regulate their conduct in an increasingly differentiated, more even and more stable manner' (Elias 2000: 367). What is involved here is the development of a process whereby more and more demands are made on the self by the self. By this process, Elias argues, 'the perception of others becomes richer in nuances, and freer from the instant response of spontaneous emotions' (Mennell 1989: 101, quoting Elias), or, as Dennis Smith (1999: 87) summarises Elias's point, this process involves 'conscious self-monitoring and self-regulation combined with close observation and careful interpretation of ... [one's] behaviour, feelings and intentions'. Stephen Mennell (1989: 96) usefully adds that the process eventually became 'an automatic, blindly functioning apparatus of self–control'.

In sum, the most 'important structural characteristics of more highly developed societies' are those directed towards 'moulding civilised conduct' (Elias 2000: 318), those characteristics, that is, by which people are 'changed in a particular direction' – towards a more or less automatic self-control where one's long–term calculations about the consequences of one's actions overrides one's short-term impulses such that an overall stability of peaceable conduct is attained and maintained (Elias 2000: 470).

Before we turn to the detail Hobbes provides about the operation of the sovereign's disciplining of subjects, we need to say a little more about what we mean by the claim that 'the option of violent hostility towards one's opponents did not totally disappear'. This is our way of pointing out that Elias is not naïve. He is fully aware

that acts of violence and the fear of acts of violence remain central features of human life even where the civilizing process has been most pronounced; his analysis of the rise of Nazi Germany in his later book *The Germans* (Elias 1996) can be taken to be a very clear statement of his awareness of this point. He even talks about the role of fears in the form of 'continuous anxiety and particular prohibitions or restrictions' and about fears of 'loss of prestige and status' in fostering the civilizing process. These types of fears, he says, are 'particularly disposed to internalisation … and become rooted [in people] … through their upbringing, as inner anxieties which bind them to a learned code almost automatically … even independently of any control by others' (Elias 2000: 444). Nonetheless, we conclude that Elias allows a smaller role for fear than does Hobbes.

This is to insist that fear is at the core of Hobbes's account of how the sovereign goes about disciplining the wills of fractious subjects so as to have them balance their passions (which is also his account of how the sovereign *should* go about this disciplining; *Leviathan* is as much a manual for sovereign rule, with many empirically derived illustrations, as it is an empirical description of that rule). Two crucial points need to be reiterated here: first, to Hobbes's way of thinking the passions are balanced by the will when excessive desires are checked by appropriate fears; and second, under sovereign rule subjects are disciplined primarily by their fear of the sovereign as an absolute ruling force with the power of life and death over them, a fear which reflects the fact that the sovereign has absolute power on behalf of God: 'The passion to be reckoned upon is fear; whereof there be two very general objects: one, the power of spirits invisible; the other, the power of those men they shall therein offend. Of these two, though the former be the greater power, yet the fear of the latter is commonly the greater fear' (Hobbes 1845: 129; see also 353).

For Hobbes, then, fear is not only natural – it is useful, even if it is sometimes 'dishonourable' (Hobbes 1845: 79), sometimes excessive (Hobbes 1845: 95), and sometimes ineffective (Hobbes 1845: 285–6). Without fear, Hobbes argues, humans would not interact in the manner that has become so beneficial to them: 'Fear of oppression, disposeth a man to anticipate, or to seek aid by society: for there is no other way by which a man can secure his life and liberty' (Hobbes 1845: 88). On this connection between fear and liberty Hobbes is adamant: 'Fear and liberty are consistent … [G]enerally all actions which men do in commonwealths, for *fear* of the law, are actions which the doers had *liberty* to omit' (Hobbes 1845: 197, emphasis in original).

The fear element is undoubtedly vital to Hobbes (in ways that it is not for Elias), but this does not mean that fear is the one and only component in Hobbes's account of the sovereign's disciplining of wills. Some hints about what else Hobbes has in mind, as David Burchell suggests, can be gleaned from a sentence in the Latin version of *De cive* ('On the Citizen'): 'Ad societatem ergo homo aptus, non natura sed disciplina factus est' (Burchell 1999: 509, quoting Hobbes). Burchell is especially concerned that the contemporary unauthorised English translator rendered *disciplina* as 'education' in translating the sentence as 'Man is made fit for society not by nature, but by education' (Burchell 1999: 509, quoting Hobbes). For Burchell, Hobbes must mean more by *disciplina* than simply education, though formal instruction, tuition and teaching are definitely part of what he means. Burchell later points out that classical Latin used the word *disciplina* 'to denote all those subjects capable of instruction (science, art, morals, politics)', adding that, in 'medieval clerical life', it also 'denoted those techniques and rules which served to create an image of pious comportment' and it 'connoted most of the range of meanings attached to discipline in the modern English sense of the word, and some others besides: military discipline, the discipline of the household, as well as the science of government and statesmanship'. 'In short', Burchell argues, Hobbes more than likely means 'not merely the effects of formal pedagogical instruction as such, but also the much wider range of "disciplines" by which human beings are "made fit" for the various social roles which they inhabit as responsible citizens' (Burchell 1999: 510).

Further hints about what Hobbes has in mind are contained the list-like discussion of what the sovereign is to teach the subjects that he offers in chapter 30 of *Leviathan*, 'Of the Office of the Sovereign Representative'.

The sovereign is to focus, Hobbes says, on '*the safety of the people*', which should be more than 'bare preservation'. It should not be 'applied to individuals' but should be delivered instead 'by a general providence contained in public instruction, both of doctrine, and example; and in the making and executing of good laws, to which individual persons may apply their own cases' (Hobbes 1845: 322–3, emphasis in original). After these and other introductory points Hobbes gets down to six key lessons to be taught:

> [T]he people are to be taught, first, that they ought not be in love with any form of government they see in their neighbour nations, more than with their own … Secondly … that they ought not be led with admiration of the virtue of any of their fellow-subjects … nor of any assembly, except the sovereign assembly, so as to defer to them any obedience … appropriate to the sovereign only … Thirdly … they ought to be informed how great a fault it is, to speak evil of the sovereign representative … Fourthly … it is necessary that some such times be determined, wherein they [the subjects] may assemble together, and, after prayers and praises given to God, the sovereign and the sovereigns, hear those their duties told them, and the positive laws, such as generally concern them all, read and expounded, and be put in mind of the authority that maketh them laws … [Fifthly] … every sovereign ought to cause justice to be taught … Lastly, they are to be taught, that not only the unjust facts, but the designs and intentions to do them … are injustice (Hobbes 1845: 326–30).

This perhaps makes Hobbes's account a little more like Elias's account than a sole focus on the fear component would allow, though we suggest it makes it only a little more like it. Inasmuch as Hobbes's six lessons to be taught to the subjects are all in one sense extensions of the fear these subjects should feel, there is still quite a distance between the two thinkers on exactly how human beings are transformed from the condition in which they are a grave danger to one another into the condition in which they can lead primarily irenic lives. We think it best to put this down, at least in part, to the fact that where Hobbes wrote in the seventeenth century, in the wake of and the midst of some of the worst civil wars in European history, and with an emphasis on how order might be produced quickly, Elias wrote his classic work on the civilising process with the aid of nearly three hundred more years of evidence and with no interest in the directly political task of producing order (working primarily as a scientifically minded sociologist). We leave it to other scholars to more thoroughly explore the discrepancy between Hobbes and Elias on this point, and we move on to their common debt to the early modern revival of certain Epicurean and Stoic ideas.

The revival of Epicurean and Stoic currents of thought as a common source for Hobbes and Elias

There are two aspects to the common debt owed by Hobbes and Elias to the early modern revival of Epicurean and Stoic propositions. One aspect relates to the content of Hobbes's and Elias's arguments. Here the debt is owed to just one theme, in which Epicureanism and Stoicism are combined. The other aspect relates to each of Hobbes's and Elias's commitment to empiricism. Here the debt is owed mostly to the development of a particular method based on Epicurean principles. We will deal with these aspects one at a time.

The ancient schools of Epicureanism and Stoicism, which emerged in late fourth century BC Greece as alternatives to the dominant schools of Aristotle and Plato, shared many features, most notably the idea 'that a good life leads to the state of mental tranquillity' and the associated idea that 'such tranquillity follows from the proper attitude toward the cosmos' (Osler and Panizza 1991: 2–3). But they also differed from one another

in a number of ways, especially inasmuch as the Stoics were more committed to the idea of a 'divine and purposeful' cosmos than were the Epicureans (Osler and Panizza 1991: 3–4). The differences are not unimportant but, as we just indicated, we think that one jointly developed theme is more important than any of the differences. This Epicurean–Stoic theme is an expansion upon the point we offered above, that 'tranquillity follows from the proper attitude toward the cosmos'. This became part of the more complex ethical/political formula that a thorough understanding of the cosmos will produce a thorough understanding of human nature, which will in turn produce a thorough understanding of the best way to calm or balance human passions, which in turn will help attain and maintain social peace.

During its early modern revival – indeed as a driving force of that revival – this Epicurean–Stoic theme was to a certain extent Christianised (we use the qualifier 'to a certain extent' because the Catholic Church, the Church of England, and other reformed churches all remained unconvinced by the theme, often launching accusations of atheism against its advocates). Two important figures in this (partial) Christianising, among others, were Justus Lipsius, a Dutch thinker who wrote mainly in the late sixteenth century, and Pierre Gassendi, a French thinker who wrote mainly in the first half of the seventeenth century (Osler and Panizza 1991: 7–8; see also Joy 1987; Oestreich 1982; Popkin 1968). Eventually the theme became, on the one hand, a central strategy for Hobbes and other early modern thinkers directly involved in bringing to an end the civil wars raging across Europe, such as Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Thomasius (see esp. Hunter 2001; Pufendorf 2003; Saunders 1997; Thomasius 2007) and, on the other, an indirect organising principle for Elias's twentieth-century account of the civilising process.

We have already presented some evidence of Hobbes's reliance on this Epicurean–Stoic theme. Burchell offers still more evidence in suggesting a close link between what Hobbes was trying to do and what Lipsius had done before him. 'For Lipsius', says Burchell, 'both the activity of rule and the activity of being ruled were seen as positive exercises of self-discipline, using techniques which were in principle generalisable to the population as a whole' (Burchell 1999: 513). More than this,

> The ruler, like the general, helped create the objects of his tutelage as reliable and independent moral individuals; and the ruler was no less constrained by the ethical requirements of good tutelage than his subjects were constrained by their need to resist the blandishments of violence and rebellion (Burchell 1999: 513).

Having witnessed first-hand the savage religious war associated with the Dutch revolt against Spain in the middle of the sixteenth century, Lipsius's doubts about the ancient Greek philosophy of Aristotle and Plato were compounded (doubts which, as we have seen, Hobbes developed into a full-scale attack, especially on Aristotelianism). This was the point at which Lipsius sought more practical guidance from the likes of Seneca and Epictetus, on which he based his distinctive secular political ethics for his civil servants, merchants, and military officers alike (Oestreich 1982: 5–9, 14–15, 31).

In his best known book, *De Constantia*, first published in 1584 (Lipsius 2005), Lipsius formulated a triad of categories, *constantia*, *patientia*, and *firmitas* (constancy, patience, and firmness) for use in the development of attributes needed by both those conducting sovereign rule and those being ruled by it. Lipsius offers direct advice on how one might use one's limited reasoning capacity towards the goal of constancy and patience (so as to escape the thrall of one's own emotions). The firmness is a crucial addition, particularly for troubled times, helping to produce the sort of person 'who acts according to reason, is answerable to himself, controls his emotions, and is ready to fight' (Burchell 1999: 512, quoting Oestreich). As David Saunders puts it, this type of person, this 'man of constancy' – a figure we can take as an indirect model for the type of subject Hobbes believes sovereign rule can and should produce – is Lipsius's 'contribution to the Dutch achievement

of producing personnel for military, juridical and administrative offices, men equipped to set aside their religious beliefs in order to perform official functions for the State' (Saunders 1997: 87; see also: van Krieken 1990b; Wickham and Evers 2010).

Goudsblom (2003) offers considerable help in showing how our single Epicurean–Stoic theme serves an indirect organising principle for Elias's twentieth-century account of the civilising process. Goudsblom (2003: 25) argues that Elias developed many of the key arguments of *The Civilizing Process* 'as a continuing discussion with Max Weber', particularly with what he regarded as Weber's overemphasis on religion as a source of shaping personal attributes, an overemphasis which Weber might have inherited, albeit inadvertently, from the Augustinian tradition. In seeking an alternative to the Augustinian way of thinking, Goudsblom (2003: 32–6) continues, Elias was influenced by the first century BC Latin poet Lucretius, who sought to promote certain Epicurean and Stoic (especially Epicurean) propositions. We take Goudsblom to be saying that Lucretius influenced Elias both in terms of what he *does* take into *The Civilizing Process* and, just as importantly, what he *does not* take into it. Probably the main thing he does take into his book is Lucretius's 'coherent account of the development of the world and of humankind that in many ways strikingly anticipated the modern theory of evolution', especially as it is contained in his epic poem *De rerum natura* ('Concerning the Nature of Things'):

> According to Lucretius, people were susceptible to religious beliefs because they were uninformed about the principles underlying the cosmos and life on earth. In their ignorance they attributed all the many events they did not understand to the will of gods before whom they then trembled with obsessive fear. A reasonable survey of the real nature of the universe should dispel that fear; it would help people to appreciate their own limited powers and to reconcile themselves with the fact that, for each and every individual, death is inevitable and finale ... But it can also show that humans have been able to improve the conditions of their lives (Goudsblom 2003: 32).

In other words, Elias is able to borrow from Lucretius the idea that, even with all their limitations humans can engage in a civilising process.

Regarding what he does take into *The Civilizing Process*, Goudsblom (2003: 34) makes clear that, under the influence of Lucretius, Elias is determined to reject at least three aspects of the rival Augustinian tradition. First, Elias rejects the 'persistent tendency to conceive of the civilising process in terms of providence and teleology – as if that process has always been guided by a divine or otherwise transcendental plan'. Secondly, he rejects the idea of acknowledging 'the church or, more broadly, religion as the driving force in the entire process'. And thirdly, he refuses the temptation to read 'all theories of socio–cultural development' as if they necessarily encompass 'the ideas of providence and teleology'.

In the wake of this methodology-flavoured discussion, we turn now to the matter of the debt owed by both Hobbes and Elias to a particularly Epicurean form of empiricism. Hobbes's commitment to a strictly empirical method is made plain in the first three chapters of *Leviathan* (Hobbes 1845: 1–17), where he insists that human knowledge comprises sense impressions of objects external to the humans: 'the thoughts of man' are 'every one a *representation* or *appearance*, of some quality, or other accident of a body without us, which is commonly called an object' (Hobbes 1845: 1, emphasis in original). While Hobbes did craft a method of his own in the first fifty years of his life, roughly up to 1640, during which period he conversed regularly with Francis Bacon, even in rejecting Bacon's inductivist method, ultimately his empiricist method on display in *Leviathan* is in fact a version of the *via media* or 'middle-way' scientific method, which he helped to develop during his exile in Paris between 1640 and 1651 (Aubrey 1975: 154–69; Rowse 1993). In Paris Hobbes became

a member of the 'Mersenne circle', a group of Epicurean thinkers which gathered around Marin Mersenne and Gassendi, who was mentioned earlier and who is for our purposes the more important of these two French figures (Popkin 1968: 132–48; see also: Hankinson 1995; Hookway 1990; Joy 1987).

The *via media* method was formulated as a thorough response to the so-called 'Pyrrhonian crisis' of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The rapid spread of Pyrrhonian scepticism in the wake of the appearance in 1562 of a 'printed edition of a readable Latin translation' of Sextus Empiricus's second-century *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Hankinson 1995: 11) had popularised the proposition that not only can we know nothing, but we cannot even know that we can know nothing, which in turn had produced widespread despair about the possibility of producing 'true' scientific knowledge. The *via media* alternative developed by the Mersenne circle – a middle way between the extreme scepticism of the Pyrrhonists and the dogmatic commitment to the possibility of perfect knowledge – featured the idea that while we cannot know things absolutely, we can know them on a limited basis. It is thus said to be based on a form of *mitigated* scepticism, whereby the scepticism of the Pyrrhonists is mitigated by our natural, albeit greatly limited, capacity as knowers. In other words, this scheme, particularly in the hands of Gassendi, [3] [#N3] proposes that we have a natural capacity to know, a capacity which defeats the most damaging assaults of the Pyrrhonists. By this 'win a bit lose a bit' approach, our knowledge is genuine but also fragile and contested. Popkin captures the significance of the approach in stressing that it can,

> accept the full force of the [Pyrrhonian] sceptical attack on the possibility of human knowledge, in the sense of necessary truths about the nature of reality, and yet allow for the possibility of knowledge in a lesser sense, as convincing or probable truths about appearances. This type of view ... has become what many philosophers today consider the scientific outlook ... The *via media* ... could supply an adequate rationale for the procedures and discoveries of science, without having to furnish an unshakeable foundation for the new edifice of scientific knowledge ... [They thereby achieved] the separation of science from metaphysics. (Popkin 1968: 132, 148)

While Elias obviously did not participate directly in formulating the original form of this type of empiricist method, he is nonetheless a well-versed practitioner of it. For him the 'science of life' must be studied through experience, without resort to transcendental reasoning. He understands the world as a mechanical (historical) process of chance and change, unencumbered by divine intelligence or intervention. He does not presuppose people to possess innate qualities, such as a pre-given sense of morality. Instead he contends that '"the circumstances" which change are ... the relationships between people themselves' and he insists that 'understanding socio-historical developments' involves close attention to historical details, unencumbered by metaphysical prejudices, that is, it 'requires a suspension of the habits of thinking with which we have grown up' (Elias 2000: 402).

Conclusion

In exploring the possibility that Norbert Elias travelled a road quite similar to that travelled some three hundred years earlier by Thomas Hobbes, we have limited our remarks to three areas. First, we have highlighted some similarities (and mentioned a few differences) between, on the one hand, Elias's work on the connection between the development of the state and the development of constraints on individual behaviour, and, on the other, Hobbes's work on the connection between the development of sovereignty and the development of more disciplined subjects. Secondly, we have shown that both thinkers were vitally interested

in the manner in which individuals can be trained to avoid violence towards one another and live a more peaceable existence. Thirdly, we have explored their common debt to the early modern revival of certain Epicurean and Stoic currents, both in regard to the content of their respective arguments and in regard to the commitment they shared to an empiricist method.

We have been careful not to go too far. If Elias was a Hobbesian, he certainly kept quiet about it; there is no evidence suggesting that he ever claimed this status, either in print or in conversation. As such, we have simply pointed to a possibility. We wish to do no more than this. We hope future scholarship will provide more fuel for the very small fire we have attempted to light. It could well be that those interested in the study of the restraining potential of states will come to regard the link between Elias and Hobbes which we have investigated as a workable alliance. We would not be displeased by this outcome, but for now we think it best that the question mark remain in our title.

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Notes

1. We thank Joop Goudsblom for sharing with us his immense knowledge of Elias's *oeuvre*. [#N1-ptr1]
2. Hobbes dedicates an entire chapter of *Leviathan* (Hobbes 1845: chapter XLVI) to an attack on scholasticism, which he takes to be a marriage of Aristotelian metaphysics and Christian dogma. [#N2-ptr1]
3. Popkin describes Gassendi's crucial role in following terms: 'Much more than Mersenne [though strongly influenced by him], Gassendi tried to clarify in detail the epistemological status of his

mechanical picture of the world through a serious, careful, systematic analysis of the nature of knowledge' (Popkin 1968: 143–4). Dedicated to Epicurean materialism, Gassendi examined carefully the Pyrrhonian views he had formerly espoused and 'showed why he was abandoning their total doubt about the possibility of knowledge'. He too, like Mersenne, worked his way through Sextus' [Sextus Empiricus (c.160–210 AD)] key text and used this as the basis to 'defend his own compromise between dogmatism and scepticism' (Popkin 1968: 144). He concentrated much of his examination of Sextus on the question of whether 'suggestive signs' could guide us to knowledge (some things, while non–evident, are conceded even by the Pyrrhonists to be discernible through such signs). Gassendi thought we could develop 'some instrument or criterion' to know these non-evident things (Popkin 1968: 144). In short, Gassendi was able 'to formulate quite fully a scientific outlook devoid of any metaphysical basis, a constructive scepticism that could account for the scientific knowledge that we do, or can possess, without overstepping the limits on human understanding revealed by the Pyrrhonists' (Popkin 1968: 148).

[#N3-ptr1]

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