

Squelching the Double Vision: Thomas Hobbes and the Problem of “Political Theology”

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Against dominant interpretations of Thomas Hobbes that ignore or downplay the place of theology in his work, this essay shows that theology is not only instrumental to his famous argument for the absolute sovereignty of the incipient nation-state, but also central to the fuller account of politics he offers in *Leviathan*. This essay has two movements. The first (chapters 1-2) provides context of two kinds: the scholarly context for this study; and Hobbes's own context, which has insufficiently informed the standard interpretation, but is central to the revised account presented here. Close attention to the complex case Hobbes makes for his civil science and the state governance it advocates—a case that entails several modes of suasion: scientific demonstration, appeals to intuition, theological and scriptural argumentation, all of them seasoned with Hobbes's distinctive rhetorical flourish—yields an aspect of his *Leviathan* seldom appreciated: in it, he articulates a new way for Christians to see the world, to speak intelligibly about it, and to conceive of their own role as agents in it. In so doing, Hobbes aims to transfigure Christendom by 'squelching the double vision' that he thinks undermines sovereign governance.

The second (chapters 3-6) attends to Hobbes's reform project, exploring in particular the redescription of the world he offers. The project thus seeks to offer a 'thick description' of the world Hobbes recommends to his Christian readers. In so doing, it attends to the theoretical groundwork Hobbes thinks necessary for a truly rational and truly reformed Christendom, defined by an Erastian arrangement of church and society, and governed by the nation-state, "Gods Viceregent upon earth" during the time before Christ's return (*Leviathan* III.36).

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
<i>Introduction to Part One. Hobbes and the Problem of “Political Theology.”</i>	1
1. <i>Chapter One. “Political Theology” and Liberal Myth: The Great Separation</i>	15
1.1 Liberalism and Myth.....	18
1.2 The State of Liberalism.....	35
1.3 How to Let God and Let God Be: On Overcoming “Political Theology”	40
1.4 Conclusion	68
2. <i>Chapter Two. The Political Theology of Hobbes’s Leviathan</i>	71
2.1 Evaluating Lilla’s Two Theses	73
2.2 The Structure of <i>Leviathan</i>	84
2.3 Traditional Models of Reading <i>Leviathan</i>	87
2.4 Recent Challenges to Hobbesian Orthodoxy	95
2.5 On the Relationship of the Two Halves of <i>Leviathan</i>	102
2.6 What is <i>Leviathan</i> ?	114
2.7 Hobbes’s Political Theory and its Background.....	119
2.8 The Role of the State in Hobbes’s Political Theory	125
2.9 The Rational Argument for State Sovereignty.....	127
2.10 How to Read (All of) <i>Leviathan</i>	134
2.11 Conclusion	141
<i>Introduction to Part Two. “Squelching the Double Vision.”</i>	145
3. <i>Chapter Three. Desufflating the Christian Imagination: Hobbes’s Materialist Ontology</i>	158
3.1 ‘Thought Experiments’ in <i>Leviathan</i>	161

3.2 Hobbes and the Modern 'World-Picture'	167
3.3 Hobbes's Universe: 'Matter in Motion'.....	169
3.4 Sensory Perception: the Basis of Mind in Matter	182
3.5 The Mechanics of Perception	184
3.6 Sense and Sensibility	192
3.7 Conclusion	197
4. Chapter Four. Clearing the Mist: Hobbes's Subversion of Sola Scriptura	203
4.1 Imagination and Mental Discourse	205
4.2 Hobbes's Rules for Interpreting Scripture	212
4.3 Which Books are Scripture? And How Do We Know?	214
4.4 Desufflating the Christian Scriptures: a Rational Interpretation of 'Spirit' ...	223
4.5 Hobbes and the Rhetoric of 'Sola Scriptura'	230
4.6 Conclusion	236
5. Chapter Five. On the Limitations of the 'Natural Mind'	237
5.1 Cognitive Powers: Discursion and Desire.....	238
5.2 Cognitive Powers: Pre-Linguistic Prudence	247
5.3 Motive Powers: Vital and Animal Motion	249
5.4 On the Mechanics of Desire.....	252
5.5 Deliberation and Will	256
5.6 The Complex of Human Desire	263
5.7 The Limitations of the 'Natural Mind'	272
5.8 Conclusion	275
6. Chapter Six: Mind Over Matter: The Invention of 'Active Thought' and Language	278
6.1 The Significance of Language	280

6.2 The Origins of Language	247
6.3 Varieties of Knowledge.....	296
6.4 The Logic of Language: From Thought to Speech	300
6.5 The Invention of Words	302
6.6 The Invention of Universals	306
6.7 Consequences of Propositions: The Foundation of Ratiocination.....	313
6.8 On Signification.....	315
6.9 The Varieties of Language’s Uses.....	321
6.9 Dangers of Language in General	325
6.10 Conclusion	328
Conclusion. “What is Going On?”: Returning to Niebuhr’s Question.....	331
Works Cited	334
Biography	349

Introduction

Thomas Hobbes and the Problem of “Political Theology”

This essay represents a contribution to a discourse that typically takes the name ‘political theology,’ though it’s only tangentially theological.¹ In its Anglophone form at least, ‘political theology’ typically concerns the relationship of ‘religion’—most often, but not always, in the form of Christianity—to contemporary politics.² The scope of such discourse is thus both deep and wide. But when ‘political theology’ is performed as a mode of specifically Christian theology, as I aim to do in this essay, it inquires more particularly about the mutual significance of politics (the

¹ On the use of the term ‘political theology’ in recent literature, see Hent de Vries, “Before, Around, and Beyond the Theologico-Political,” in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 45-87. Those perplexed by de Vries’s dense essay might consult the more accessible Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2012). For a helpful—though brief—discussion of ways Christian theologians conceive of political theology, see the editorial introduction to *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 1-2.

If Christian theology is, as Paul Griffiths claims, “reasoned discourse about . . . the triune LORD,” its data “paradigmatically but not exclusively, what the LORD has revealed [about the LORD] to the church,” and its “first purpose . . . elucidation: to make clearer (never finally clear) what the LORD has revealed,” then this project is not a straightforward instance of Christian theology. My primary task here is not the properly theological task of explicating Christian doctrine in order “speculatively to further the church’s corporate understanding of that doctrine.” Rather, my task here is at least two steps removed from such speculative reflection on doctrine. For if Christian political theology, as the application of Christian doctrine to questions about the polis, and conversely, the interrogation of Christian doctrine via reflection on political life, is one step removed from theology proper, then this project is even one step further removed: here, my primary aim is to offer critical recommendations about how the task of political theology might go on. Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Thing of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 35, 41.

² This is this case not only of self-identified “political theologians” who write from a Christian theological perspective, but also of non-theologians such as Paul Kahn, who take themselves as engaging in political theology, and non-theologians who engage *with* it, such as Victoria Kahn. On Paul Kahn’s self-understanding of his work as constituting political theology, see Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), especially 120-21, but also 1-30. On Victoria Kahn’s account of political theology and its significance for contemporary politics, see Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), esp. 124-36.

ordering of the common life of the polis, and discourse about such ordering) and Christian theology (discourse primarily about God, but also about the relationship of the world to God). When its topic is modern liberal politics, such discourse will always and ultimately relate to the nation-state and its complex modes of governance.³ In what follows, I offer a limited, particular, and local intervention into one central problem of contemporary Christian political theology, namely: *How properly to understand the emergence of modern liberal politics from the ideas, practices, and institutions of Christendom?*⁴ To do so, I focus narrowly on just one facet of this question, though a signally important one: the supposed founding of modern politics in an event that is sometimes called the ‘Great Separation.’ It gains this focus by attending closely to the work of Thomas Hobbes, who has been identified, variously, as the architect of this ‘Great Separation,’ the founder of liberal politics, and the “first modern theorist of the state.”⁵

³ As Philip Bobbitt, *inter alia*, argues, the nation-state we are familiar with today appears to be slowly evolving into something rather different: in Bobbitt’s terms, a market-state that renders the nation-state increasingly irrelevant as a political entity even as the figure of the nation-state becomes a useful smokescreen for the workings of the incipient market-state. Philip Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent: The Wars of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Knopf, 2008), *passim*. One might conclude that this development makes my attention to the ‘liberal nation-state’ irrelevant, but I would respond with three points. First, even if my account of Hobbes is of relevance only to traditional nation-state arrangements, nonetheless an investigation into the relation of theology to that state-form will be relevant in considering its successor, because an account of one will bear important analogies to the other: the significance of the nation-state for Christian political existence is hardly unrelated to that of the market state. Second, an investigation of Hobbes’s theological defense of the then-incipient nation-state should yield at least *formal* parallels to theological accounts of an equally incipient market-state today. Third, it is doubtful that the market-state is so radically different from the traditional nation-state that a theological analysis of the former is rendered a mere historical curiosity. On the contrary, central to both is the shared assumption that bodies are properly and justifiably to be yielded to the state’s policing and judicial apparatus: police, judges, executioners, torturers, and so forth. For an alternative view to Bobbitt’s, one which considers the same political and economic evidence, but thinks the report of the nation-state’s death greatly exaggerated, see Kenneth Surin, *Freedom Not Yet: Liberation and the New World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), esp. 6-11, 28-44 70-77, 151-55.

⁴ This question has profound implications for a more practical one: *How ought Christians to understand and assess the nation-state and its attendant liberal politics?*

⁵ The claims are made, respectively, by Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the*

Because the ‘Great Separation’ thesis is so central to this essay, it will be helpful to articulate it here, before rehearsing the essay’s argument. This thesis—crystallized by Mark Lilla in *The Stillborn God*, but already latently and widely present before his formulation of it—suggests that, following the epochal events of the Protestant Reformation, the ‘wars of religion,’ and the subsequent Enlightenment, “something happened—or rather, many things happened, and their combined force would eventually bring the reign of political theology to an end in Europe. Not just Christian political theology, but the basic assumptions upon which all political theology had rested.”⁶ Here, an important distinction is in order: Lilla uses “political theology” as a term of art for naming a concept entirely distinct from the mode of intellectual discourse I have just described under the same name.⁷ By “political theology,” he refers to two intertwined phenomena: (i) a habit of connecting “basic questions of politics” to “questions of theology and cosmology”; and (ii) “a discourse about political authority based on a revealed divine nexus.”⁸

Modern West (New York: Knopf, 2007), passim; Leo Strauss, “Some Notes on the Political Science of Hobbes,” in *Hobbes’s Critique of Religion and Related Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 122; Quentin Skinner, “The State,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 126.

⁶ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 57-58.

⁷ Thus, throughout this essay references to Lilla’s term of art are placed in double quotation marks, to distinguish it from the more common referents of the term. Instances of “political theology” in this essay should be understood to refer to Lilla’s twofold concept.

Lilla later acknowledges the idiosyncrasy of this definition in “A Conversation,” in *Political Theology for a Pluralist Age*, ed. by Michael John Kessler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

⁸ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 307, 23. Patrick Deenen helpfully glosses the meaning of this term in Lilla’s book: “political theology is the effort to associate or affiliate political authority with appeal or reference to a comprehensive doctrine of a divine being or beings. It thus represents an intermingling not only of church and state, but also theology and politics in the deepest sense—a condition in which political authority and legitimacy derives its [sic] force and definition from the society’s understanding of the divine.” Patrick J. Deenen, “The Great Combination: Modern Political Thought at the Collapse of the Two Cities,” in *Political Theology for a Pluralist Age*, ed. by Michael John Kessler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 43.

Following the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century upheavals that put an end to medieval Christendom, the thesis continues,

Christianity as a religious faith survived, as did its churches. The Christian tradition of thinking about politics that depended on a particular conception of the [relations among God, humanity, and world] did not. It was replaced by a new approach to politics focused exclusively on human nature and human needs. A Great Separation took place, severing Western political philosophy decisively from cosmology and theology. It remains the most distinctive feature of the modern West to this day.⁹

Thus, the ‘Great Separation’ has implications for both religion and politics: under its conditions, religion—shorn of its political authority—goes on concerned with its distinctive questions, which no longer include matters of politics; and politics is thereby freed to go on with its own concerns, no longer responsible to theological claims.¹⁰ Such an arrangement, which became more sophisticated as liberalism developed—and was stated schematically for the first time in Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)—thus defines the modern West.¹¹

So much for Lilla’s thesis, at least for now. This essay, in addressing the so-called ‘Great Separation’ and the role Hobbes is said to have played in it, moves beyond a narrow concern with a particular debate in ‘political theology.’ Thus, it offers not merely a critical intervention in the ongoing conversation about the theological origins of modern politics, but also a preliminary investigation into a

⁹ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 58.

¹⁰ Though Lilla nowhere defines the term “religion,” he seems to approach it with the attitude of Potter Stewart toward pornography: “I know it when I see it.” Justice Potter Stewart, concurring opinion in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184 (1964). On the problematic modern category of “religion,” especially in conversations about modern politics, see William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), passim. I follow Cavanaugh’s example: “When I use the terms ‘religion,’ ‘religious,’ and ‘secular,’ I recognize that they should often be surrounded by scare quotes. I have nevertheless tried to keep the use of scare quotes to a minimum to avoid cluttering the text” (7).

¹¹ John Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” in *Locke on Toleration*, ed. Richard Vernon, trans. Michael Silverthorne (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3-46.

crucial moment within the history of Western Christianity, namely the long transformation from medieval Christendom to secular modernity that occurred in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. From the perspective of Christian theology, this second aspect of this project is the more important one, for Hobbes's seventeenth-century context is of crucial significance for the subsequent history of Western Christian thought about politics and, relatedly, of ways Christians have thought about political order since Christendom began slowly to disintegrate.¹²

In its simplest form, the argument of this project may be reduced to the following claim: Hobbes does not—as a dominant portrayal of him within contemporary political theology would have it—seek to abolish the discourse of “political theology,” nor even the practices and institutions of Christendom. Rather, he seeks to reform all of these, and the theoretical work he does in *Leviathan* represents an important foundation for his envisioned reform program.

¹² As will become evident in the course of this essay, three features make the seventeenth century crucially important to the evolution of Christendom: the continuing fallout of the Protestant Reformation, the development of the “new science,” and the emergence of the modern state.

The question of Christendom's fate and its contemporary significance is both complicated and vexed. Oliver O'Donovan represents a dominant view amongst Christian theologians in “tak[ing] it as beyond dispute that Christendom has in fact ended,” and has been replaced by “the liberal society” of “late-modernity.” Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 214, 246-47. See especially 193-210, 226-42, 243-52. For a subtle demurral to this view, see Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), esp. 8-9, for the claim that Christendom didn't so much disintegrate as reorganize itself into a more elusive, hidden, and—in his normative assessment—a more insidious phenomenon, precisely because of its hiddenness. A similar point is made by John Howard Yoder, “The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics,” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 135-47. As Yoder suggests, once Christians adopted “Constantinian” assumptions about the meaning of Christian existence, it became difficult to purge these from the Christian imagination. In fact, as shown by the subsequent development of movements that have aimed at overcoming a Constantinian arrangement, such assumptions typically re-emerge in more subtle ways, such that Yoder describes a certain social ethic as “neo-neo-neo-neo-Constantinian.” John Howard Yoder, “Christ, the Hope of the World,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 194-97.

To state the argument more baldly, Hobbes doesn't seek an institutional separation of religion from politics, nor an intellectual disjuncture of theological claims from political ones. Thus, the 'Great Separation' thesis, when applied to Hobbes, is obviously false, as any close and careful reading of *Leviathan* will disclose. What he does in fact attempt in *Leviathan*—a task that Lilla and others mistake for an attack on Christendom itself—is to recommend a novel way for Christians to see the world, one consistent with the 'new science' of Copernicus, and Harvey, and in which the state is central. After demonstrating the plausibility of these two claims, this essay has the modest task of depicting the world Hobbes recommends to his readers, and thus to show that what Lilla mistakes for a 'Great Separation' is in fact something quite different.

The title of this essay, "Squelching the Double Vision," points to this other aspect of Hobbes's project. While central to his civil science is a defense of the absolute sovereignty of the state, he recognizes that some dominant forms of Christian theology pose a profound threat to such sovereignty. In a memorable attack on temporal-spiritual dualism, Hobbes complains that any non-Erastian ecclesiology tends "to make men see double, and mistake their *Lawfull Sovereign*."^{13,14} Such double vision, he suggests, is not simply a problem of competing claimants to

¹³ Thomas Hobbes, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes*, vols. 4 and 5, *Leviathan: the English and Latin Texts*, ed. by Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), III.39.248; 732-34. Further citations appear parenthetically in the main text, and specify two figures: first, Hobbes's original pagination (the part in Latin numerals, then the chapter and page numbers, both in Arabic); a semicolon then divides this from the corresponding page number in Malcolm's edition. For example, a citation of the first chapter's opening line, which appears on page 3 of the original, and page 22 of Malcolm's edition, will be cited as follows: I.1.3; 22. My primary engagement in this essay is with the English edition of 1651, but in cases where the Latin edition of 1666 differs from it, I engage those differences in the footnotes.

¹⁴ See chapter 2 below on Hobbes's relationship to Erastian ecclesiology.

sovereign power, but rather lies more complicatedly in particular claims of Christian theology and metaphysics—claims that he insists are not only disputable, but both can and should be expunged from a properly reformed Christian Commonwealth. Thus, Hobbes’s aim of squelching the double vision is in service of his more basic aim of reforming Christendom, an aim that the double vision fundamentally threatens.

Hobbes’s chief aim in *Leviathan* is not only to demonstrate Christendom’s need for the sovereign state, and thus to expose as illegitimate any competing claims to the sovereignty which, by definition, is to be exercised properly and exclusively by the state. He also aims to articulate a new philosophical foundation for Christian discourse of all kinds. This is, in part, because the competitors to state sovereignty he has chiefly in mind are those who ground their challenge in a purported distinction between “Temporall, and Spirituall Domination” (I.12.58; 180). Such political distinctions, whether made in good faith or not, typically appeal to an underlying pair of metaphysical distinctions: an anthropological distinction between body and soul, and an ontological distinction between matter and spirit. Yet this new philosophical foundation is also necessary because Hobbes recognizes a kind of feedback loop between seeing and speaking. Thus, to reform Christian politics requires reforming habits of speaking and seeing.

This essay has two parts. The first of these (chapters 1-2) provides two kinds of context for my central claim that the ‘Great Separation’ thesis mischaracterizes Hobbes’s work: the scholarly context for this study (in chapters 1 and 2); and Hobbes’s own context (in chapter 2), which I insist has insufficiently informed the standard interpretation, but which is central to the revised account I offer here.

The first chapter traces a pervasive misreading of Hobbes's aim as being not so much to *reform* Christendom as to *transform* it into an incipient form of secular modernity that a contemporary advocate of secular liberalism, such as Richard Rorty or Judith Shklar, would be pleased with. Here, I focus specifically on Mark Lilla's account of Hobbes in *The Stillborn God*, which applies the 'Great Separation' thesis to Hobbes, casting him as the architect of secular modernity and the hero in the revolutionary struggle that led to the emergence of a secular vision of political life from the "political theology" of Christendom that had tyrannized the West for centuries. Lilla claims that Hobbes's solution to the problem of the sectarian strife evidenced in the "wars of religion" is to proffer a new way of thinking of politics, and to insist upon expunging all questions of God's will or nature from the scope of political discourse. On Lilla's reading—just one instance of a common way of telling the story of the transformation of 'the West' from its distinctive shape in medieval Christendom into the secular modern world we inhabit today—Hobbes not only urges his contemporaries to expunge any reference to God from political deliberation, but also demonstrates how to do so by devising and exemplifying a modern, post-theological public discourse.

The problem with Lilla's narrative is threefold: (a) it mischaracterizes Hobbes's views as stated explicitly in his texts, for Hobbes never calls for anything like expunging God from politics, and in fact, in several respects, actually makes claims to God's will central to his political theory; (b) it thus fails to appreciate what is actually interesting about his solution to the problem of post-Reformation discord; and (c) it misses what is significant, from a Christian theological perspective, about his envisioned reform of Christendom. In short, Hobbes seeks to construe salvation

history in order to incorporate the incipient modern nation-state as a key aspect of God's salvific action in the world.

Chapter 2 sketches some scholarly precedents for Lilla's view. Though he never places his own account within any broader stream of scholarship or intellectual tradition,¹⁵ his account of Hobbes is neither novel nor uncontroversial, though it is manifestly wrong. Though Lilla is a writer of popular histories, the view of Hobbes he expounds is commonly rehearsed by writers in the Christian theological disciplines. It also has precedents amongst scholars who—unlike Lilla—have specialized in Hobbes's political theory. This is simply that say that Lilla's misreading of Hobbes is not fashioned from wholecloth, nor is it isolated to the realm of popular-level 'history of ideas.' Lilla just happens to share in a long and venerable tradition of reading Hobbes poorly. Hence, the second chapter will briefly trace the history of scholarly attempts to make sense of *Leviathan*, a brilliant, yet deeply flawed, and therefore puzzling, classic of early modern philosophy. For many years, I will show, the dominant way of reading *Leviathan* has been to study only the first two parts, either simply ignoring parts three and four, or else dismissing them as irrelevant to Hobbes's *real* intentions.¹⁶

This mode of interpretation is typically rooted in either a surface reading of selected texts, or else in a more complex, but equally misleading account of Hobbes as a secret atheist, whose work has an 'ironic' aim of achieving some end opposed to what its surface meaning suggests. In contrast to both, I will suggest a way of

¹⁵ This is no oversight on Lilla's part, for his work on Hobbes is found chiefly in two texts (*The Stillborn God* and "The Politics of God") that belong to the genre of 'popular history,' one convention of which is to eschew scholarly apparatus and methodological positioning.

¹⁶ The caesarean approach just described, which does to *Leviathan* what Jefferson did to the Holy Bible, has lost much of its dominance amongst Hobbes specialists, although it remains for now the dominant way that Hobbes is viewed and taught by non-specialists.

reading it that accounts for the unity of the work and for the unity of Hobbes's project, which seeks to reform the central institutions of Christendom—church, state, and educational institutions—and to order all of these to the sovereign state. Yet this reform isn't a simple 'trickle down' project whereby a sovereign state can solve all the other problems by immediate fiat. Rather, its citizens must learn to see, speak, and act in the right ways.

Thus, if the first movement (chapters 1 and 2) provides the context for my central claim, the second movement (chapters 3-6) substantiates this claim by articulating the theoretical groundwork Hobbes lays for his sweeping reform project. This groundwork consists primarily in a recommendation to Christian readers about how to see the world and their place within it in a way that is at once truly rational and a truly faithful response to God's work in the world. Hobbes's ultimate aim is both to offer a new view of the world, and to shape a nation of Christians who are fit to inhabit the world he sketches.¹⁷

Hobbes wants to show his contemporary Christian readers, positively, that they inhabit a distinct moment of salvation history, one defined by the sovereign state's role as "Gods Viceregent upon earth" during this time before Christ's return, when the state "hath next under God, the Authority of Governing Christian men" (III.36.232; 678).¹⁸ But he also seeks to show, negatively, that a genuinely biblical and rational Christian metaphysics requires rejecting matter-spirit dualism.

¹⁷ My proposal thus stands in contrast to three ways of interpreting *Leviathan*: as attempting to expunge talk of God from the political realm (Lilla), trying by means of irony to undermine his readers' belief in God (Leo Strauss), or aiming to demonstrate rational alternatives to Christianity (David Johnston). See chapter 2 for specific references to these interpretations.

¹⁸ In Latin: "ille homo vel Coetus hominum, qui in Civitate gerit Personam Dei; & . . . Doctrinam quam doceri ille jusserit in Dei nomine" (III.36.203; 679).

Thus, at the heart of this project—in chapters 3-6—is a careful account of Hobbes’s theoretical account of the world his readers inhabit, and which defines their possibilities for seeing, speaking, and acting: a reductively materialist ontology (chapter 3), an account of church and scripture consistent with this reductive materialism (chapter 4) a theory of mind and empiricist epistemology rooted in the same ontology (chapter 5), and an account of the origins and functions of language (chapter 6). Each aspect of this account seeks fundamentally to redescribe the world in terms consistent with both Christianity and the ‘new science.’ On the basis of this redescription, Hobbes sketches a program for reforming Christendom that begins by reforming Christian ways of seeing, speaking, and inhabiting the world.

The payoff of these chapters will be a more nuanced, contextually situated reading of the picture of the world Hobbes sketches for his readers. His ultimate aim is to squelch the ‘double vision,’ and to do so, he finds it necessary to provide an alternative to problematic forms of metaphysics that he thinks have profoundly damaged Christian habits of seeing the world, of thinking and speaking about it, and ultimately of acting therein. Thus, these discussions of optics, psychology, linguistics, and scientific method that frame Hobbes’s political proposals are not—as Lilla would have it—an attempt to put an end to both Christendom and the “political theology” that theoretically and imaginatively grounded it. Rather, Hobbes offers all of this as an imaginative prolegomenon to his concrete project for reforming Christian discourse, for he aims not merely to reform scientific discourse, but—having derived a rational, scientifically informed account of language’s function and purpose—to go on to reform the theological, scriptural, political, and ethical modes of discourse proper to Christendom. These, he hopes, will compete

with and ultimately replace the irrational and outdated accounts that had dominated Christendom, in service of the “Kingdome of Darknesse,” for so long.¹⁹

Thus, attention to the complexities of Hobbes’s argument, the aims of his rhetoric, and the identity of his intended audience, shows that the typical deployment of Hobbes as an instance of the modern rejection of “political theology” is too simplistic. Contra the liberal myth of the ‘Great Separation,’ Hobbes aims not at divorcing theological concerns from those of politics, but to show (a) the task that God has given humanity to develop effective forms of self-governance; and (b) that when Christendom is properly reformed, the church and state will be almost indistinguishable. Thus, this essay concludes that the deployment of Hobbes in conversations about political theology is widely and profoundly misguided, and rooted above all in partial and surface readings of his texts. First, Hobbes’s texts, especially *Leviathan*, are not to be read as monolithic pieces of rational persuasion, but rather as subtly deploying various modes of suasion so as not only to articulate a truly reformed—and thus truly rational—commonwealth, but also to form the kind of readership that could sustain such an envisioned society.

In short, Hobbes’s texts are not to be read as proto-liberal attempts at solving “the problem of religion and politics” by distinguishing and separating the two realities. This is for two reasons: first, because central to Hobbes’s philosophy is the notion of the “Christian Common-wealth,” in which the Christian church and the

¹⁹ The “Kingdome of Darknesse” is the title of *Leviathan’s* fourth part, and refers to the “Confederacy of Deceivers, that to obtain dominion over men in this present world, endeavour by dark, and erroneous Doctrines, to extinguish in them the Light, both of Nature, and of the Gospell; and so to dis-prepare them for the Kingdome of God to come” (IV.4.44.333; 956). Ideally, this “Kingdome” refers to the Church of Rome, but Hobbes sometimes includes Presbyterians, Puritans, and some Anglicans under this heading. The defining mark of the Kingdome is a double error: first misinterpreting scripture by imposing bad philosophy on it, and second, misusing it to subvert the proper civil sovereign.

political community are intrinsically connected; second, because, in addition to the profound connection in Hobbes's thought between civil science and ecclesiology, the argument of *Leviathan* is thoroughly colored by Hobbes's overriding aim to persuade a Christian audience—on Christian terms—to follow his recommendations about society and its governance by the sovereign state.

My approach to Hobbes in this essay differs significantly from more typical engagements with his work, whether within or outside the Christian theological disciplines. In general, Christian theologians have not taken Hobbes to be theologically relevant.²⁰ In part, this is because, like Lilla, they largely follow the lead of his interpreters in political theory and philosophy. But attention to the theological shape of Hobbes's argument, I suggest, not only yields a more nuanced and coherent reading of *Leviathan*, but also shows how useful Hobbes's account is for thinking the relationship between Christianity and the birth of modern politics. Because of Hobbes's unique position at a crucial period of Christian history (which is also to say the history of the modern West), his project should be of profound interest to those concerned about Christianity and politics, the relationship of Christianity to liberalism, the social implications of Protestant ecclesiology, etc. Indeed, nowhere else in history are we presented with an influential modern political theorist who presents his theory in close conjunction with reflections on the significance of Christian doctrine and practice for civil science, and who articulates his views of science alongside explicit concerns for theological method, ecclesiology, salvation

²⁰ I do not intend this remark to discount the work of figures like John Milbank or William Cavanaugh. See 97n57 below.

history, etc.²¹ Thus, study of Hobbes's attempt to squelch the "double vision," which he thinks plagues Christian views of politics, yields insights about the shape of Christian political existence in the modern West.

Given that this essay neither makes explicit claims about the triune God, nor spells out any implications of Christian doctrine for contemporary politics, its status as a project in Christian theology is admittedly ambiguous. However, if, as H. Richard Niebuhr said, the first task of ethical deliberation is to ask *What is going on?*, a key part of that task today is to interrogate ways in which Christian theology has responded to, contributed to, or otherwise been implicated in the developments of 'modern politics.'²² Part of this task, then, is the critical and contextual analysis of particular theological positions advocated throughout history, with attention not only to what is advocated, but also to the manner in which it is advocated, and to the historical, cultural, and ecclesial factors that shape its content. Given Hobbes's important role in the formation of modern conceptions of statehood, and the contested question of the relationship of the modern state to Christianity (which is *the* question of political theology), there are few better places to press Niebuhr's question.

²¹ John Locke, who wrote just a few decades after Hobbes, comes close in this regard. However, the scope, depth, and centrality of Hobbes's theological reflections all set his project apart from Locke's, which—while easier to interpret—does not articulate as comprehensive a program for reforming Christianity as does Hobbes's. On Locke's more modest program for reforming Christianity, see Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19-69, esp. 59-61.

²² H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 60.

Chapter One

“Political Theology” and Liberal Myth: The Great Separation

The actual choice contemporary societies face is not between past and present, or between the West and ‘the rest.’ It is between two grand traditions of thought, two ways of envisaging the human condition. We must be clear about those alternatives, choose between them, and live with the consequences of our choice. That is the human condition.

–Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God*.¹

Ein *Bild* hielt uns gefangen. Und heraus konnten wir nicht, denn es lag in unsrer Sprache, und sie schien es uns nur unerbittlich zu wiederholen.

–Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 115²

This chapter, like the project it sets into motion, is essentially about pictures. As the epigraph from Wittgenstein suggests, these pictures are connected intrinsically to language, or—as the qualification “*our* language” suggests—to various languages. Yet the point is not merely that these pictures are expressed by language. Rather, in Wittgenstein’s terms, they lie within language, and somehow, in being “repeated to us inexorably,” they can, and do “hold us captive,” preventing us from “getting outside” them.

In what follows, I explore this concept of pictures by iterating three distinct, yet intertwined themes, each one a variation on a central idea: A person’s way of seeing the world depends on the language she’s been given to encounter and interpret it. First, I attempt to identify and describe the crucial features of a

¹ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 13.

² “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2001).

particular picture that lies within contemporary North American discourse about the polis. I call this conjunction of picture and language *the liberal myth of the modern nation-state*; it represents my first theme.³ Though any attempt to reduce a complex myth to a single discursive proposition is bound to remain unsatisfying, we might characterize the liberal myth of the state as depicting a world of ineliminable and persistent conflict which—this myth takes as obvious—is most effectively managed by means of the state and its complex apparatus.⁴

Second, to display key elements of this myth, I turn to a recent iteration of an old story, told here by a historian of modern thought, Mark Lilla, about the origin of the “modern West” and the conditions necessary for its perdurance. Lilla’s narrative fortifies the broader liberal myth by offering a subsidiary myth, a “just-so story” of how modernity came to be.⁵ Thus, in articulating a mythological narrative of the “Great Separation” of religion from politics that purportedly gave rise to modernity and continues to sustain it, Lilla also embodies the broader liberal myth, especially in his zealous account of modernity’s essentially agonistic past and present, and his prognostication about its equally agonistic future. This second theme, then, is *the role that mythical history, and especially an origin myth, plays in the broader liberal myth of the*

³ I use the term “myth” here rather than “mythology” because the former, which entered the English language only in the nineteenth century, connotes “a truer (deeper) version of reality than . . . realistic descriptions or scientific explanation,” and is “fundamental to particular periods or cultures.” The latter, which has been part of English four centuries longer than its cognate, connotes “what could not really exist or have happened,” or a “fabulous narration.” Raymond Williams, “Myth,” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 210-12.

⁴ The referent of the term “state” and the character of its apparatus must remain—in this highly formal description—rather vague. It is worth noting, however, that thought I speak here of the “modern nation-state,” the myth more broadly encompasses pre nation-state forms (indeed, the nation-state as such didn’t emerge until the invention of nationhood, which followed the invention of modern statehood by at least a full century) and post-nation state forms (such as what Philip Bobbitt describes as the market-state).

⁵ Interestingly, in a later interview about his ‘Great Separation’ narrative, Lilla criticizes dominant stories about secularization as being “just-so” stories. Lilla, “A Conversation,” 16.

modern nation-state. Remarkably, in disseminating these myths, Lilla never explicitly describes—or even acknowledges—the picture that lies within his own story, a picture that belongs to the liberal myth of the state. Indeed, throughout Lilla’s narrative, we shall see, his picture remains hidden in the background.

Nevertheless Lilla treats in explicit detail another picture and attendant myth that lay in an “older” way of construing the world, one that, he is clear, continues to hold captive another set of language users—those who reject the “Great Separation.” Lilla’s principal point in relating his narrative, which connects the “just-so story” about the modern state to the contemporary world, is precisely to evince for all his readers the dangers of the older picture, to encourage those readers tempted by it to flee such temptation, and to suggest to the rest of “us”—a term of familiarity, along with “we,” that Lilla uses prodigally—that special care must be exercised to prevent these others from endangering us with their outdated, irrational, and perilous picture of the world. Thus, this second theme is marked by a consistent tension between Lilla’s emphasis on ways of seeing, and his own apparent blindness to the particularity of his own way of seeing.

The hero of Lilla’s tale is Thomas Hobbes, whose signal accomplishment was precisely to shatter the older picture, one that Lilla calls rather winsomely, if somewhat confusingly, “political theology.”⁶ Occasioned by Lilla’s use of Hobbes, I then explore—in the bulk of this project—the complex relationship of Thomas Hobbes not only to this “older” picture that Lilla decries but also to the “modern” picture that Lilla curiously avoids ever naming, but which grounds his own account

⁶ This is a term of art for Lilla, and can be perplexing, given the more common use of “political theology” to describe the wider field of academic inquiry to which Lilla’s work contributes. The broader use of “political theology,” as I suggested in the introduction, is already nebulous; Lilla’s addition of this equivocal term to the conversation makes it more so.

of the world. The third and final theme, then, concerns *Hobbes's revision of a picture that lay in medieval Christian language about God, church, and polis*. Although the first two themes will reappear from time to time in later chapters, the third dominates all the movements of this piece.

I have so far deployed two concepts that, while powerful, can be mystifying in their vagueness. The first is the concept of pictures that lie within language and are able to hold language users captive. The second is the concept of myth and mythical narrative. To gain more articulacy about both concepts, and thereby to resist the mystification that already looms here, I begin by connecting Wittgenstein's concept of pictures within language to three related concepts: social imaginary, myth, and political myth. Though closely related, these concepts are not strictly identical. Attention to them together, I suggest, helps us better see the connection between our language, the way we see the world, and our role as agents. To such concepts I now turn before going on to iterate these chapter's three themes.

1.1. Liberalism and Myth

A certain strand of recent Christian social ethics might be described as unhealthily obsessed with liberalism.⁷ Accordingly, some have (perhaps justifiably)

⁷ This is the complaint that Jeffrey Stout raises against Christian ethicists who deploy Alasdair MacIntyre's diagnosis of modernity, most obviously Stanley Hauerwas and those influenced by him. Stout has sought to reorient the attitude of secular theorists of liberal democracy—especially within the U.S.—towards the role of committed religious believers within their relevant polities. He questions the practical value of excluding “religious” voices *as such* from conversations about the common good. Yet at the same time, Stout's sustained critique of what he calls “new traditionalism” castigates such figures as Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Milbank for abandoning the democratic project and for alienating their constituencies from eager participation in democratic politics ranging from local municipalities to the federal level. Such a dismissive posture, Stout thinks, makes the emergence of another voice like Martin Luther King, Jr.'s or Reinhold Niebuhr's unlikely. The future MLK, Stout fears, is encouraged, by reading too much MacIntyre and Hauerwas, to steer clear of “politics” entirely. The practical upshot of all this, Stout thinks, is that, in the absence of a coalition of committed believers and non-believers,

called for a temporary moratorium on such writing.⁸ Yet political theology, at least in a contemporary North American context, cannot avoid saying something about 'liberalism.' The aspiring political theologian faces a problem, though, in that the meaning of this term she must deploy is vague, multivalent, and highly contested. Accordingly, I will aim to speak of liberalism in this project as seldom as possible. But to engage responsibly with the contemporary context, I must address the question of how the term 'liberalism' relates to the three themes I've taken up, all of which concern contemporary assumptions about the relationship of Christianity to modern politics.⁹

the plutocrats are more easily able to take control, rendering democracy less potent, and further widening the disparities between rich and poor, the elites and ordinary citizens. In connection with this practical critique, Stout offers a theoretical critique, accusing Hauerwas of conflating liberal political theory with liberal democracy, and (both unfairly and harmfully) extending critiques of the former to the latter. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), esp. 136-79.

Hauerwas, in turn, argues that Stout's conception of liberal democracy is too idealistic, and that the stance Stout calls for from Christians is at best naïve, and at worst, means to relinquish the prophetic voice that the church is called to use. See, for instance, Stanley Hauerwas, "Postscript: A Response to Jeff Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*," in *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 215-41. As Charles Pinches has argued, this conversation comes to a standstill when each valorizes the object of his own account (for Stout, American democracy; for Hauerwas, the church), and demands of the other "where's the body?" In other words, "prove to me that the social entity of which you speak really exists!" Thus, the Stout/Hauerwas debate, as we might term it, has ended in a quagmire precisely because the indeterminacy of "liberal democracy" and the complex ambivalence of proper Christian political theology towards it hasn't been sufficiently acknowledged by Stout's critics. Charles Pinches, "Book Review: Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*," in *Modern Theology* 26.4 (October 2010): 660-63.

The best account of this debate is found in the review piece by Romand Coles, "Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess: A Review of Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*," in *Modern Theology* 21.2 (April 2005): 301-22. See also William T. Cavanaugh, "A Politics of Vulnerability," in *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 178-79.

⁸ Stout proposes "a truce on the following terms: Stan, your critics will stop calling you a sectarian if you will stop calling them liberals. Let's see how far we can get simply by refraining from using these terms for the next decade." Jason Springs, ed. "Pragmatism and Democracy: Assessing Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78:2 (June 2010): 413-48.

⁹ Here, I concur with William Cavanaugh, who acknowledges Stout's point that "the problem with Hauerwas's talk of 'liberalism' is" its "heavyhanded use . . . as an all-purpose critical instrument," but also adds: "Nevertheless, the term 'liberalism' does allow Hauerwas to identify

Paul Kahn has recently distinguished amongst three primary senses 'liberalism' holds in contemporary discourse about politics.

First, it refers to a family of political theories. These extend across a wide range bounded by libertarianism, on one side, and social-welfare theories on the other. Second, liberalism refers to a partisan political practice. In this sense, we contrast liberals with conservatives. Opponents at this level may find their disagreements actually stem from their support of different liberal philosophies. Even conservative politicians may support a liberal political theory. Third, liberalism refers to a political culture that has neither the sophistication of a theory nor the partisanship of a political party. This is the sense in which we speak of American political culture—or, more generally, of the West—as liberal. Liberalism in this third sense characterizes values and institutions both private and public; this liberalism provides the context within which both liberal theory and liberal partisanship operate.¹⁰

As Kahn acknowledges, these are porous boundaries, given the reciprocal relations among all three levels. "Liberal theory, for example, is an effort to understand an ongoing set of practices within a liberal society, just as partisan political battles can be efforts to realize ideals clarified by, or even derived from, liberal theory. Starting at any one level, an investigation of liberalism is likely to be pulled across the others as well."¹¹ Thus, though my investigation into liberalism will not concern the second sense at all, it will move across both the first and third senses, and in either case will aim to signal how the term is being used.

To take just one instance of the leakage across these levels, consider a recent critique Charles Mathewes offers of "liberal political theory."¹² Mathewes explains

pathologies in American society that link the things Americans most value and defend with the things that threaten to destroy them." Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 178-79.

¹⁰ Paul W. Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 29.

¹¹ Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place*, 29.

¹² Indeed, the first few times Mathewes deploys this term and its cognates "liberal" and "liberalism," he sets them off in quotation marks to signal some kind of distance from them.

that, in its characteristic mode of theorizing about politics, liberalism “aims to establish a consensual adjudicative framework and a set of political structures that fundamentally autonomous individuals will find legitimate, in order to avoid seriously contentious, hence socially straining, public dispute—all of which is in the service of resolving complex socio-political issues in pluralistic societies while securing a stable ‘non-political’ space for individuals to pursue their ‘private’ interests with the minimum of interference by one another” (153). In short, Mathewes demurs, “liberal political theory is, paradoxically, not a theory about politics at all, but a theory about avoiding politics” (156). Liberalism thus represents “a despair of politics, of the possibility of political life itself” (157). Three features of political liberalism, Mathewes suggests, enable it to do so: it propounds an inaccurate picture of the present, it assumes a bad history, and it presents a false political ancestry (154).

First, “on its picture . . . America is split between decent, right-thinking liberal moderates who are content to let others do what they want, so long as they can sip their lattes, flip through *The New York Times*, and zip to the organic market in their SUVs; and psychologically corseted redneck rubes who mutter darkly about black helicopters and UN conspiracies” (154). Second, it falsely portrays the central political dynamic of the early modern era as being “the creation of political tolerance as a reaction to interreligious violence” rather than the more accurate dynamic, which he identifies as the “rise of the centralized and absolutist state as the locus of all legitimate violence and political sovereignty, out of a world of far more various (complementary and conflictual) structures of political authority” (155). Third, this

Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 152-54. Further citations of this book will appear parenthetically in the text.

faulty history allows liberal political theory “to pretend to a deeper ancestry than it can properly affirm. For liberal theory really begins not in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in post-World War II anxieties” about threats to the modern state (156). Drawing on its “picture of rights-bearing individuals as primary, [liberal theory] focuses on how best to leave one another alone, and the most basic human commitments it presumes are non-political commitments . . . while the most basic ‘political’ commitment it presumes in its participants is the commitment to live in proximity to each other” (156-57).

I will be unconcerned in what follows with either Mathewes’s rich and complex proposal for a mode of genuine political engagement that might counteract liberalism’s anti-political tendencies, or the specifically Christian “theology of public life” he sketches to undergird that proposal. Rather, I want to explore the “picture” to which Mathewes alludes here that undergirds not just liberal political theory—as he rightly suggests—but also pretheoretical (yet nonetheless basically liberal) ways of seeing the contemporary world. As Mathewes points out, liberal political theory depends upon a picture of the present that is itself inextricable from a story about the past. As modern liberals, our implicit way of seeing the world and our place in it is determined by the sometimes unarticulated story we’ve received about how this world came to be, and what that story entails about the meaning of our own actions, which now become part of that story. Connecting Mathewes’s insight that political liberalism is grounded in particular pictures to the broader Wittgensteinian point that ways of speaking are grounded in particular pictures, I suggest that even pretheoretical ways of thinking about politics depend similarly upon pictures, and that the picture grounding liberal political theory (Kahn’s first sense of “liberalism”)

may be the same picture that grounds liberal culture (“liberalism” in Kahn’s third sense).

Mathewes is surely right to note that liberal political theory depends on a set of dominant narratives, stories about the world that serve to justify its theoretical framework and corresponding assumptions, and to legitimate the political structures it deems necessary (most obviously the state and its apparatus). But equally dependent on narratives, I suggest, are *pre-theoretical* ways of encountering the world, of understanding one’s place in it, and of organizing one’s experience of it. Indeed, the very same narratives can function in two different ways, at two different levels of discourse, and for two distinct (if sometimes ultimately complementary) ends. To express this abstract and formal claim in a specific and material mode: The story of the early modern era that Mathewes decries as false, but which justifies central assumptions of liberal political theory, functions also to undergird *cultural liberalism*.

Consider an example unrelated to political liberalism, namely the stories of creation in the book of Genesis. At the level of theory, these stories may function both to inform and to justify certain theological claims about *creatio ex nihilo* (Genesis 1) and the creation of humanity in the *imago dei* (Genesis 2). Yet at a pre-theoretical level, these same stories may shape their readers’ imaginations, thus informing the way they see the world, even though this relationship remains at a pre-critical, unthematized level. A reader of Genesis who is uninterested in or incapable of theorizing about what *creatio ex nihilo* implies about divine providence or the grammar of divine involvement with the world, nevertheless may read these stories, and having drunk deeply from them, come to see the world in a profound, yet pre-

theoretical way as coming from God, and accordingly see both herself and everything else around her as implicated in the same story she encounters in Genesis. This distinction between two ways of reading applies not only to different readers of Genesis, but even to different ways the story might affect an individual reader. You might be a theologian, for instance, who thinks with great suppleness at a highly abstract level about the metaphysics of creation depicted in Genesis, and yet in certain moments of disengagement from such abstraction, experience the world and your place in it similarly to the “devotional” reader just described.

This same distinction applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to political liberalism, which—like a biblical account of creation—has both a high theoretical register (the way that John Rawls, for instance, writes about the relation between public reason and overlapping consensus) and a more quotidian, pre-theoretical register (the unarticulated assumptions that the devoted viewer of network news or reader of the *New York Times* brings to her engagement with the latest story). With this distinction in mind, we might consider how the three elements that Mathewes criticizes in liberal political theory also play determinative roles in ordinary, pre-theoretical ways that a viewer of CNN, for instance, is trained to interpret the stories portrayed in the news. And having been trained to see this world presented by the network news as in fact the “real” world, the world she inhabits, the consumer of the news comes to interpret the events of her own daily life according to these narratives. Even if this typically happens at an entirely unconscious level, its effects are no less profound: the white, lower-middle-class man feels *safe* when a gang of heavily-armed, quasi-militarized policemen walks by, yet feels threatened by a pair of unarmed black men casually sauntering along the same block. This pre-theoretical

framework, of which CNN is not the source, but with which it is deeply implicated, may account for this *prima facie* deeply puzzling pair of reactions. For this framework functions formally by encouraging certain habits of perception, thought, and speech. Returning to Wittgenstein's insight, we might say that this framework sustains a way of speaking, and at the heart of the framework is a particular picture, which holds the speakers of this language captive to a certain way of seeing the world.

One way to describe the role these unarticulated frameworks play in our pre-theoretical encounters with the world is in Charles Taylor's language of the "social imaginary." By this term of art, Taylor means "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."¹³ The social imaginary, in short, is "that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."¹⁴ Taylor deliberately avoids speaking of this as a *theory*, because "it is in fact that largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have."¹⁵ The social imaginary of liberal culture (at least in its

¹³ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 23. See also Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 171-76.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25. Distinguishing his account from various forms of idealism, Taylor explains that the "social imaginary" is not a set of ideas, but "what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" (2). Indeed, Taylor points to a deep problem with the assumption that one can extrapolate a set of ideas from its social role. "Because human practices are the kind of thing that makes sense, certain ideas are internal to them; one cannot distinguish the two in order to ask the question Which causes which?" (32). Yet Taylor *does* aim, by introducing this term, to distinguish between "the intellectual schemes people may entertain

manifestation in the U.S.), though not reducible to the ways of seeing displayed and taught by CNN, is what determines these ways of seeing. Not only is the social imaginary *pre-theoretical*; it cannot be adequately captured by theory or “expressed in the form of explicit doctrines” precisely “because of its unlimited and indefinite nature.”¹⁶ Taylor elaborates:

This implicit grasp of social space is unlike a theoretical description of this space . . . The understanding implicit in practice stands to social theory the way that my ability to get around a familiar environment stands to a (literal) map of the area. I am very well able to orient myself without ever having adopted the standpoint of overview which the map offers me. And similarly, for most of human history, and for most of social life, we function through the grasp we have on the common repertory, without benefit of theoretical overview. Humans operated with a social imaginary, well before they ever got into the business of theorizing about themselves.¹⁷

Though no given instance of a social imaginary can be exhaustively or finally defined, just as none of our implicit maps that enable us to negotiate our environs can be exhaustively reproduced by a cartographer, a social imaginary may nonetheless be described, in hopes of explicitly displaying some of its crucial features. Indeed, such careful, attentive description may prove not just helpful, but necessary work if we are to be articulate about our way of life.¹⁸

when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode,” as in political theory, and the way “ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, [which] is often not expressed in theoretical terms, [but] carried in images, stories, legends, etc.” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171-72.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25.

¹⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 173.

¹⁸ I simply assume here, without arguing for the assumption, that greater articulacy about Christian ways of life is a good proper to the theological disciplines. I do not, however, mean by articulacy the attempt “to elaborate articulate explanations” about our actions in order “to control the narrative” of our lives, nor do I mean to subordinate those faithful actions characterized by their “relative dumbness.” See Chris K. Huebner, “The Apocalyptic Body of Christ?: Reflections on Yoder and Apocalyptic Theology by Way of David Foster Wallace,” in *Pro Ecclesia* 23.2 (May 2014): 125-31. Rather, insofar as this project is an instance of what Kathryn Tanner calls “academic theology,” its aim is to reflect in clear and articulate discourse on matters that bear on the Christian life. See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), 69-92.

Taylor's specific concern is with "a new conception of the moral order of society" that he thinks has become "central to Western modernity."¹⁹ This modern conception of moral order, Taylor explains, "was at first just an idea in the minds of some influential thinkers, but it later came to shape the social imaginary of large strata, and then eventually whole societies. It has now become so self-evident to us that we have trouble seeing it as one possible conception among others."²⁰ I am not concerned here with Taylor's detailed account of what he calls "Western modernity,"²¹ though if Taylor is right, it is intimately though complexly linked to the "cultural liberalism" that is my concern. Rather, I simply want to appeal to Taylor's insight that a social imaginary is rendered invisible to its inhabitants precisely by its apparent self-evidence to those who inhabit it. A social imaginary is like a set of contact lenses, in that the better they function, the less their "wearers" will be aware of them. For a social imaginary determines how people, in a pretheoretical and unthematized manner, envision their relations to others, to social practices, and to the institutions that ground these practices. In short, a social imaginary fundamentally shapes the way people see themselves and their place in the world. Yet, like our tendency not to notice a well-functioning pair of contact

¹⁹ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2.

²⁰ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2.

²¹ Western modernity, Taylor argues, "is inseparable from a certain kind of social imaginary." One of his most insightful conclusions is that "the differences among today's multiple modernities need to be understood in terms of the divergent social imaginaries involved." Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 1-2. Indeed, Taylor's insight suggests that the reason scholars have such widespread and persistent difficulty in defining "modernity" and "post-modernity" may have primarily to do with how difficult it is to examine an imaginary that one inhabits. The same insight applies, *mutatis mutandis* to our attempts, as inhabitants of a liberal social imaginary, to define "liberalism."

lenses, or our inability to see our own eyes without a mirror, a social imaginary becomes so self-evident that those who see through it remain blind to it.²²

In keeping with the modesty that Taylor's insights recommend, I will forgo here the attempt to isolate, define, and then critique a particular social imaginary we might call "liberalism." Instead, in what follows, I aim to display a few striking elements of a particular form of liberalism by looking closely at Mark Lilla's narrative of the "Great Separation," a narrative, I contend, that exemplifies a predominant form of the contemporary North American social imaginary. But it will first be worth considering another concept related to the social imaginary: myth

Although Taylor himself says little about the possible relations between social imaginary and myth, it seems almost obvious to pursue a connection between the two concepts. Gérard Bouchard offers one way of envisioning the relation between them. Bouchard uses the term *l'imaginaire collectif* ("collective imaginary) to refer to "a set of myths that constitute the symbolic foundation of a society."²³ He thus hints at the subsidiary relation of a social imaginary to its constitutive myths: a collective or social imaginary, we might say, comprises whatever myths sustain a society both synchronically (across its existence at any particular moment, i.e., what

²² Cf. Martin Heidegger's contrast between tools that are discrete artifacts such as a pen, and tools that are too close to see, such as the eye "The pen is an independent entity, something ready to hand for several different people. By contrast, the eye, the organ, is, for those who need and use it, never present in this way. Rather every living being can in each case see only with its eyes. These eyes...are not independently present at hand like an item of use, a piece of equipment, but are incorporated into that entity which makes use of them." From Heidegger's 1929-30 lectures at the University of Freiburg, quoted in William McNeill, *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 7.

²³ Gérard Bouchard, *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents* (London: Routledge, 2013), 33n5. He treats this concept at length in "Sur la structure et l'évolution des imaginaires collectifs: quelques propositions," in *Interfaces Brasil/Canada, Belo Horizonte* 1.3 (2003): 9-27. See also (in English) Gérard Bouchard, *Making of the Nations and Cultures of the New World: An Essay in Comparative History*, trans. by Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 3-24.

allows people in Chicago and in Dallas to share the same liberal imaginary) diachronically (through its historical existence across time, i.e., what enables the liberal social imaginary we inhabit today to be somehow the same as what Rawls theorized four decades ago).

Attention to myth helps uncover some other features that distinguish a social imaginary from a formal theory. Alasdair MacIntyre begins an early analysis of myth with some remarks that anticipate what Taylor will later articulate. In a treatment of Marxist thought, MacIntyre identifies Marxism (like Christianity in this respect) as not simply a speculative theory (like the string theory of space-time, or the wave-particle duality theory of light), but as *myth*.²⁴ He explains: “Marxism is not simply an economic doctrine: it is a doctrine about the universe, and such doctrines are held with religious rather than with scientific attitudes . . . [I]t is a feature of religious thinking that it should inevitably make cosmological claims of some sort.”²⁵ On MacIntyre’s account, two basic differences distinguish myth from speculative theory. First, “myth pictures the world as a whole. But to picture the world as a whole from the limited viewpoint of the myth maker who is himself part of the world means a stretching of ordinary language, so that extended metaphor is essential to the insight of myth.” Second, in contrast to “scientific thinking,” which “must eliminate the emotive elements, must distinguish sharply between the emotive and the cognitive,” mythical language has “both descriptive and evaluative” functions. “For while myth and science both select certain facts as significant: they differ in their criterion of significance.”²⁶ Because myth is

²⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 13-14.

²⁵ MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation*, 101.

²⁶ MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation*, 13-14

comprehensive and thus straddles both descriptive and normative registers, any given myth will typically affect those who imbibe it at both the cognitive and emotive levels.

To MacIntyre's twofold claim about myth, we might add a third element: as a "comprehensive metaphysical position," myth shapes an agent's assessment of proper action, and thus is both theoretically and practically important.²⁷ Thus, although myth is typically articulated as a narrative, and thus is essentially *discursive*, it is inseparable from a mode of perceiving or "seeing" the world; it is equally inseparable from a sense of what counts as right action within the world that myth construes for the agent. In short, myth offers a comprehensive way of seeing the world, speaking about it, and conceiving of the meaning of one's agency with it.

Myth's narrational aspect brings our attention to a feature of myth that MacIntyre doesn't address, but which is perhaps its most definitive feature: its essential connection to stories.²⁸ Again, a contrast with speculative theory is instructive here. While speculative theory operates at a high level of abstraction—dealing explicitly with concepts—myth operates at the level of narrative—treating the concepts only indirectly, as they emerge from myth's proper concern with the events and characters that belong to its stories.²⁹

²⁷ I take the term "comprehensive metaphysical position" from David Trener, *Alasdair MacIntyre, George Lindbeck, and the Nature of Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 18-19. Trener helpfully compares MacIntyre's image of myth as world-encompassing with Lindbeck's notion of "religion as an interpretive medium capable of absorbing the universe" (18n64; citing George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 117).

²⁸ Cf. *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions 1a, "a traditional story," and 1b, "such stories collectively." See "Myth, n." in OED Online. Oxford University Press, September 2015.

²⁹ This is not to suggest that MacIntyre is unaware of the importance of story or character to myth. On the contrary, consider his perceptive description of the exemplary characters of liberal modernity: the aesthete, the therapist, and the manager. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A*

Thus, in connecting the concept of social imaginary to that of myth, the hinge must be the stories myth trades in. Without pretending to great precision, we might describe myth as the set of stories that instantiates the social imaginary. But what distinguishes some stories from others, such that *these* count as myth but not others? Unfortunately, “myth” proves to be just as difficult to define as “liberalism.”³⁰ However, a few definitive features seem clear. Given that story is myth’s proper vehicle, myth is essentially discursive, a matter of words. Furthermore, as MacIntyre suggests, myth has an explanatory power among those for whom it functions as myth. Hence, “[t]o be the expression of *myth* the telling of any given narrative in any particular instance needs to be perceived as being adequately faithful to the most important facts *and* the correct interpretation of a story which a social group already accepts or subsequently comes to accept as true.”³¹ Proper to myth are stories that provide conditions for the right interpretation of the world and its history.

In his influential but controversial work on myth, Mircea Eliade has emphasized the way that myths function as “exemplary history” for those who see

Study in Moral Theory, 2nd edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 23-35, 73-78.

³⁰ Bruce Lincoln introduces a monograph on myth with a disclaimer: “It would be nice to begin with a clear and concise definition of ‘myth,’ but unfortunately that can’t be done. Indeed, it would be nice to begin with *any* definition, but to do so would not only be misleading, it would undercut and destroy the very project I intend to pursue.” Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), ix. In a treatment of political myth, Christopher Flood begins by explaining: “Given the apparent importance attached to myth in contemporary societies, it might be expected that the phenomenon would have attracted widespread attention as an object of theoretical definition and discussion. However, the best that can be said is that the field is in a process of slow crystallization.” Scholarly literature on myth, Flood judges, “in practice . . . has tended to mean impoverishment through fragmentation, lack of debate, and failure to challenge inadequate arguments.” Christopher Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

³¹ Flood, *Political Myth*, 43.

the world according to a given myth.³² Yet Eliade's work follows faultlines similar to those in Mark Lilla's story: he loosely assumes two kinds of human cultures in history: an older, more primitive type defines itself in mythical terms, while moderns typically attempt to do without myth, thus remaining blithely unconcerned with such primitive notions as the sacred, or the gods, or the world's creation. Eliade thus suggests that one feature of the modern world is its lack of any myth that might serve as "simultaneously a 'model of' and a 'model for' reality" among those who believe.³³ However, given the intrinsic connection between social imaginary and myth I have shown, the modern liberal imagination is surely far more mythical than Eliade allows.

Christopher Flood has pointed out the mythic character of modern political ideologies, introducing the term "political myth" to capture this notion:

Modern political myths are narratives of past, present, or predicted political events which their tellers seek to make intelligible and meaningful to their audiences. They relate stories which can often be grouped in broadly similar categories to those which have been applied to the myths of traditional societies—such as stories of origins and foundings, stories of the exploits of culture heroes, stories of rebirth or renewal, and eschatological stories. In general, political myths do not have sacred status in secular societies, but they need to be accepted as fundamentally true by an identifiable group, whatever its size and constituency.³⁴

³² Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), 19. Cf. his statement in the same book: "The foremost function of myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities" (8).

³³ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24-25, referring to Clifford Geertz's "Religion as a Cultural System," in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 107-08.

³⁴ Flood, *Political Myth*, 41.

Thus, Flood suggests, Eliade allows the secular/sacred distinction to overdetermine his account of myth, thereby capitulating to the modern liberal presumption to have overcome myth, to have outgrown myth's utility. Flood continues:

Modern political myths, especially those established over long periods of time, will be expressed in many variants, given that no one narration of a story is likely to be absolutely identical to another. When we allude to the existence of a particular myth, we are referring to what is *more or less* constant in a number of instances of narrative discourse. In other words, a political myth can be said to exist when accounts of a more or less common sequence of events, involving more or less the same overall interpretation and implied meaning, circulate within a social group.³⁵

What Flood says here about political myth bears obvious formal similarities to Taylor's observations about the social imaginary. To suggest that various narrations that aim to interpret a single event or set of events all represent versions of the same basic myth is to suggest that myths have porous boundaries. Flood's point here may be extended beyond political myth.

Consider, for instance, Christian mythology surrounding the meaning of Christ's atonement, that is, the claim that in the incarnation of the divine Word, the breach between the world and God introduced by human sin was somehow repaired, and the relationship between God and creation thus rectified. Surrounding this one event (or more properly, this one set of events), many and various interpretations have emerged. On some tellings of the myth, there is a particular moment in which the atonement is effected. In others, atonement occurs through a holistic process of God's living a human life. On some views, the goods proper to the atonement are achieved at once, and on others, this happens in a more gradual process. On some views, these goods are applied to all of creation, and on others, to

³⁵ Flood, *Political Myth*, 41-42.

humanity alone, or to some subset of humanity. Despite these differences, many of them undoubtedly important, we may nonetheless, and without doing violence to the myth, describe them all as variations on the same myth, namely that God—in the form of the Word—became human in Jesus Christ, and in doing so, solved the problem of human sin in some ultimate way.

To cite Flood once more, any given exemplification of some myth serves the “ideology” corresponding to that myth insofar as its “narrative discourse carries the imprint of the assumptions, values, and goals associated with a specific ideology or identifiable family of ideologies, and that it therefore conveys an explicit or implicit invitation to assent to a particular ideological standpoint.”³⁶ In other words, the discursive narrative carries within it a controlling picture. Myth, in short, is one form—perhaps the principal form—of habituating an agent into a particular form of life, or ‘world.’³⁷ It does so by construing a world that the agent can see, by teaching her a language that fits that world, and offering her a complex practical sense of how rightly to inhabit that world.

³⁶ Flood’s use of the term “ideology” here can be misleading, given the double sense of the term since Marx and Engels to mean either “false consciousness” or “the set of ideas which arise . . . from a definite class or group.” Flood clearly means it in this second sense. See Raymond Williams, “Ideology,” in *Keywords*, 153-57.

³⁷ Here I intend to use “world” in the sense of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s remark that “die Grenzen der Sprache (der Sprache die allein ich verstehe) die Grenzen meiner Welt bedeuten.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung: kritische Edition*, B. McGuinness and J. Schulte, eds. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), § 5.62. In the Pears-McGuinness translation: “the limits of the language (*the language I understand*) mean the limits of *my* world.” Ogden renders the ambiguous German slightly differently: “the limits of the language (*the language which I understand*) mean the limits of my world.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), § 5.62. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

1.2. The State of Liberalism

Whether we think of the relevant framework in terms of social imaginary or of myth, one important way such a framework is constituted, reinforced, and taught to others is through narrative. These narratives effectively convey concepts through the telling of mythical history. Consider, for instance, the role within the contemporary U.S. social imaginary of the sacred stories we tell about the “civil rights movement” of the mid-twentieth century. Though the liberal social imaginary is self-consciously secular, in the sense that it holds as a central good neutrality with respect to religion in the public sphere, these stories nonetheless bear a sacred status: we take them as holding significant import for the meaning of our lives; it would be unthinkable for many of us to speak disrespectfully of these events or of their heroes (Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., et al.).

As this observation about contemporary liberalism suggests, the role of myth in liberalism has evolved since its emergence in early-modern Europe. As Margaret Canovan explains, “the mythical element in liberalism lies in a set of assumptions about nature: about the nature of mankind and the nature of society. Originally . . . these claims took mythical form in the shape of descriptions of an original state of nature.” In the first centuries of liberalism, these myths focused on an imagined state of nature, which emphasized the dangers of life outside the bounds on the state. But once liberalism—that is, cultural liberalism (Kahn’s third sense), in a process connected to liberal political theory (his first sense)—took root, the role of myth in constituting liberal modernity began to change fundamentally. Now, rather than emphasizing a state of nature, a notion that no longer seems credible in the contemporary imagination, the myth of liberalism tells a purportedly historical tale

about how liberalism itself came to be, emerging from the dark ages of medieval and early modern Europe, a time before “we” (and here the first-person plural pronoun is used to reinforce the democratic ethos of the myth, which suggests that, unlike the benighted subjects of premodern political regimes, subjects of the modern liberal state play a determinative role in their own governance) learned to separate religion from politics and then devised a secular, liberal state.

The liberal myth of the nation-state, as might be expected given the features of myth in general I’ve sketched so far, is complex, multi-layered, and susceptible to different articulations. Just as with Christian myths of the atonement, the liberal myth is told in various ways; and like particular construals of the atonement, insofar as each one emphasizes a different aspect of the myth, it may stand in tension with, or even contradict, the others on key points. Finally, just as the Christian view of the atonement may be expressed at an abstract theoretical level that articulates propositionally what the relevant events of Christ’s life achieved for the world, so the liberal myth may also be articulated in abstract theoretical form (Kahn’s first meaning of “liberalism,” and the version that Mathewes criticizes). The myth may be explicitly described by liberal political theorists, but it also implicitly guides the way denizens of cultural liberalism describe themselves and their relationships to others and to the world. Thus, the two forms of liberalism I’ve described so far—its abstract mode of political theory, and its mythological mode of “pictur[ing] the world as a whole”³⁸—are intimately related.

³⁸ MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation*, 13.

The liberal myth of the modern nation-state³⁹ is centered on a problem and its solution. The elements of this myth are various, but like an ellipse, all center on two foci: one portrays the dangers that make the state necessary; the other portrays the state's mode of averting these dangers and providing a security otherwise unavailable to human communities. Thus, optimism about the nation-state's ability to bring peace is conjoined with an assumption that politics is distinct from religion, and that political exigency trumps religion's impulse to exercise political authority. Liberal politics in particular identifies the state as salvific, insofar as it saves us from the worst harm we're capable of doing to one another. It domesticates our most dangerous tendencies.

Conjoined with this portrayal of liberalism's solution to a basic human problem is a critique of "religious" attempts to address the same problem. What these other attempts in fact do, the liberal narrative suggests, is to worsen the problem. Indeed, this myth portrays liberalism as standing in self-conscious contrast to these irrational, particularist ways of solving the problem of violent human competition. Thus, liberalism is not just about the need for a state, it's also about the "problem of religion and politics." It points to the dangers of unbridled public religion, the imminent threat of violence wherever religion becomes mixed with

³⁹ The term *modern liberal nation-state* is problematic. As one scholar remarks: "There is a great failure and mental morass concerning theory and political practice of nation and nationalism... The reason is a long-standing and widely shared quest for adequate definition of what does not exist, in reality, as a collective body. Nation is a powerful metaphor which two forms of social groupings—polity (state) and ethnic entity (the people)—are fighting to have as their exclusive property. In its latest manifestation, it [serves as] an argument for geopolitical engineering and for questioning the legitimacy of weaker collective actors on the part of the winners. There is no sense in defining states and ethnic groups by the category of a nation. The latter is a ghost word, escalated to a level of meta-category through historic accident and inertia of intellectual prescription." Valery A. Tishkov, "Forget the 'Nation': Post-Nationalist Understanding of Nationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23.4 (July 2000), 625. Nonetheless, I use it here not with reference to a really existing entity, but rather to a concept central to certain modern political myths since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

politics, the importance of a proper distinction and careful partition between public and private affairs, and of the utility of the nation-state to maintain peace and social order through the proper maintenance of this divide between religion and politics.

On this view, a particular aspect of human social life—namely the claims that some make to religious authority—threatens to undermine a more basic aspect—namely the order that undergirds political community. An effective—and therefore healthy—political order will not only free itself from the tyranny of religious claims, but will restrain religion, insofar as religion poses a threat to the goals of that political order. The solution to the problem of religion, then, is the effective enforcement of political sovereignty by the legitimate political authority over all politically relevant phenomena that lie within the scope of the regime. This is why it is in the best interest of any subject of a state to cooperate with the projects of the state. To lend one's loyalty to any political project that undermines—or is perceived to undermine—the proper and legitimate political sovereign is to place oneself outside the proper bounds of the political community, to become criminal, or an enemy of the state. Given this axiom, any religion that makes politically authoritative claims on its adherents is thereby illegitimate. And given religion's profound sway over humanity throughout history, it poses a particular threat to a legitimate and effective politics whenever it makes pretensions to political authority.

A corollary to this myth is what Cavanaugh has famously deemed the “myth of religious violence.” This is a “just-so” story about the nature of religion, and in particular about the dangers of politicized religion. In Cavanaugh's words:

The idea that religion has a tendency to promote violence is part of the conventional wisdom of Western societies, and it underlies many of our institutions and policies, from limits on the public role of churches to efforts to promote liberal democracy in the Middle East. What I call

the “myth of religious violence” is the idea that religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from “secular” features such as politics and economics, which has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence. Religion must therefore be tamed by restricting its access to public power. The secular nation-state then appears as natural, corresponding to a universal and timeless truth about the inherent dangers of religion.⁴⁰

The narrative aspect of the myth describes what it takes to be the early-modern recognition—through the hard lessons of the “wars of religion”—that centuries-old links between church and state, religion and politics, the spiritual and the temporal, would have to be severed. In so doing, this myth also works subtly towards the ‘naturalizing’ of the state.⁴¹ But the foundational myth of the modern liberal nation-state goes beyond merely solving the problem of religious violence. At its heart is the assumption that the subordination of all political loyalties to that of the state, all sorts of ills can be overcome, not only religious violence, but—once religion has been tamed—the state is free to suppress violence of all kinds, and to effect the end of poverty, oppression, and ignorance.

This myth is diffuse in contemporary North American intellectual life and has been described, in its many permutations, by scholars both sympathetic and hostile to it.⁴² The myth is also irreducibly complex, but one of its key and exemplary features is the tale it tells about the origins of the modern West, and about what distinguishes the West from the rest. A typical feature of narratives of the

⁴⁰ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 3.

⁴¹ To *naturalize* something is to claim “that this is just the way things are and once you look at experience without preconceptions, this is what appears. ‘Natural’ is opposed here to something like ‘socially constructed.’” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 560.

⁴² For those sympathetic to the myth, see, inter alia: Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), passim; John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. xxi-xxx, 148-49. For those more skeptical of it: Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, passim; Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 1-68, 115-40; Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 184-189, 365-86.

contemporary “liberal” social imaginary is to draw a connection between a particular concept—the “problem of religion and politics”—and a historical process that illustrates that concept—the birth of liberalism from the womb of a premodern and irrational world marked by widespread confusion of religion with politics, and plagued by irresolvable conflict and unrelenting violence that was rooted in that confusion.⁴³ Such a tale lies at the heart of Mark Lilla’s recent book *The Stillborn God*.⁴⁴ Lilla’s recent articulation of the myth is worth closer attention because his account, if not quite influential, is deeply representative of a dominant way of thinking about politics in North America. The myth of the “Great Separation” that Lilla outlines in *The Stillborn God* achieves all of this by describing a world that should be familiar to readers who inhabit the “modern liberal” social imaginary. This tale, Lilla thinks, is too often ignored. Such ignorance, he insists, threatens to undermine the modern world itself. Thus, his task in articulating this myth is crucial to preserving the liberal way of life itself. This is the mythical history that serves to justify the broader myth.

1.3. How to Let Go and Let God Be: On Overcoming “Political Theology”

At the [heart] of Lilla’s project is a broad claim about human beings: “We have trouble letting God be,” he soberly laments.⁴⁵ But it seems “we” are also largely self-deceived about our perverse condition. He explains:

⁴³ For two other exemplifications of this myth, see Beiner, *Civil Religion*, passim; Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, esp. xxi-xxx.

⁴⁴ See also the related essay, Mark Lilla, “The Politics of God,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 19, 2007, 28-35, 50, 54, 55.

⁴⁵ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 296, 302. Further citations of this book appear parenthetically in the text.

For over two centuries, from the American and French revolutions to the collapse of Soviet Communism, political life in the West revolved around *eminently political questions*. We argued about war and revolution, class and social justice, race and national identity. Today...we are again fighting the battles of the sixteenth century—over revelation and reason, dogmatic purity and toleration, inspiration and consent, divine duty and common decency. We are disturbed and confused. We find it incomprehensible that theological ideas still inflame the minds of men, stirring up messianic passions that leave societies in ruin. We assumed that this was no longer possible, that human beings had learned to separate religious questions from political ones, that fanaticism was dead. We were wrong. (3; emphasis mine)

Here, Lilla suggests that political debate in the nineteenth- and twentieth- century West was, for the most part, fittingly ordered according to a distinction between properly political questions and those that ought to be excluded from politics. In other words, for two hundred years, the liberal distinction between “religious” matters and those of “polities and government” (to use John Locke’s language), or between questions of justice and questions of goodness (to use that of John Rawls), seemed to have taken root.⁴⁶ Yet for some reason—and for Lilla, this is the perverse persistence of human beings in polluting politics with “theological ideas”—the line has been blurred and the spheres confused. But this is not a matter of mere theoretical interest: Lilla’s dramatic prose underscores an earnest plea to his readers to pay closer attention to their own intellectual habits and to those of their neighbors.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ John Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” 6-12, 22-43. John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” in Rawls, *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Lilla’s rhetoric is worth closer attention. Especially distracting is Lilla’s ubiquitous “we,” which is difficult not to find imperious. Granted, the aim of his rhetoric is probably to invite the reader, from the very beginning, to share the vision he lays out in his project. Though this first-person plural voice portrays itself as markedly egalitarian, it clearly takes itself to be representative of a ruling class. To those not ensconced in such a ruling class, this “we” may seem imperialistic and arrogant.

Because his readers are so thoroughly entrenched within a particular social imaginary, and so committed to the institutions of a liberal social order in which political matters are decided without any reference to “religious” principles, such an arrangement may seem to them the only tenable option.⁴⁸ But to assume that this state of affairs is natural, Lilla insists, is naïve, parochial, myopic, and ultimately dangerous. For despite the overwhelming success of liberalism in “the modern West,”⁴⁹ liberal political orders continue to be confronted—both internally and externally—by troglodytes wielding non-liberal political assumptions. Most egregious—and most shocking to those comfortably ensconced within a liberal framework—is the atavistic assumption that purportedly divine revelation has any normative bearing on political life.

Despite its Whiggishness, Lilla’s account is far from triumphalistic. He insists that, though liberalism seems to have won the day in many contexts (and is the only conceivable framework for many of his readers), its triumph is not complete, nor its

Yet another, more subtle point is worth noting. At first glance, there seems to be a tension between two uses of “we” here. On the one hand are the obstinate antimoderns who have trouble “letting God be,” and on the other, the perplexed and beleaguered sophisticates who just want to live in peace without the intrusion of religious fanaticism, who thought they could retire into a comfortable, secularized world, but who, so it turns out, “were wrong.” But attention to his use of “we” throughout the book as a whole helps to resolve this apparent tension: the latter “we” is, in fact, the one for whom Lilla speaks consistently in his narrative. Thus, the best way to make sense of the “we” on pp. 296 and 302 is to take Lilla as meaning that “we have trouble letting God be” in the same way that we have trouble letting other diseases, such as the common cold or the mosquito, be. Nevertheless, this tension remains significant for Lilla’s project, because the most interesting character in Lilla’s book is the imagined and nameless reader who fits into both categories of “we”: the liberal religious believer who feels committed to the agenda of secular liberalism that Lilla lauds, but whose catechesis as a Jew, Christian, or Muslim prevents her from fully embracing that agenda, and thus—despite herself, and probably even unawares—suffers from a double consciousness. In short, the second “we” Lilla deploys marks its bearers as inhabitants of this mythical world, eager denizens of this social imaginary and fluent speakers of its language.

⁴⁸ Lilla does not himself use Taylor’s term “social imaginary,” but it helpfully illumines his account.

⁴⁹ The “West” is an important conceptual category for Lilla. It refers primarily not to a geographical entity, but to a kind of social order that depends precisely on the “Great Separation” that his book describes.

ultimate success guaranteed.⁵⁰ Though such political arrangements may seem utterly natural to Lilla's readers, he reminds them that a robust liberal social order comes only through hard work combined with good luck. The modern West, thanks both to historical contingencies and careful governance, has managed to stave off apocalypticism in its politics precisely because it has formally cordoned off its institutions and practices from religious principles such that "public conflict over competing revelations is virtually unthinkable" (4).

But this achievement is a fragile thing. One unfortunate side effect of the success of liberalism in the West, Lilla thinks, is that the modern separation of politics from religion has come to seem natural, even *inevitable* to those fortunate enough to inhabit such regimes. As Charles Taylor observes, once we are "well installed" in a particular social imaginary, "it seems the only possible one, the only one which makes sense."⁵¹ But this distinction—the "Great Separation," Lilla calls it—is highly contingent upon particular and unusual social conditions. Indeed, for most of human history, whether viewed diachronically or synchronically, the distinction between the political and the religious—which Lilla and his readers take to be sacrosanct—has never been even entertained. Hence, Lilla's "we" is not the norm, but the exception.

Indeed, the central thrust of Lilla's book is to show that those who cherish liberal political institutions—and he assumes that his readers both do and ought to cherish them—must remain vigilant in defending them from the ever-present threat

⁵⁰ Contrast Lilla's attitude to that of the far more optimistic Francis Fukuyama in "The End of History?" *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), 3-18. This piece was later expanded into a full-length book: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

⁵¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 168.

of religious fanaticism and apocalyptic politics. As the history he sketches demonstrates, a successful defense of these institutions is more complicated and difficult than simply dismissing those so uncouth as to mix these volatile substances, religion and politics. For the political deployment of religious claims can be as subtle as it is persistent; thus even the staunchest supporters of liberalism may find themselves at any time having unwittingly invited God back into the public square.⁵² Hence, the contest between liberalism and its rivals over the future of the West—a contest that, Lilla suggests, hinges on whether its citizens continue to resist apocalyptic politics or capitulate to them instead—will be decided only by the continued formation of deep intellectual and moral habits rooted in and nourished by the right sort of social institutions.

Lilla grounds this constellation of claims in a tale spanning several millenia of human history. Fundamental to his account is the suggestion that, though the spectrum of political theory be littered with endless variations, there are two basic, and mutually incompatible, ways of conceiving politics. People today face a stark choice “between two grand traditions of thought, two ways of envisaging the human condition” (13). The first, which he categorically rejects, he calls “political theology”—a term of art not to be confused with other, more conventional uses of this term.^{53, 54} For Lilla, this refers to a particular framework for conceiving of the

⁵² This is the ultimate lesson that Lilla draws from the post-Kantian history of European Christianity, culminating in the failure of Christians to stop National Socialism. See Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 9-10, 277-85, 299-302. For a criticism of this aspect of Lilla’s narrative, see David Hollinger, “Separation Anxiety,” in *London Review of Books* 30.2 (January 2008), 17-18.

⁵³ On the use of the term “political theology” see the introduction above.

⁵⁴ In an insightful review of Lilla’s book, Charles Taylor points out that Lilla is finally unclear about what he means by this central term. Taylor highlights three different senses of the term at play in Lilla’s narrative: 1) where our normative political theory depends directly on premises derived from revelation; 2) where this theory depends on premises which are theological, even though not drawn solely from revelation, e.g. Locke and Pufendorf; and 3) the enframing of our

world and one's place in it. Though this framework may be explicitly articulated in theoretical terms, political theology is at root both pre- and sub-theoretical. It is "a way of thinking, a habit of mind" (8). In particular, political theology "offers a way of thinking about the conduct of human affairs and connects those thoughts to loftier ones about the existence of God, the structure of the cosmos, the nature of the soul, the origin of all things, and the end of time."⁵⁵ To employ the metaphor of vision that Lilla sometimes uses, we might call political theology a mode of seeing which manifests itself in certain assumptions, in certain patterns of reasoning and acting in the world. Determinative for this mode of seeing is a picture: "a theological image in which God, man, and world form an indissoluble divine nexus" (21; see also 55). Here Lilla evokes the Wittgensteinian insight that has suffused this chapter. The way of seeing proper to political theology is determined by a picture rooted in a particular kind of theological discourse.

This picture—like the way of seeing and inhabiting the world that depends on it—may be utterly incomprehensible to Lilla's sophisticated readers, yet he reminds them that those who do conceive of such a world "have reasons for thinking that they live in this nexus, just as they have reasons for assuming that it offers guidance for political life."⁵⁶ But here Lilla adds an important caveat: "how

thought about politics and human affairs in some doctrines about God and the world, which Lilla speaks of as maintaining a "divine nexus." I focus here on the third of these senses, because that is the one that remains most determinative in Lilla's account of Hobbes. But Taylor's critique is especially incisive on two points: 1) that it really matters for Lilla's argument which sense of "political theology" he thinks the modern West has abandoned; and b) that there are serious problems with Lilla's argument no matter which one of these—or combination of them—it assumes. See Charles Taylor, *The Stillborn God: Two Books, Oddly Yoked Together*, *The Immanent Frame*, Social Science Research Council (January 24, 2008), accessed April 1, 2015, <http://blogs.ssrc.tif/2008/01/24/two-books-oddly-yoked-together>.

⁵⁵ Lilla, "The Politics of God," 30.

⁵⁶ Lilla, "The Politics of God," 30.

that guidance is to be understood, and whether believers think it is authoritative, will depend on how they imagine God.”⁵⁷ Indeed, these variables are crucial, for though all believers in God are *capable* of engaging in political theology, not all are *culpable* for having done so. To “go all the way” in practicing political theology means granting one’s intuition of God enough epistemic privilege to let this picture order one’s life. Yet some believers have successfully managed to keep this from happening. These are among the readers Lilla most needs to persuade. As we shall see, one of Lilla’s chief tasks is to convince those religious believers whose form of religion has evolved beyond the primitive and dangerous mode of political theology to form an informal coalition with others who reject political theology, including nonbelievers, to prevent misuses of politics by the misguided.

What makes the political theology option so dangerous, Lilla explains, is not just that it entails an imagined nexus of God, self, and world. Rather, the danger emerges when a person accepts the further notion that God has particular intentions for the world, has communicated some of these to humanity, and that these intentions have a normative bearing on her mode of life. Lilla explains: “If we take seriously the thought that God is a person with intentions, and that the cosmic order is a result of those intentions, then a great deal will follow. The intentions of such a God are not mute facts, they express an active will . . . And that is where politics comes in” (22). It’s one thing, after all, to conceive of a theological nexus and yet to maintain a certain ironic distance from that conception.⁵⁸ But it’s another thing

⁵⁷ Lilla, “The Politics of God,” 30.

⁵⁸ Such irony is what Richard Rorty sees as the hallmark of liberal citizens, those well trained in the art of keeping their private visions of salvation fittingly private, and thus safely out of the public sphere where they might harm others. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xiv-xv, 61, 68, 84-85.

entirely to treat that nexus as the most determinative factor for one's life. For as soon as one thinks that one's own ultimate salvation and that of others depends on conforming to this set of divine intentions, one not only confuses the private with the public, but in so doing, moves precariously close to religious fanaticism, even violence, all because of one's dubious, properly private hopes of bringing about some form of salvation. The threat of apocalyptic politics is thus intrinsic to political theology, even in its more modest forms, insofar as it aims to know God's will and to instantiate that will in human affairs.⁵⁹

Moreover, as unfamiliar, or even absurd, as this way of seeing the world may seem to Lilla's readers, the temptation so to see comes naturally to human beings, for a kind of inertia propels human sensibilities in the direction of political theology. Just as a sunflower stubbornly persists in following its source of light and life, so human beings are naturally driven to seek divine guidance unless—like a hothouse heliotrope carefully manipulated by gardeners and lamps—it is placed under artificial conditions and thus constrained to do otherwise than its nature seeks. Likewise, we humans “seem to be theotropic creatures, yearning to connect our mundane lives, in some way, to the beyond. That urge can be suppressed, new habits learned, but the challenge of political theology will never fully disappear so long as the urge to connect survives.”⁶⁰

Most of human political life, after all, has been defined by political theology of some sort, for political theology represents a “primordial form of thought” (4),

⁵⁹ This point finds its analogue in Rawls' famous account in the introduction to *Political Liberalism* of the problems that ensue when a “salvationist religion” seeks political power, and thus connects politics to salvation. Indeed, as I suggest below, this is one of the points at which the mythic narratives of Lilla, Rorty, and Rawls overlap most obviously. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxii-xxvii.

⁶⁰ Lilla, “The Politics of God,” 50.

emergence from which requires a complex host of the right conditions. Throughout history—and even now, beyond the pale of the liberal nation-state—humans have looked to the gods for wisdom about political life. Thus, those who seek to overcome political theology—Lilla’s “we”—face a twofold problem of nature and culture: not only is the urge to seek divine guidance rooted in our nature as a species, but—at least in the West—political theology has long provided the ideas and symbols that shape order society and form the lives of moral agents. A social imaginary dominated by a personal God with desires and intentions for creatures is more natural than one that does without such a God, Lilla suggests, and for that reason is much harder to get rid of than the fragile modern one.⁶¹

Though it has been manifest throughout history, political theology was exemplified on a grand scale in medieval Europe, whose political theories and practices were thoroughly rooted in a picture of a God who had purposes in history, and whose purposes made particular demands on human political communities:

For over a millennium the destiny of the West was shaped by the Christian image of a triune God ruling over a created cosmos and guiding men by means of revelation, inner conviction, and the natural order. It was a magnificent picture, one that allowed a magnificent and powerful civilization to flower. Yet its inner ambiguities produced endless doctrinal differences over spiritual and political matters that rendered medieval European life increasingly intolerant, fearful, and violent. (55)

Here, Lilla’s narrative follows a well-worn path. In its tale of the birth of the modern world from the tumultuous matrix of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, it echoes the view, for instance, of John Rawls, the eminent spokesperson of

⁶¹ Lilla’s point resonates with Nietzsche’s famous remark in § 5 of “Die <<Vernunft>> in der Philosophie,” in *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt*, *Werke Kritische Studienausgabe*, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, eds. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967-1977), vol. 10, p. 78: “Ich fürchte, wir werden Gott nicht los, weil wir noch an die Grammatik glauben . . .” In English: “I fear we won’t get rid of God because we still believe in grammar.”

contemporary liberalism.⁶² While Rawls and Lilla diverge in several key ways—Rawls is a political theorist, Lilla a writer of popular histories; Rawls’s *bête noire* is what he calls ‘unreasonable comprehensive views,’ while Lilla’s is the much broader entity ‘political theology’—it is helpful to note the commonality that grounds their differences.

In the course of arguing for the surpassing reasonability of political liberalism, Rawls offers a concise narrative to highlight some historical conditions that have allowed for the emergence and persistence of liberalism. Rawls’s narrative, though different from Lilla’s in some key respects, shares several important features with it. Both locate the origin of modern politics in the breakdown of medieval Christendom, which resulted immediately in religiously motivated violence and social disorder, but which ultimately led to the emergence of the modern state and the development of political attitudes that were in principle separable from theological attitudes.

Rawls famously describes Latin Christianity in the Middle Ages in terms of five definitive features that pagan society had lacked.⁶³ Medieval Christendom was *authoritarian*, in that its episcopal authority—above all that of the pope—was

⁶² “There is a wide consensus today that Rawls’s political philosophy represents the crowning expression of the liberal tradition, at least up until the end of the twentieth century.” Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 284.

⁶³ Rawls’s preferred term is not “pagan,” but “civic religion,” by which he means a “religion of public social practice, of civic festivals and public celebrations...not based on a sacred work like the Bible, or the Koran or the Vedas,” and largely unconcerned with matters of doctrine. Within ancient civic religion, “as long as one participated in the expected way and recognized the proprieties, the details of what one believed were not of great importance. It was a matter of doing the done thing and being a trustworthy member of society, always ready to carry out one’s civic duties as a good citizen—to serve on juries or to row in the fleet in war—when called upon to do so.” Furthermore, and most important, ancient civic religion “was not a religion of salvation in the Christian sense and there was no class of priests who dispensed the necessary means of grace; indeed the ideas of immortality and eternal salvation did not have a central place in classical culture.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxi.

centralized, absolute, and final; it was *salvationist*, inasmuch as it promised eternal beatitude to those who participated in its economy; it was *doctrinal*, in that it demanded assent to its teachings; it was *sacerdotal*, insofar as access to its salvific economy was mediated by priests; and it was *expansionist*, in that it “recognized no territorial limits to its authority short of the world as a whole.”⁶⁴ These aspects formed “an integrated package”⁶⁵ because each feature determined the shape of the other four; absent any of them, the overall synthesis would lose its essential integrity. What Rawls offers here, then, is a fuller and more complex description of what Lilla calls the world of “political theology.”

So long as the church was able to maintain its centralized and relatively absolute authority in Christian lands,⁶⁶ then the implicit tension between the two soteriological requirements (assent to right doctrine and obedience of bishops) remained inert. But when this authority was radically challenged, as it was in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, this tension exploded in radical violence.

Rawls is worth quoting at length here:

The Reformation had enormous consequences. When an authoritative, Salvationist, and expansionist religion like medieval Christianity divides, this inevitably means the appearance within the same society of a rival authoritative and Salvationist religion, different in some ways from the original religion from which it split off, but having for a certain period of time many of the same features. Luther and Calvin were as dogmatic and intolerant as the Roman Church had been.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxiii.

⁶⁵ Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 288, describing Rawls’s narrative.

⁶⁶ Rawls acknowledges that the conciliar movement of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries posed a challenge to this authority, but rightly suggests that these challenges and their implications for Christendom were categorically different from what happened in the Protestant Reformation. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxiii.

⁶⁷ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxiii.

The Reformers' replication of certain hallmarks of medieval Christianity is crucial to the tale Rawls relates: the Reformation did not dissolve the authoritarian, illiberal, and imperialist features of Catholic Christendom, but rather replicated them on a smaller scale and in multiple manifestations. For instance, both "Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century held that it was the duty of the ruler to uphold the true religion and to repress the spread of heresy and false doctrine."⁶⁸

Nonetheless, the upshot of the Reformation was not just more of the same, as though Roman Christendom were simply replicated fractally. Rather, the fracture of medieval Christendom led to a genuinely new development: "the Reformation did not just confront a dogmatic and intolerant authoritarian church with a sect of dogmatic and intolerant sects; it also gave rise to a tremendous pluralism of worldviews that eventually set the stage for political liberalism as the object of overlapping consensus among those worldviews that met the standard of reasonableness."⁶⁹ This "fragmentat[ation of] the religious unity of the Middle Ages . . . led to religious pluralism, with all its consequences for later centuries. This in turn fostered pluralisms of other kinds, which were a permanent feature of culture by the end of the eighteenth century."⁷⁰ Thus, one key historical factor in the origin of liberalism—if not the principal one—is the Protestant Reformation and its aftermath.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 148.

⁶⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxii.

⁷⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxii.

⁷¹ More specifically, Rawls points to "the Reformation and the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ending with the, at first, reluctant acceptance of the principle of toleration and liberty of conscience." John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 11.

In both Rawls's and Lilla's accounts, it is in the collapse of medieval Christendom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the alternative emerges. More specifically, the catalyst for this alternative are the "wars of religion." Lilla's narrative here is standard: the Protestant reformation of the sixteenth century exacerbates existing fractures within Christendom, resulting in "no unified Christendom to reform, just a variety of churches and sects, mostly allied with absolute secular rulers eager to assert their independence."⁷² In the devastating "wars of religion" that ensued, each state claimed to fight to defend salvific truth. Hence, "doctrinal differences fueled political ambitions and vice versa, in a deadly, vicious cycle that lasted a century and a half. Christians addled by apocalyptic dreams hunted and killed Christians with a maniacal fury they had once reserved for Muslims, Jews and heretics. It was madness."⁷³ Again, the narrative follows well-worn tracks: this violence ultimately propelled Europe out of its theocentric slough and into the bright new age of modernity. What emerged from this process was a viable alternative to the political theology that had dominated Christendom for so long. Finally, history was ready for the "Great Separation" that would come to define the modern West.

Rawls expresses the same solution to the problem of "religious violence," but in different terms. As he explains, in a more theoretical mode than Lilla's: principled liberal toleration "came about as a *modus vivendi* following the Reformation: at first reluctantly, but nevertheless as providing the only workable alternative to endless and destructive civil strife."⁷⁴ "Until the wars of religion in the sixteenth and

⁷² Lilla, "The Politics of God," 31.

⁷³ Lilla, "The Politics of God," 31.

⁷⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 159.

seventeenth centuries...social cooperation on the basis of mutual respect was regarded as impossible with those of a different faith” or “those who affirm a fundamentally different conception of the good.”⁷⁵ Rawls then connects this tale to his own constructive proposals: “Were justice as fairness to make an overlapping consensus possible it would complete and extend the movement of thought that began three centuries ago with the gradual acceptance of the principle of toleration and led to the nonconfessional state and equal liberty of conscience.”⁷⁶

Their differing descriptions of the liberal solution to the wars of religion is where Rawls’s and Lilla’s narratives principally diverge. For Rawls, the solution is the decoupling of comprehensive moral views from the realm of politics. For Lilla, it is the dismantling of the nexus that results in “political theology.” The two concepts are, of course, closely related. Rawls’s sharp distinction of comprehensive questions about the good from political questions about the right would certainly entail the subordination, though not necessarily the rejection of “political theology,” while Lilla’s “Great Separation” might entail the separation of comprehensive questions of goodness from political questions of justice—both not necessarily. In fact, Lilla’s view would be closer to what Ronald Beiner thinks Rawls *ought* to say in order to be consistent—namely that liberalism itself offers a compelling comprehensive version of the good life—though it goes further than what Rawls does in fact say.

The hero of Lilla’s narrative, the architect of this “Great Separation,” is none other than Thomas Hobbes. As Lilla describes it, Hobbes’s profound innovation may seem deceptively facile: Hobbes simply “changed the subject” of political deliberation from the long-dominant imagined nexus of God, humanity, and world,

⁷⁵ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 303.

⁷⁶ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 154.

to a set of purely immanent, human-oriented concerns. “Hobbes planted a seed, a thought that it might be possible to build legitimate political institutions without grounding them on divine revelation.”⁷⁷ This second way of negotiating political authority, which Lilla commends, but to which he never assigns a proper name (let alone one as pithy as “political theology”), is to see politics as properly unconcerned with what—if anything—the gods require of human social life. To express this point positively, the Hobbesian way limits its political deliberation exclusively to “eminently political questions” (3). This is the mode of politics, of course, that now seems so obvious to Lilla’s readers in the modern West. What Hobbes offers—and here Lilla’s narrative is simultaneously its most dubious, its most tendentious, and yet its most interesting—is a political science free from all concerns with divine revelation, divine will, and divinely-oriented teleology. In short, Hobbes expunges God from the realm of political theory.

Lilla emphasizes four important points about Hobbes’s accomplishment. First, the key theoretical innovation of the new political science, Lilla suggests, was to draw a fundamental distinction between two broad types of questions—comprehensive ones on the one hand (by which Lilla means claims about God, the origin and structure of the cosmos, the nature of the soul, the direction of history, etc.), and properly political ones (concerning “disputes over authority, who may legitimately exercise power over others, to what extent and under what conditions” [22]) on the other—and then methodically to ignore the former, thereby freeing political theory to focus better on the latter. More broadly, Hobbesian thought “relinquished comprehensive claims,” precisely “by disengaging reflection about the

⁷⁷ Lilla, “The Politics of God,” 33.

human political realm from theological speculations about what might lie behind it” (7).⁷⁸ Lilla describes this methodological decision as “sever[ing] Western political philosophy decisively from cosmology and theology” (58). To do so is to make a complete break with “the long tradition of political theology...and with it the memory of the age-old human quest to bring the whole of human life under God’s authority” (5).

Second, what enables this distinction is an epistemological pessimism, a stringent skepticism about the human ability to identify and discern the will of God for humanity. Supposing God *had* expressed a will for the shape of human social life, how would anyone really know that God had done so? Plenty of humans, to be sure, *claim* to know, but how would we ever adjudicate such claims to divine revelation? Hobbes responds with an unrelenting and salutary skepticism, insisting that we can’t know whether any claim to divine authority is valid or not. The time, of course, was ripe for Hobbes’s attitude: The “wars of religion” had left his contemporaries fed up with the interminable and often violent disputes over religion that defined their age, of the claims by various religious leaders to salvific truths supposedly worth killing and dying for. Yet, in what Lilla describes as the hinge on which Hobbes turned Western political thought from “political theology” to properly scientific accounts of politics, this pessimism frees us to attend to another kind of question. If God’s will isn’t finally available, and thus too weak an epistemic foundation on which to build a political order, what we *can* understand are humans and human communities.

⁷⁸ He adds: “By changing the subject it would expunge Christian political theology from European memory and establish a strict separation between speculation about the divine and scientific observation of human behavior” (298).

Third, then, is Hobbes's method of grounding his political science strictly in the human sciences. He thereby replaces questions about God and human teleology with questions about human behavior, reduced to psychological states that can be exhaustively accounted for by reference to material conditions.⁷⁹ Having thus expelled theological concerns from his political science, Hobbes asks: What do human communities need? Reminding his readers that life is "solitary, nasty, brutish, and short," he insists that the best humans can hope for in this life is simply to erect institutions that will protect each person from the worst designs of their fellows. Thus, "when he announced that a new political philosophy could release them from fear, they listened."⁸⁰ In so doing, Hobbes "showed the way out" of political theology.

As I shall suggest in the following chapters, Lilla poses a false dichotomy here between, on the one hand, Hobbes's proto-liberal concern with curtailing state-promoted comprehensive visions of the good life, and on the other, his deployment of political theology. Contrary to Lilla's central assertion, what is most important about Hobbes's contributions to the tradition of political theology in the Christian West is his combination of these two. For Hobbes's self-conscious invention of civil science is intended to replace an older mode of thought. But what he wants to

⁷⁹ Unfortunately, Lilla gives no indication of what passages he has in mind here. Two chief candidates present themselves: (a) Hobbes's account of natural religion, rooted in superstition and primitive fears about invisible forces; and (b) Hobbes's reductively materialistic account of the human mind, and corresponding empiricist epistemology. Both candidates present profound problems for Lilla's reading: the latter, because Hobbes's critique of natural religion, which sits firmly in the long Christian theological tradition of distinguishing irrational pagan religion from the truly rational religion revealed by God to Israel and the church, serves precisely to demonstrate the superiority of true Christianity to paganism, or to forms of Christianity that—through their irrationality—dilute the purity of true Christianity with brackish pagan elements; the former, because, as I will show in part two of this essay, Hobbes's point is not to replace questions about God, but to reject irrational and superstitious answers to those questions, offering instead answers that are at once more rational and more faithfully Christian.

⁸⁰ Lilla, "The Politics of God," 33.

replace is not just a mode of reflecting on the implications for human politics of Christian doctrine, but rather the entire tradition of political theory that preceded him, a tradition of thought precariously rooted in merely inductive or prudential and thus unreliable considerations about human behavior, rather than in a scientific account of politics that can issue in *certain* conclusions.⁸¹ This older form of political theory that Hobbes rejects, after all, comprises not just Christian “political theology,” as Lilla suggests, but also such figures that obviously don’t fit into Lilla’s category—Aristotle and Plato, along with an entire pagan tradition of political thought, are dismissed along with the political theorists of medieval and early modern Christendom. On Hobbes’s account, once a truly scientific civil science was fashioned, and he takes himself to be the first in human history to have done this, it could be used in conjunction with a Christian theology that—in proper Protestant fashion—had been chastened and delivered of its pretensions to move beyond its own proper concern with articulating the meaning of the gospel. Thus, in mistaking the object that Hobbes intends his civil science to replace, Lilla establishes a false Hobbesian dichotomy between two modes of thought that should properly not be in tension at all, but should work together in a truly synthetic arrangement of church and state proper to Christendom.

⁸¹ Cf. Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 153, 156: “[W]hile Machiavelli separated ethics from politics and thus prudence humanistically conceived from prudence as the cunning or *versutia* the humanists were so intent on repudiating, Hobbes takes the further step of rejecting prudence altogether: political science cannot, according to Hobbes, be practical and prudential in the Aristotelian sense, since prudence is based on experience that yields only the knowledge of probably effects, while science requires universal truths, that is, the conditional knowledge of logical consequences. Hobbes thus substitutes the goal of objective, mathematical certainty for the practical certainty of Quattrocentro humanists. His aim in *Leviathan* is accordingly to develop a language commensurate with this new scientific notion of politics, a logic of invention that would do what the humanists’ prudential rhetoric had failed to do . . . to formulate a political science that will be grounded on the truth, but will also be persuasive.”

But Lilla's fourth point is the most interesting, because it articulates a genuine insight about Hobbes, although this insight becomes immediately distorted by his broader misreading of Hobbes. On Lilla's interpretation, Hobbes recognized that no decent political life could be realized within terms set by political theology, which ineluctably bred violent eschatological passions and stifled human development. Political life must be *entirely* detached from such passions. Hobbes realized that such passions are rooted ultimately in the way people imagine the world they inhabit, and that the way people see the world will, in turn, finally determine the mode of politics that makes sense to them. "A reorientation would have to take place, turning human attention away from the eternal and transcendent, toward the here and now. The old habit of looking to the divine nexus for political guidance would have to be broken, and new habits developed" (218). And habits of seeing are inextricably connected to habits of speaking. If people cease to speak of God's will as a relevant political consideration, then over time, new habits of speech and thought will develop in which God's will is utterly irrelevant to politics. But habits are not broken overnight, nor simply by means of fine intellectual distinctions. To inculcate new ways of seeing, speaking, and acting, Hobbes and those within the liberal tradition he inaugurated would need to overcome the age-old habits of political theology.

Though Lilla never explicitly describes the new way as a *picture* or a *mode of seeing* (which is how he characterizes political theology), the point is clear: What the West needed to emerge from the stifling conditions of political theology was a new way of seeing the world; this would entail a new vocabulary for describing politics, and would thus make possible a new way of inhabiting the world. To express Lilla's claim in Wittgenstein's terms, Hobbes was able to isolate the picture that, having

long lain within the language of Western Christendom, had held Europe captive for centuries. Having isolated it, he sketched a twofold mode of attack: First a plan for utterly destroying it, and second, a plan for cultivating a new language that would hold an entirely new picture.

What *Leviathan* presents, Lilla suggests, is an exhaustive program for cultivating a way of life that would be commensurate with a new way of seeing and speaking about the world, a way that self-consciously and intentionally would reject the way of political theology. Thus, by simultaneously changing the subject and then describing a world in which “political theology” fails to make sense, Hobbes’s political theory shows a way for society to change its habits, to develop new “habits of thinking and talking about politics exclusively in human terms, without appeal to divine revelation or cosmological speculation” (5). Only having first addressed the matter of perspective could Hobbes “then begin to develop what has proved to be the most important art for living in a liberal-democratic order: the art of intellectual separation” (90). The introduction and earliest cultivation of this art, Lilla suggests, is Hobbes’s most enduring contribution to Western politics. For, though we may not “accept Hobbes’s individual scientific ‘findings’ . . . we have accepted his manner of conceiving political life solely with reference to man” (90).⁸²

A defense of this art, of this particular mode of seeing the world, is Lilla’s chief aim in narrating this tale. In reminding his readers of the seed Hobbes planted, which others watered, and which, having flourished, needs continual cultivation, he aims to convince his readers to be more cautious, “to take stock, to . . . think harder

⁸² This claim bears an interesting formal similarity to Hobbes’s own claim about himself, namely that he was the first to cultivate a truly scientific account of politics. See the “Epistle Dedicatory” of *De corpore*, EW I viii-ix.

about how we live now and what is required if we wish our experiment to continue” (13). The new way is fragile, unnatural, and contingent. It must be carefully cultivated and preserved. Yet a curious side-effect of the success of liberal political orders has been that the modern Western separation of religion from politics has come to seem natural, even *inevitable* to those fortunate enough to inhabit those regimes. The temptation confronting Lilla’s readers is to assume that things will continue to persist the way they have for centuries now. However, Lilla unrelentingly emphasizes the contrary: As the resurgence of political theology in the past century has made clear, the Great Separation needs to be carefully nurtured. Hence, Lilla reminds his readers that their way of seeing might collapse at any time, given the right conditions; for political theology “is not the preserve of any one culture or religion nor does it belong solely to the past. It is an age-old habit of mind that can be required by anyone who begins looking to the divine nexus of God, man and world to reveal the legitimate political order” (50). Thus, those who cherish this tradition—and Lilla assumes that his readers not only do but ought to cherish it—must discipline themselves (and others) to keep appeals to “religious” authority out of the realm of political deliberation. This is the principal reason Lilla thinks it crucial to narrate this history, namely as a reminder both of the remarkable and difficult accomplishment it was to fashion a society like ours, and also of the conditions that were necessary first to fashion and then preserve that society.

But a mere awareness of this history and of Hobbes’s role in it is insufficient. Lilla also aims to expose to his readers the continued threat political theology poses even in contexts where it seems to have been extinguished. While the most effective means of expunging political theology from Western life has been to foster the

intellectual habit of distinguishing politics from religion, such intellectual work is insufficient. This is because “[p]olitical theology is highly adaptive and can present to even educated minds a more compelling vision of the future than the prospect of secular modernity” (54). The Christian picture of a God with a particular will for human life—like the Jewish and Muslim pictures—is intrinsically dangerous, even in its domesticated, modern liberal forms. This is where material conditions, such as a robust form of market capitalism, may be more determinative than any school, book, or newspaper. Indeed, despite its shortcomings, market capitalism in fact applies helpful pressure that contributes to a healthy liberal political order.⁸³ For “[w]hen the urge to connect is strong, passions are high and fantasies are vivid, the trinkets of our modern lives are important amulets against political intoxication” (Ibid).⁸⁴

The extent to which Hobbes’s “Great Separation” has succeeded, Lilla suggests, is the very extent to which this way of seeing the world comes naturally and without conscious effort. Given that atheism and agnosticism are viable options in our world to an extent unimaginable five centuries ago, the “Great Separation” has been a tremendous success. After all, if the world we inhabit is godless, then there is no divine revelation to make claims on us in the first place. Yet Lilla expects

⁸³ Montesquieu may have been the first to recognize the rich promise of global capitalism for ‘domesticating’ or ‘emasculating’ Christianity. See Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 4-5, 189-98, 304-05, 418; Thomas Pangle, *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu’s “Spirit of the Laws”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 99-102, 248, 253-54.

⁸⁴ Cf. Henry Perowne’s remark in the novel *Saturday* by Ian McEwan: “The secular authority, indifferent to the babel of various gods, will guarantee religious freedoms. They should flourish. It’s time to go shopping . . . Such prosperity, whole emporia dedicated to cheeses, ribbons, Shaker furniture, is protection of a sort. This commercial wellbeing is robust and will defend itself to the last. It isn’t rationalism that will overcome the religious zealots, but ordinary shopping and all that it entails—jobs for a start, and peace, and some commitment to realizable pleasures, the promise of appetites sated in this world, not the next. Rather shop than pray. Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 126-27.

that even those readers who adhere to a biblical faith will find the “Great Separation” not only tolerable, but preferable, and thus worth defending.

Indeed, this way of seeing the world is not atheistic, Lilla insists, nor even necessarily hostile toward religion, and thus is nothing for religious believers to fear. It simply demands “an intellectual art of distinguishing questions regarding the basic structure of society from ultimate questions regarding God, the world, and human spiritual destiny” (298). Indeed, “Christianity as a religious faith” survived the Great Separation, “as did its churches. The Christian tradition of thinking about politics that depended on a particular conception of the divine nexus did not” (57). There are plenty of religious believers left, many of whom still think about the relationships amongst God, humanity, and the cosmos. Yet most seem to have trained themselves not to take that last step into politics. Most “are no longer in the habit of connecting our political discourse to theological and cosmological questions, and...no longer recognize revelation as politically authoritative” (7-8).⁸⁵ But some still do, and so by the end of his book, another aim becomes apparent: an appeal to religious believers to do their part in maintaining—and extending—the Great Separation.

Lilla appeals to both those religious believers who explicitly accept the Great Separation, thus refusing to allow theological commitments to bear on their social commitments, and those who do so implicitly, who have absorbed modern assumptions about the difference between politics and religion, and developed modern habits of separating theological questions from political ones. Thus, he calls

⁸⁵ Indeed, Lilla finds reason for hope in the shared disgust evident amongst both secularists and religious believers at contemporary deployments of political theology, such as an open letter from Mahmoud Ahmehdinejad, then President of Iran, to George W. Bush, then President of the United States. Lilla, “The Politics of God,” 30.

on liberal religious believers to convince to their non-liberal co-religionists, for “we are heirs to the Great Separation only if we wish to be, if we make a conscious effort to separate basic principles of political legitimacy from divine revelation. For “even if political theology is not powerful enough to dislodge these institutions, it is always capable of distorting our thinking about them” (8). Avoiding the twofold danger of the ideology of political theology and the false consciousness it tends to produce requires not only vigilance, “but even more it [demands] self-awareness” (50).

In the end, Lilla offers his Christian, Jewish, and Muslim readers two things—a sober assessment of contemporary politics, and a modest plea: if they will endeavor to cultivate the intellectual and conversational habits necessary to maintain the Great Separation, then they will have done everything within their power to stave off apocalypticism, and thus prevent the worst effects of political theology.

Those of us who have accepted the heritage of the Great Separation must do so soberly. Time and time again we must remind ourselves that we are living an experiment, that *we* are the exceptions. We...have chosen to keep our politics unilluminated by the light of revelation. If our experiment is to work, we must rely on our own lucidity. (308-09)

In a sense, Lilla offers religious believers a variation on Rorty’s ‘irony as a way of life.’ In Rorty’s vision, those who persist in holding religious beliefs and in defining themselves in terms of religious identity are welcome to pursue their comprehensive visions of the world as much as they like—but only in private, and with the explicit hope that their religious commitments, in the absence of institutional public support, will eventually wither away. Lilla’s anti-religious stance is less vehement than

Rorty's.⁸⁶ Lilla simply asks that religious believers take their identity as part of the "we" to be primary, and thus to subordinate whatever comprehensive religious beliefs they might hold as secondary. Thus, rather than insisting that believers keep whatever fantasies they may have about God, or God's purposes for the world, to themselves, as Rorty would insist, Lilla suggests that believers might in fact use their theological commitments as tools for engaging in the hard and serious work of making as peaceful and as comfortable a life for themselves as the contingencies of life will permit. This begins with the "renewal of political theology from within . . . offering (for instance) biblical reasons that Christians should be loyal citizens of the state they live in."⁸⁷

The role of Hobbes in this narrative, then, is twofold: (a) to highlight the contingency of modern, post-theological views of politics and public life; and (b) to describe the material shape of this modern, Hobbesian approach to politics that is necessary if this contingent, and fragile, yet crucial accomplishment is to be

⁸⁶ See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, esp. 73-95. It should be noted, however, that later in life, Rorty softened his views: "Although I have lately come to think that Nicholas Wolterstorff is largely right and Robert Audi largely wrong about whether it's okay for religious believers to offer religious reasons for their opinions in the public square, I persist in thinking that non-theists make better citizens of democratic societies than theists. If Brandomian pragmatism is indeed the philosophical view best suited to democracy, and if theism cannot be brought within the ambit of that sort of pragmatism, then theism and democracy remain at odds. Most forms of theism entail acknowledgment of a non-human authority, and such acknowledgment is incompatible with Brandom's initial premise—that agreement among human beings is the source of all norms." Springs, ed., "Pragmatism and Democracy," 419-20. As Jeff Stout astutely remarks in the same symposium, there are many voices of Richard Rorty: "The Nietzschean Rorty presents himself as a radical reformer of common sense," while the Wittgensteinian Rorty "sets out not to reform ordinary uses...but rather to provide a kind of therapy for philosophical temptations." And there are "also Davidsonian and Brandomian Rorties." In short, Stout points to a crucial tension in Rorty's work between its pragmatism and its doctrinaire anti-theism (437-40). Thus, while Rorty—and apparently Lilla—dream of the withering away of theism, Stout thinks "it's often a good thing for citizens to express [theistic] beliefs, so that the rest of us can have an opportunity to criticize them" (440).

⁸⁷ Lilla, "The Politics of God," 54.

safeguarded, and the liberal way of life to survive the continuing threat of “political theology.”

Although, as I will show in the following chapters, Lilla’s account of Hobbes is deeply flawed,⁸⁸ it nonetheless helpfully displays an insight often overlooked in contemporary political discourse, namely the crucial significance of seeing the world for how one acts in it, and thus for politics. Lilla’s narrative does so in four ways.

First, in embodying the liberal myth of the modern nation-state, it exemplifies a common view about the significance of the modern West, namely that it is a particular human achievement of a difficult but crucial settlement of the conflicting claims of politics and religion that can be maintained only through intentional work. Under the conditions of the “Great Separation,” a sharp line is drawn between these two realms, and so any citizen who wishes also to practice a religion may do so insofar as she keeps political questions distinct from theological questions. This settlement is obviously far more “Lockean” than “Hobbesian,” insofar as its first clear and programmatic articulation is found in Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689). But Lilla’s narrative—though it gets many of the historical details wrong—

⁸⁸ In addition to Taylor’s insightful review cited above, four others are worth mentioning, each of which challenges a different aspect of Lilla’s narrative. Stanley Hauerwas has pointed to the striking absence of any treatment of war in Lilla’s account. Stanley Hauerwas, “War and the American Difference: A Theological Assessment,” in *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2011), 7-12. Two reviews by political theorists point to a common problem: one by Tessitore and another by Gillespie and Perkins have criticized Lilla for misreading Hobbes, for offering too simplistic an account of “political theology” and for lumping all forms of Christian politics together as monolithically dangerous. Aristide Tessitore, “Political Theology and the Theological-Political Problem,” in *Perspectives on Political Science* 38.1 (January 2009), 5-12. Michael A. Gillespie and Lucas Perkins, “Political Anti-Theology,” in *Critical Review* 22.1 (March 2010), 65-84. Finally, Ronald Beiner, in a highly sympathetic review, raises two objections against Lilla’s book: first, that it’s not explicit enough about the need to expunge religion from public life; and second, that Lilla’s deployment of Hobbes in the narrative is puzzling: “it is ironic to present Hobbes as the intellectual founder of the Great Separation when he pursued civil-ecclesiastical unity with all his formidable intellectual energy: a resolute concentration of the sword and the crosier in one all-powerful set of hands.” Ronald Beiner, “Has the Great Separation Failed?” in *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 22.1 (2010), 45-63.

helpfully displays the way this view manifests itself in discourse about the problem of “religion and politics.” For religious believers and non-believers alike, politics is one thing, religion is another; the two must be properly and thoroughly distinguished, and the border between them must be vigilantly policed. Lilla’s narrative shows why this separation is so fragile, and what believers in the liberal settlement (whether they also be *religious* believers or not) must do to maintain it.

Second, although it badly misinterprets and misrepresents Hobbes’s views on these matters, deeming him the architect and herald of a “Great Separation” he never planned, and indeed, one that contradicts the plans that Hobbes in fact laid out, Lilla’s narrative does helpfully bring to light an important feature of *Leviathan* that typically remains hidden. This is the subtle yet crucial role that vision—both literal, physical vision, and metaphorical vision understood as one’s overall mode of encountering and interpreting the world—plays in Hobbes’s treatise. For Hobbes does not simply identify a problematic form of behavior (disobedience of or disloyalty to the proper sovereign) and then correct it by specifying the right kind of behavior (obedience of and loyalty to the sovereign), although he certainly does this. But Hobbes also recognizes that human behaviors are intimately entwined in a nexus of habits, which are themselves embedded in particular practices with which they bear complex relations and which habits comprise not just ways of acting, but ways of seeing, interpreting, and deliberating. Thus, for Hobbes to recommend a new way of acting in the world (namely, recognizing the absolute sovereignty of the nation-state) is inextricably linked to his recommending new ways of seeing and understanding the world and one’s place in it. Thus, to offer a radically different way of conceiving of politics—which Lilla rightly sees that Hobbes does—means not

simply recommending new ways of acting, but of seeing the world and of speaking of it as well.

Third, insofar as his account of the “Great Separation” signals how important a role vision plays in human life and in politics in particular, Lilla’s narrative reminds us that the way one sees the world is not a purely private affair, but truly matters for politics. It reminds us of the fact that we necessarily see the world in one particular way rather than another. Furthermore, Lilla’s account of Hobbes is most insightful where it points to Hobbes’s important role in shaping the way Christians in the West see the world and their place in it. Indeed, Lilla is even right in suggesting that Hobbes’s work inaugurates a “Great Separation” in Western Christendom. However, it is not, as Lilla suggests, a separation of political questions from religious ones. For Hobbes, the political and the religious are finally inseparable, and to attempt so to separate them is to sabotage the economy of salvation God has implemented, whereby human communities are saved from the destructive violence of civil war through the constructive violence of the state, and individual humans are saved eternally through Christ’s atoning work, which is applied to humans most effectively by a sovereign state that confesses publicly that “Jesus is the Christ.” Rather, the Great Separation that Hobbes effects is one of political authority from ecclesiology, and of Christian witness from any concrete social manifestation.

Fourth, Lilla is surely correct in identifying Hobbes’s account of the relation between theology and politics in his *Leviathan* as being an important moment in the development of Western thought about such matters from views dominant in the late medieval period to those dominant in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Yet Lilla is wrong to see Hobbes's intervention as constituting a break with "political theology." Rather, Hobbes's work should be seen as part of a long tradition of Christian attempts at articulating the best way to relate ecclesial life and its institutions to political life and its institutions. While some of Hobbes's answers to these questions may ultimately have contributed in some way to the breakdown of Christendom, it is a gross misinterpretation of Hobbes's work to suggest that his aim was so to dissolve Christendom, to abolish the "divinely revealed nexus between God, man, and world."⁸⁹

1.4. Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that attention to mythic narratives, such as Lilla's tale of the origins of modern politics, is valuable in uncovering key features of the social imaginary proper to modern liberalism. Insofar as a central task of "political theology," in both its non- or anti-theological forms and its theological (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) forms, is to render more visible some hidden features and obscure background assumptions of the dominant social imaginary, one important element of that task is to articulate the connections between the political meaning of Christianity (its discourses, practices, and institutions) and the contemporary context it encounters (the broader culture, which of course is a complex and unstable referent⁹⁰), or—in more explicitly theological terms—between the church's politics

⁸⁹ Lilla uses this phrase three dozen times in *The Stillborn God*, on pages 21, 23, 27, 31, 39, 55, 58, 61, 73, 88, 89, 103, 108, 113, 116, 121, 124, 125, 131, 158, 162, 163, 164, 180, 187, 188, 198, 218, 219, 224, 267, 296, 297, 311, 313, and 316.

⁹⁰ See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, passim.

and those of “the world.”⁹¹ Thus, attention to the modern liberal social imaginary and its constitutive political myths is a necessary task of political theology. But this is to express what I’ve shown in this chapter in a highly formal mode. In material terms, I have made a twofold claim. First, that central to the liberal myth—as Lilla exemplifies it—is the assumption that an important, and indeed world-defining break occurred at the cusp of modernity, as certain forward-thinking theorists introduced a new way of thinking about politics and its relationship to theological questions. Second, that in Lilla’s version of the myth (though admittedly not in all articulations of the myth), Thomas Hobbes is the chief architect of the new way of thinking, and a militant burner of any bridges connecting the new world to the old one of political theology.

By contrast, I contend that Hobbes’s signal contribution to the traditional of “political theology” is best understood neither as deracination or erasure, as Lilla would have it. Rather, Hobbes’s efforts are best conceived as redefinition, or rearrangement of the nexus of God, world, and humanity. The remainder of this project will elucidate this claim and its implications by exploring what we might imprecisely call the prolegomenon to Hobbes’s political theory, namely his efforts to convince Christian readers to see their world in a new way—not to dissolve the fundamental theological nexus of God-self-world, but to cast it in new light. The chief questions I will take up in the chapters that follow include: *What kind of world does Hobbes describe? How does he aim to train his readers to see that world as their own, and thus to speak well and to act fittingly within it?* I will do so primarily by examining

⁹¹ As James McClendon reminds us, “the line between church and world passes right through each Christian heart.” James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1: *Ethics*, revised and enlarged edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 17.

Hobbes's best-known work, *Leviathan*. Hence, in the following chapter, I take up the question of how to read that book, before exploring in part 2 how Hobbes redescribes the world for his readers.

Chapter Two

The “Political Theology” of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*

In the previous chapter, I suggested that Mark Lilla’s account of the ‘Great Separation’ of religion and politics, an event he locates at the dawn of modernity and which he sees as continuing to undergird the ‘modern West,’ exemplifies more broadly a particularly liberal way of seeing the world—what we might describe in terms of either social imaginary or myth. At the center of Lilla’s tale is a pivotal moment in which Thomas Hobbes—whom he casts as both the architect of modern politics and the archetype of the liberal rejection of ‘political theology’—overturns Christendom and its entire political-theological tradition, not by offering a competing theology, but rather by simply “changing the subject.”¹ In so doing, Lilla claims, Hobbes shows by example that questions of politics not only *can* be sharply distinguished from questions about God, but *ought* so to be distinguished to prevent sectarian violence from making life intolerable. Lilla’s narrative has a moral: contemporary inhabitants of the modern West ought to be vigilant in avoiding atavistic habits of political-theological thinking, and diligent in warding off conditions that encourage such habits. Looking specifically at Lilla’s deployment of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* in this broader narrative, I then suggested—somewhat telegraphically—that Lilla’s *Leviathan* bears little resemblance to the treatise Hobbes actually wrote.

The remainder of this essay substantiates this assessment by offering an extended response to the misreading of Hobbes that Lilla’s view exemplifies. In this

¹ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 75, 88, 108, 298, 313.

second chapter, I suggest that Lilla's interpretation of *Leviathan* is far from novel. Indeed, his reading accords with a dominant way political theorists and intellectual historians have interpreted *Leviathan* since the recovery of Hobbesian political thought in the nineteenth century.² Nor is this mainstream interpretation entirely unfounded, for *Leviathan* is an ambiguous book. As we shall see, once a path of misreading had been forged, Hobbes's text itself provided later readers with what seemed like good reasons for following this path to its logical end: the false conclusion that what Hobbes seeks in *Leviathan* is a principled separation of church from state and of 'religion' from 'politics.'

This chapter has three aims: to describe the broader tradition of reading Hobbes to which Lilla's work belongs; to provide a brief overview of the structure and content of *Leviathan*, with some reference to its context in Hobbes's life and work; and to sketch my own proposal for interpreting *Leviathan*, one which will undergird the interpretation I offer in the essay's second half. By the end of this chapter, several points should be clear: (i) that some of reasons that might account for Lilla's misreading stem from a dominant tradition of Hobbes scholarship, which is itself grounded in ambiguities within Hobbes's text itself;³ (ii) that there are nonetheless good reasons for rejecting this interpretation of Hobbes; and (iii) that the hermeneutical model I offer in its stead provides a better way to approach Hobbes's work, precisely because it attends more closely to the overall shape of *Leviathan* and to its broader context: one shaped, variously, by Hobbes's own career, by the volatile

² On the history of modern interpretations of Hobbes, from the nineteenth-century "renewal of Hobbesian historiography" up until 1974, see Norberto Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, trans. Daniela Gobetti (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 205-12.

³ Other reasons are likely rooted in the way the overarching myth of liberalism determines Lilla's reading of this text and the history surrounding it, but such speculation lies beyond the proper scope of this chapter.

complex of Stuart England, and more broadly, by a mid-seventeenth-century Christendom still reeling from the Reformation, and just beginning to grapple with the *nova scientia* or ‘new science.’⁴

The structure of this chapter may be compared to the technique of ‘layering’ in digital photography—it offers a series of related discussions, the combined effect of which is to disclose an overall complex context in which my reading of Hobbes’s work—offered in chapters 3-6—will make sense.

2.1. Evaluating Lilla’s two theses

As we’ve seen, Mark Lilla deems *Leviathan* a “revolutionary” work precisely because—and in so far as—it succeeded in “changing the subject” of European political discourse from “divine commands” (what God expects of political arrangements) to “human needs” (what humans need to flourish in political community).⁵ From Hobbes on, Lilla explains, “[t]he new political thinking would no longer concern itself with God’s politics; it would concentrate on men as believers in God and try to keep them from harming one another. It would set its sights lower than Christian political theology had, but secure what mattered most, which was peace.”⁶ On this conception of politics, political deliberation is no longer informed

⁴ *Nova Scientia* is the title of Nicolo Tartaglia’s 1537 treatise on ballistics, but the name came to apply, sometime in the seventeenth century, more broadly to the self-consciously anti-Aristotelian *novatores*. Lists of *novatores* abounded in the first half of the seventeenth century, and Marin Mersenne’s is typical: Campanella, Bruno, Telesius, Kepler, Galileo, Gilbert “et aliorum,” Bacon, Flood, Hill, and Basso. Marin Mersenne, *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim* (Paris, 1623), column 1838. For a compendium of seventeenth-century lists of *novatores*, see Daniel Garber, “The Novatores and Francis Bacon,” *Between Medieval and Modern: Philosophy from 1300 to 1700*, accessed October 1, 2015, http://www.colorado.edu/neh2015/sites/default/files/attached-files/072728-daniel_garber-bacon_novatores.pdf.

⁵ Lilla, “The Politics of God,” 31.

⁶ Lilla, “The Politics of God,” 33.

by concerns about eternal salvation, references to divine will, or any teleological conception of human life. This is because—as Hobbes’s contemporaries had learned the hard way from the “wars of religion”—questions about God are inherently contentious, undecidable, and especially prone to generating irrational violence. Thus, Hobbes’s signal accomplishment was to define the criteria for good politics exclusively in terms of a science of human behavior, “a new science of man” that aims to disclose the conditions under which the human propensity for destructive violence is most effectively stifled.⁷ To the extent that Hobbes’s approach to politics took hold in the West, Lilla explains, all appeals to divine dictates or a transcendent human telos were excluded from properly *political* conversation as not only irrelevant, but in fact detrimental to a healthy political order.

As a description of the liberal tradition of political philosophy that would become dominant in Hobbes’s wake, and which continues to predominate in European and North American political theory today, Lilla’s account is valuable. His narrative is sleek and potent, and effectively articulates a view of ‘the problem of politics and religion’ central to the liberal social imaginary. However, as an account of Hobbes’s thought and of seventeenth-century developments in political theology, Lilla’s narrative is highly misleading. This misconstrual of *Leviathan* has deleterious effects on both the interpretation of that book itself and, more broadly, on attempts at understanding the historical relationship of Christianity to modern liberalism.⁸

To see why this is so, we might distinguish two theses at play in Lilla’s argument about Hobbes and the ‘Great Separation.’ The first thesis claims that

⁷ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 92.

⁸ For an even harsher assessment of this feature of Hobbes’s narrative, from the perspective of a European sociologist, see José Casanova, “A Conversation,” in *Political Theology for a Pluralist Age*, ed. by Michael John Kessler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18-22.

Hobbes in *Leviathan* both argues for a strict separation of religion from politics and shows how such a separation might be effected. The second thesis claims that Hobbes aims to demonstrate the illegitimacy of medieval Christian ‘political theology,’ that is to say, the relating of theological and cosmological questions to political questions. What makes Hobbes’s move so radical, this second thesis suggests, is that he attacks ‘political theology’ not in a direct way—by arguing against the ‘political-theological’ nexus on the very terms established by that tradition—but simply by “changing the subject,”⁹ thus flatly refusing to address the significance of theology for the polis. In short, if thesis 1 states that Hobbes aims to effect a ‘Great Separation’ of religion from politics, thesis 2 adds that, as part of this ‘Great Separation,’ Hobbes seeks to end the tradition of ‘political theology’ by refusing to connect questions about God to questions about politics.

Both theses are patently false, and not only distort the proper interpretation of Hobbes’s treatise, but also misleadingly suggest a much stronger and more sudden break between medieval political theology and modern liberalism than is warranted. That both theses are at least *prima facie* improbable will be evident on even the most cursory reading of *Leviathan*. Yet rather than offering a series of ‘proof texts’ to demonstrate this claim, I will here briefly provide clear a clear case for rejecting both, before offering a more nuanced and extended critique in the chapters to follow.

Contrary to the ‘Great Separation’ thesis—Lilla’s claim that Hobbes advocates in *Leviathan* a sharp and principled separation of the institutions of the Christian church from the secular state—what Hobbes in fact advocates is a hyper-Erastian

⁹ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 75, 88, 108, 298, 313.

arrangement of church and state.¹⁰ An Erastian arrangement is one in which the head of the state is also the head of the church.¹¹ In Hobbes's case, this means that the British monarch is also the head of the Church of England, except for the interregnum, when it was, variously, the Council of State, the Rump Parliament (in different iterations), and the Protectorate.¹² *The Act of Supremacy* (1534) is a prime example of an Erastian arrangement. In this text, Henry VIII declares that "the king's Majesty justly and rightfully is and ought to be the supreme head of the Church of England," and possesses, as such, "all honors, dignities, preeminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits, and commodities . . . of the same Church belonging and appertaining."¹³ In this declaration, Henry claims for himself all powers proper to the church, and thus unites in himself the 'two swords' of

¹⁰ After positing this term to describe Hobbes's ecclesio-political position, I discovered that the term had been occasionally deployed in debates surrounding polity in the mid-nineteenth century national churches of Scotland and England. But beyond a spat of appearances between 1848 and 1851, the term seems not to exist in print. See George Douglas Campbell, Duke of Argyll, *"Presbytery Examined": An Essay, Critical and Historical, on the Ecclesiastical History of Scotland Since the Reformation*, 2nd edition (London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street, 1849), Appendix 1, 297-318. Cf. George Douglas Campbell, Duke of Argyll, Address to the House of Lords on Patronage of the Church of Scotland, June 9, 1874, in *Parliamentary Debates*, ed. by T. C. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. CCXIX, cols. 1239-1250.

¹¹ On the history of Erastianism in England up until the civil war—and thus stopping just before Hobbes's first published work on 'church and state'—see Weldon S. Crowley, "Erastianism in England to 1640," in *Journal of Church and State* 32 (Summer 1990), 549-566.

¹² For Hobbes's tediously precise account of the proper location of sovereignty in England from 1640, when first "sovereignty was disputed between King Charles I and the Presbyterian Parliament" until the coronation of Charles II in 1660, see Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth; or, The Long Parliament*, Fourth Dialogue, folios 93-94, 97, in *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 10, ed. by Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 376-77, 389-90.

¹³ "Act of Supremacy" of Henry VIII, King of England, 1534. Original text in *Statutes of the Realm*, 26 Henry. VII, c. I, iii, 492. Quoted in *Church and State Through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents With Commentaries*, Sidney Z. Ehler and John B. Morrall, eds. (New York: Biblo and Tanner, 1988), 163-64.

sacerdotium and *imperium* or *regnum* distinguished by Pope Gelasius I in the fifth century.¹⁴ The position Hobbes advocates, however, is even stronger than this.

In addition to the Erastian thesis that the civil sovereign has full authority in ecclesial matters, Hobbes adds a corollary which makes his view *hyper*-Erastian: the civil community is not just coextensive with, but identical to the ecclesial community. He states this view most clearly near the beginning of part III of *Leviathan*, in a preliminary discussion of authority within the church.¹⁵ He explains:

the Church, if it be one person, is the same thing with a Commonwealth of Christians; called a *Common-wealth*, because it consisteth of men united in one person, their Sovereign; and a *Church*, because it consisteth in Christian men, united in one Christian Sovereign. But if the Church be not one person, then it hath no authority at all; it can neither command, nor doe any action at all; nor is capable of having any power, or right to any thing; nor has any Will, Reason, nor Voice; for all these qualities are personall. Now if the whole number of Christians be not contained in one Commonwealth, they are not one person. (III.33.205-06; 606)¹⁶

Thus, Hobbes suggests, the distinction between Church and Commonwealth (in other words, between church and state) is a distinction without any real difference, for the difference is merely semantic: in a well-ordered Christian community, the referents of these two terms will be strictly identical. Here he argues for this ecclesiological axiom—that the church is the commonwealth, and the commonwealth the church—by considering the problematic implications of distinguishing church from state. First, such a distinction would mean that the

¹⁴ See John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York: New York University, 1999), 39-45.

¹⁵ Chapter 33, "Of the Number, Antiquity, Scope, Authority, and Interpreters of the Books of Holy Scripture."

¹⁶ In the Latin edition of 1666: "At *Ecclesia* si una Persona sit, eadem res est cum *Civitate*; quae quidem quia constat ex hominibus *Civitas*; quia constat ex hominibus Christianis *Ecclesia* appellatur. Totus autem numerus Christianorum hominum, nisi unâ *Civitate* comprehendantur, non est Persona una" (III.33.182; 607).

church lacked the qualities necessary to act as an agent in the world. Though he does not here speak of the church in the Pauline terms of “one body” or “the body of Christ,” these terms are relevant here.^{17,18}

If a church is to be a genuine social body, he suggests, it must have identifiable boundaries, distinct lines that differentiate this body from others.¹⁹ It must also have a coherent internal ordering principle so that it can ‘will,’ ‘reason,’ and ‘command.’ Like Paul’s “body of Christ,” it requires an organic bodily integrity—a head, limbs, and a torso, but also a mind and a will. But—and here, Hobbes only implies, and never explicitly states, an important premise of his argument—if the church were formally distinct from the commonwealth, then the possibility arises that conflicting claims might be made on one and the same Christian subject. This is not only a practical and ethical problem, but also—more theoretically speaking—theologically absurd. For if both church and state purport to

¹⁷ See I Corinthians 12:12-31; I Corinthians 10:16, Romans 7:4-5; Ephesians 4:1-16. In the period just before St. Paul, similar language appears in Philo, for whom “the body is a figure of speech for the people in whom all the parts, like those of a body, are brought into a *koinōnia* . . . thus the one man over a city, the one city over a district, the people which rules over other peoples, is like the head of a body, which derives its life wholly from the forces to be found in and over the head.” Eduard Schweizer, *sōma*, in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume 7, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 1055.

¹⁸ Curiously, Hobbes never appeals to, or even engages with, the Pauline language of the church as Christ’s body. Indeed, the only times he writes of “the body of Christ” are in reference to the eucharistic body, and always in polemics against the doctrine of transubstantiation. The close connection between the eucharistic “body of Christ” and the ecclesial “body of Christ” may help to explain Hobbes’s notable avoidance of this phrase in his ecclesiology, for central to his argument against Roman Catholic ecclesiology is an attack on the doctrine of transubstantiation, and in particular on the absurd, deceptive, and idolatrous claim that “one body” might be in more than one place simultaneously (IV.46, *passim*). If he were to acknowledge that the church is, in a sense, “the body of Christ,” this would sit uncomfortably with his insistence that the church’s primary manifestation is precisely in the form of the various *national churches*, as many as there happen to be Christian nations.

¹⁹ Cf. the modern metaphysical principle of substantial individuation (for Hobbes, case, always and entirely determined by a thing’s material space-time coordinates) by virtue of substance that increasingly comes to replace traditional Platonic views that takes particular things to be individuated by virtue of the relations they bear to universal forms in which they participate. See Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: the Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), *passim*.

represent divine authority in the world (as they do on accounts ranging from the ‘two swords’ of Gelasius to Calvin’s “duplex regimen in homine”²⁰), then the possibility would arise of God’s making mutually exclusive demands on the same human subject.

One implication of this view is that the defining principle of both a church and a commonwealth is the proper authority whereby each body is first assembled, and then goes on to act.²¹ Based on this assumption, Hobbes defines a church as “A company of men professing Christian Religion, united in the person of one Sovereign; at whose command they ought to assemble, and without whose authority they ought not to assemble” (III.39.248; 732).²² In emphasizing that the authority by which the church is gathered and then sent comes from God not directly, but is mediated by the sovereign, Hobbes articulates a theoretical account of how God’s consistency is to be preserved in ecclesio-political matters.

²⁰ “Duplex esse in homine regimen: alterum spirituale . . . alterum politicum, or iurisdictio spiritualis et temporalis.” John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis* III.19.15. In English: “there is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual . . . the second is political . . . These are usually called the ‘spiritual’ and ‘temporal’ jurisdictions.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Publishers, 2001), 1:847.

²¹ He spells out another hidden premise six chapters later, but only in the Latin edition: “Nam quod in congregatione hominum Authoritatem non habentium factum est, singulorum quidem factum est, si consenserunt, non autem Congregationis, totius, ut corporis unius, neque illorum, qui non consensurunt” (III.39.218; 733). Or, in English, “Therefore whatever is done in a congregation of men lacking authority is indeed the act of the individuals—at least of those who agreed to the action—but not an act of the whole congregation as one body, nor of those who disagreed.” Thus, if I were to visit someone in prison or give clothes to someone lacking them, but did so apart from the authorization of a particular church, then I do so as an individual, and not as a member of the church. My action may, therefore, have moral significance, but cannot have *ecclesial* significance unless it be authorized by the church.

²² In the Latin edition of 1666: “Ecclesia Christiana est Coetus hominum Religionem Christianam profitenium, unitorum in persona una summam habente Potestatem; cujus jussu convenire debent, & cujus injussu convenire non debent” (III.39.218; 733). The only real difference is that Hobbes uses the verb “debent” twice, whereas in English he uses “command” the first time, and “authority” the second, thus lending the passage further clarity through the parallelism.

Furthermore, it follows from the strict identity of church and state—or, to be more precise but also more tedious, the strict identity of any particular ecclesial community with a corresponding national civil community—that there is no catholic church. He explains:

there is on Earth, no such universall Church, as all Christians are bound to obey; because there is no power on Earth, to which all other Common-wealths are subject: There are Christians, in the Dominions of severall Princes and States; but every one of them is subject to that Common-wealth, whereof he is himself a member; and consequently, cannot be subject to the commands of any other Person. And therefore a Church, such a one as is capable to Command, to Judge, Absolve, Condemn, or do any other act, is the same thing with a Civil Common-wealth, consisting of Christian men; and is called a *Civill State*, for that the subjects of it are *Men*; and a *Church*, for that the subjects thereof are *Christians*. (III.39.248; 732)

Just as the terms ‘church’ and ‘commonwealth’ have different semantic meanings, but an identical semantic reference, so do the terms ‘Christian man’ and ‘subject.’ Hence, precisely because there is no universal political authority able to command, authorize, and order every particular local Christian community, there is likewise no such thing as a universal church.²³ From this he concludes that the distinction between “*Temporall and Spirituall Government*” has been “brought into the world, to make men see double, and mistake their *Lawfull Sovereign*” (III.39.248; 732-34), and thus constitutes both an ecclesiological and a political error of the worst sort.²⁴

²³ Hobbes speaks in *Leviathan* chapter 47 of “three knot[s] upon Christian Liberty” whose dissolution began with the Protestant Reformation, and which continues in his own time. The third, and outer knot, which Elizabeth ultimately dissolved, is the power of the papacy in England; the second, which was dissolved in early stages of the Civil War, was the episcopal hierarchy; and the third, the use of excommunication as what Ronald Beiner calls a “quasi-political punishment for disobedience,” was dissolved by Cromwell’s victory over the Presbyterians. What all three knots have in common is the assertion of political power by bishops outside of the auspices of a civil sovereign (IV.47.384-85; 1112-16). See Ronald Beiner, “Three Versions of the Politics of Conscience: Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke,” in *San Diego Law Review* 47.4 (Fall 2010), 1115-16.

²⁴ The Latin is much less lively, but perhaps more straightforward: “*Quare regimen Temporale, & Spirituale, verba inania sunt introducta eo fine, ut propter duos Status apparentes minus cognoscerent homines, utri eorum obedientiam praestarent*” (III.39.218; 733-35).

In addition to its programmatic hyper-Erastian ecclesiology, several specific features of *Leviathan* make the “Great Separation” thesis implausible. For instance, Hobbes unambiguously argues—from natural law—that a state not only has the right to legislate public worship, but in fact ought to do so. This is because “the state’s function is not just to keep the peace, but to coordinate worship so that uniform honor to the Almighty can be offered in the name of the whole commonwealth.”²⁵ Such worship ought to meet particular standards set by God: it should be visible, should entail prayers, thanksgiving, and gifts, should exclude any swearing by God’s name, and should manifest itself above all in obedience to the natural law.²⁶ Two features of Hobbes’s argument for such public worship are particularly striking. First, to anticipate a point to be made later in this chapter, Hobbes argues for this point from natural law alone, and not by any appeal to revelation. Second, he claims that a state’s failure to render such worship is not merely a failure on *Christian* grounds, but a manifest *political* failure, for these standards for worship apply to all commonwealths, and not only Christian ones. In other words, even a non-Christian—an Islamic state like Iran, or a secular state like the U.S.—is nonetheless obligated by the laws of nature, which are derivable by reason alone, to establish public, uniform worship along these lines Hobbes spells out. Indeed, Hobbes’s standards for public worship are found not in scripture—though a Christian Commonwealth would do well to conform its worship to the additional standards found in scripture—but are rather legislated by God in the

²⁵ The best treatment of the topic is Jeremy Waldron, “Hobbes on Public Worship,” in *Toleration and Its Limits*, eds. Melissa S. Williams and Jeremy Waldron, *Nomos* 48 (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 45. See also Richard Tuck, “Hobbes and Locke on Toleration,” in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1990), 153-171.

²⁶ See *Leviathan*, II.31.188-94; 558-74.

natural law available to all rational agents. Thus, this second instance of Hobbes's close alignment of church and state not only shows the implausibility of applying the 'Great Separation' thesis to Hobbes, but also challenges Lilla's second thesis on 'political theology.'

As attentive study of *Leviathan* will corroborate, this example is not exceptional, but one of many features that mark Hobbes's text as a consummate case of 'political theology.' Contrary to Lilla, Hobbes never calls for a moratorium on bringing theological or scriptural questions to bear on political deliberation, nor does he instantiate anything like an anti- or post-'political theology' by refusing to engage theology and scripture. Rather, and in stark opposition to Lilla's account, Hobbes's treatise, throughout its length, engages almost continually with scripture, and nearly as often with what Lilla means by 'theology'—the appeal to a nexus of "God, man, and world."²⁷

Even in its opening chapters, which Lilla especially lauds for having simply abandoned the 'divine nexus' instead turning to questions of anthropology, *Leviathan* is unmistakably a Christian text, and more specifically a 'political-theological' one: Hobbes refers to God or Christ in twenty-five of the first thirty-one chapters, and cites scripture or creeds in fourteen of them. And to adduce just one concrete example from these chapters, when Hobbes treats the construction of the Commonwealth via covenant, he adds that no oath should be taken in the process, because, as he underscores by means of some classically Protestant polemic against oaths, "Swearing unnecessarily by God, is but prophaning of his name," and that

²⁷ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, passim. See 67n88 above for a full catalog of references.

“the Oath addes nothing to the Obligation,” because “a Covenant, if lawfull, binds in the sight of God, without the Oath” (I.14.71; 216-18).²⁸

But all of this is just to offer ad hoc counter-examples to Lilla’s two theses on Hobbes. As an answer to Lilla’s use of Hobbes, these observations can be only preliminary. A sufficient response—which I offer in the remainder of this essay—will show, by appeal to the broader context of the treatise and of Hobbes’s project in general, why Lilla’s account is mistaken. Responding properly to Lilla’s misreading will require displaying in a ‘thick’ way what Hobbes is doing so as to show why Lilla’s interpretation fails.²⁹ But a few more steps are needed to prepare the way. The next section of this chapter provides several layers of context for making more intelligible Hobbes’s treatise itself and Lilla’s deployment of it in his narrative. To show the implausibility of Lilla’s reading, I first connect his interpretation to the wider field of Hobbes scholarship (something Lilla never does himself), for as I suggest, it is this tradition of interpretation into which Lilla’s reading falls. This sets the stage for an adjudication amongst various proposals for interpreting *Leviathan*, and finally for my own positive proposal.

²⁸ In the same chapter, while discussing the logic of contract, Hobbes takes the opportunity to condemn the schoolmen for their distinction between congruent and condign merit, reminding his readers instead that salvation comes “by the Free Grace of God onely” (I.14.14; 68).

²⁹ I allude here to Gilbert Ryle’s concept of “thick description,” which he articulates in the 1968 lecture “The Thinking of Thoughts: What is ‘Le Penseur’ doing?,” University Lectures, The University of Saskatchewan, Reprinted in Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Essays 1929-1968: Collected Papers, Volume 2* (London: Routledge, 2009), 494-510. The term “thick description” has gained wider currency in a second sense it gained from Clifford Geertz’s later use of it to characterize a particular mode of anthropological method. But here, I intend, in Ryle’s sense, to offer a ‘thicker’ description of Hobbes’s political theory in *Leviathan* by attending to the various contexts I treat in this chapter.

1.2. The structure of *Leviathan*

In what follows, I consider the structure of *Leviathan*, pose two disputed second-order questions about the significance of this structure to its argument, examine two standard but problematic answers to those questions, and then consider some recent challenges to those answers. A brief overview of *Leviathan's* structure and how that structure relates to its content will be helpful here, before taking up these second-level questions about how to relate different aspects of it.

Leviathan comprises an introduction, forty-seven chapters divided into four parts, and a “review and conclusion.”³⁰ The bulk of the treatise—by far—consists of the four parts.³¹ For several reasons, it makes sense to take these four parts as falling into two halves.³² The first part, “Of Man,” begins by sketching an anthropology commensurate with the mechanistic, materialistic, and deterministic universe that Hobbes assumes throughout the treatise. This account culminates in a rational argument to show both the need for and legitimacy of the absolute sovereign state.³³ The second part, “Of Commonwealth,” spells out in detail what sort of governance best suits those agents described in the first part, thereby fleshing out the extended metaphor of the commonwealth as “Artificiall Man” (Introduction; 20). Together, parts I and II compose *Leviathan's* first—more abstract, less historical—half that constitutes just under half of the total text. Parts III and IV, “Of a Christian

³⁰ The Latin edition of 1666 adds to this an Appendix that, in three chapters, provides a dialogue between “A” and “B” (whose questions and answers bear a keen resemblance to the exchanges of Anselm and Boso) on the Nicene Creed, on the concept of heresy, and on some theological objections to *Leviathan*.

³¹ Although some scholars refer to these parts imprecisely as “books,” I speak of a book only in reference to the treatise as a whole.

³² More on this below, where I offer my own model for interpreting the treatise.

³³ The significance of calling this a “rational” argument here will be clearer as this chapter proceeds, but here it will suffice to define a “rational” argument, as one that begins with clearly defined terms from which conclusions can be derived with certitude.

Common-Wealth" and "Of the Kingdome of Darknesse," form a second half slightly larger than the first.³⁴ The chief interpretive problem surrounding the structure of the treatise concerns whether, how, and to what extent the second half contributes to the main argument of the treatise, given that Hobbes appears already to have offered a full argument for absolute state sovereignty in the first half.

In Eric Brandon's statement of the problem, *Leviathan* consists of "two halves of very different natures. The first . . . presents a largely secular political philosophy that explores the nature of man, the infamous Hobbesian state of nature, the best government, and related issues in political philosophy." The second half, by contrast, "displays an explicit religious orientation that involves lengthy Scriptural exegesis and creative interpretations of Christian history and tradition."³⁵ Yet even to frame an interpretation of *Leviathan* in terms of its two halves is to depart somewhat from the scholarly orthodoxy of the past two centuries.

As J.G.A. Pocock remarked nearly fifty years ago: "The two books [of *Leviathan*] in which Hobbes expounds Christian faith and its sacred history are almost exactly equal in length to Books I and II; yet the attitude of far too many scholars towards them has traditionally been, first, that they aren't really there, second, that Hobbes didn't really mean them."³⁶ Two broad reasons seem to contribute to this intentional forgetting of the second half. One is the apparent

³⁴ Parts I and II comprise 192 pages, and Parts III and IV comprise 202 pages in both the original fair copy MS and first printed edition. For all matters related to the textual history of *Leviathan*, in both its English and Latin versions, see Noel Malcolm, "Textual Introduction," in *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes, vol. 3, Leviathan: Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 197-325.

³⁵ Eric Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan: Civil and Religious Authority Combined* (London: Continuum International, 2007), 2.

³⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics, Language and Time* (London: Methuen, 1972), 148.

superfluity of the second half to the main argument, and another its thoroughly theological content, for—if one begins by assuming that *Leviathan* aims at a ‘Great Separation’ and a corresponding dismantling of ‘political theology’—such theology must remain a surd. In the preface to her Gifford Lectures, Jean Bethke Elshtain reports that by the time of her own education in political theory in the mid-twentieth century, it was clear that “the theological backdrop to political concepts had fallen away in the study of political thought; indeed, there were some editions of Hobbes’s great work *Leviathan* that eliminated the entire second half.”³⁷ Although “Hobbes’s project was a political theology,” she explains, this feature became increasingly obscured “as the ‘canon’ of Western political thought got ‘normalized’”³⁸ As Elshtain’s remark makes evident, the problem of relating the two halves is closely bound up with a related problem, namely how to interpret Hobbes’s theology and scriptural exegesis.

Indeed, Hobbes himself suggests an intimate connection between these two distinctions: that between the two halves and that between ‘secular’ and ‘theological’ argumentation. As he begins Part III, and thus the second half, Hobbes signals a clear shift. He explains that, though he has so far articulated an account of politics “from the Principles of Nature only,”³⁹ which applies to any political order

³⁷ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), xiv. Two of the most influential introductions to *Leviathan* hardly mention Hobbes’ religion at all, let alone the fact that over half the book is concerned with scriptural interpretation and theological argument: Michael Oakeshott, “Introduction to *Leviathan*,” collected in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1978), 1-74; C. B. MacPherson, “Introduction” to *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (London: Penguin, 1968).

³⁸ Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self*, xiv-xv. Cf. A. P. Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14.

³⁹ In the Latin, he adds the phrase: “nimirum à Definitionibus vocabulorum consensus hominum approbatus” (III.32.173; 577). In English: “namely, from the definitions of words according to human agreement.” As I will suggest in chapter 5 below, Hobbes increasingly came to emphasize reason as essentially the derivation of implications from properly defined terms.

whatsoever—whether Christian, Mahomedan, or Gentile—he will now express the same in the particular terms of “a Christian Common-wealth, whereof there dependeth much on Supernaturall Revelations of the Will of God.” This difference necessitates that “the ground of [his] Discourse must be not only the Naturall Word of God, but also the Propheticall” (III.32.195; 576). It is primarily from scripture, Hobbes explains, that he will derive “the Principles of [his] Discourse concerning . . . Christian Common-wealths,” for “by wise and learned interpretation, and carefull ratiocination, all rules and precepts necessary to the knowledge of our duty both to God and man . . . may be easily deduced” from scripture” (III.32.198; 584).

These remarks—if interpreted straightforwardly—would seem to provide a clear answer to the question of the relation between the two halves: the first provides a purely rational account of politics which will remain normative for any human community whatsoever, and the second provides an account of the “Christian Common-wealth” in particular. As should already be obvious, however, this straightforward interpretation of Hobbes’s structural signaling is incompatible with Lilla’s reading. Indeed, if Lilla is right, Hobbes aims above all in this book to show that appeals to scripture, and to “the will of God” have no place in political deliberation. But why dismiss something that Hobbes seems to state so clearly? As we shall see, there are at least two dominant justifications for doing so.

2.3. Traditional Models for Reading *Leviathan*

Though Lilla’s reading of *Leviathan*, as I have already intimated, is misguided both in its interpretation of the treatise itself and in its claims about Hobbes’s

broader intentions for the text, in neither case is his interpretation unprecedented.⁴⁰ In fact, it fits squarely within a dominant tradition of reading *Leviathan*. His two theses about Hobbes are but coarser, oversimplified versions of mainstream interpretations of *Leviathan*. This tradition has assumed that—although constituting well over half the text—*Leviathan's* theological elements add little or nothing to Hobbes's account of politics, and thus can be unproblematically ignored. Thus, in spite of both the plain sense of the text and Hobbes's subsequent protestations of sincerity, *Leviathan's* readers have, for much of its history, either simply ignored, or else dismissed Hobbes's scriptural arguments and theological descriptions of the world as either mere window dressing or rhetorical smokescreen, thereby dismissing his Christian rhetoric as insincere, and his specifically Christian modes of argumentation (from scripture and doctrine) as irrelevant to what the text *really* means.

Before assessing competing approaches to *Leviathan*, it will help to keep in mind two distinct—but intimately related—questions about how properly to interpret Hobbes's *Leviathan*. These are, first, *What is the significance of the scriptural exegesis and theological argumentation in Leviathan for the overall aims of the treatise?* And second, *What is the proper relationship of parts 1 and 2 to parts 3 and 4 of the treatise?*

⁴⁰ David Gauthier opens his classic study *The Logic of Leviathan* with a sentence that anticipates the maxim Lilla ascribes to Hobbes: "To understand morals and politics, understand man." David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1. Yet, though in the end Gauthier's interpretation of Hobbes's political science is deeply similar to Lilla's, Gauthier is innocent of Lilla's crimes against the text for two reasons: 1) Gauthier is not an intellectual historian, but a political theorist; thus his account is responsible to a different set of standards; and 2) Gauthier's final, appendix-like, chapter, entitled "God," does in fact acknowledge the positive claims Hobbes makes about God—he just insists that God is superfluous to Hobbes's treatise. Thus, my critique of Gauthier is that, while he acknowledges what Hobbes says, his interpretation distorts what Hobbes *means*. Lilla, by contrast, is guilty not only of distorting Hobbes's meaning, but also of making inaccurate claims about what Hobbes actually *says*.

Lilla's account of Hobbes—as does the broader tradition he follows—offers (at least implicit) answers to both, and so assessing Lilla's two theses will require being able to answer these questions.

These questions should not be conflated. Though the answer one offers to either question necessarily shapes one's answer to the other, it doesn't decide the answer to the other. For instance, two interpreters may hold the same view on the first question (both may say that *Leviathan's* engagement with scripture and theology is subversive, and intends to undermine Christian doctrine), but disagree on the second (one interpreter might say that the second half is a mere appendage, and thus utterly dispensable, while the other might hold that it achieves an important function in Hobbes's argument, namely to show Christian readers the absurdity of their beliefs), or vice versa.

For the dominant tradition of Hobbes interpretation, the two questions are treated as nearly indistinguishable. This is because, given the unambiguous answer to the first question—that *Leviathan's* theology is irrelevant to its basic argument, and thus can be ignored—it follows implicitly that the only elements of Hobbes's argument worth attending to are contained entirely in the first half: the rest of the treatise, one is left concluding, is filled with Hobbes's attacks on theological views that were already obsolete by the seventeenth century, and are certainly no longer relevant today. Such dismissals have typically been proffered on the grounds that the theological parts of *Leviathan* are a necessary bit of obfuscation in order to get the book—and its author—safely past the Christian censors, or else as a vestigial trace of late medieval residue in an otherwise modern political treatise.⁴¹ I will, however, not

⁴¹ Gauthier, *Logic of Leviathan*, passim, but esp. 204-06. Thomas Pangle represents a variation of this view in his suggestion that Hobbes appeals to scripture and doctrine because that is what his

only offer differing answers to these two questions, but will also suggest that attention to the difference between the two questions is important. The interpretive model I propose later in this chapter—and deploy in part 2 of the essay—attends closely to this difference.⁴²

Within this mainstream tradition of interpreting *Leviathan*, we can distinguish broadly between two broad channels. The first contends that the theological and scriptural engagement in general, and the second half in particular, does not fundamentally affect Hobbes's argument for state sovereignty, and thus can be easily ignored. The second, similarly, results in the exclusion of theology and scripture from the purview of Hobbes's proper political argument, but does so in an importantly different way, in suggesting that Hobbes's use of theology and scripture and the second half are fundamentally ironic, and that once their ironic function is properly understood, they can be safely removed from consideration in one's study of the text, and thus essentially ignored.

The first model for interpreting the place of theology and scripture in *Leviathan* is simply to ignore it. In Gauthier's classic account of Hobbes's political theory, he states explicitly that Hobbes's "theistic suppositions are logically superfluous" to the argument of *Leviathan*:

Neither the formal structure of Hobbes's theory, expressed in our formal definitions and the conclusions we have drawn from them, nor

context required, but that he subtly undermines these conventions. Thomas Pangle, "A Critique of Hobbes's Critique of Biblical and Natural Religion in *Leviathan*," in *Jewish Political Studies Review* 4.2 (Fall 1992), 34, 52-53.

⁴² I will not address in any detail how or why these faulty interpretations of *Leviathan* came to be—an etiology of such readings is beyond the scope of this project. I will, however, sketch two representative positions on how to read *Leviathan* that—like Lilla's reading—either ignore or downplay the presence of scriptural and theological argumentation in it. In so doing, I will address the perceived merits of each, and then evaluate each for its ability to interpret the text. This will then occasion my own proposal for how to make sense of the entirety of *Leviathan*, both with respect to its own integrity as a text and with respect to its place within Hobbes's corpus.

the material content, expressed in our material definitions and their consequences, depends in any important way on theistic presuppositions. Hobbes's theory is intended for rational men who aim at their own preservation, whatever their religious views may be.⁴³

Gauthier's approach is representative of those who simply find *Leviathan's* theological component a strange appendage, a leftover feature of Hobbes' late medieval context, but extraneous to the treatise's argument for sovereignty. Given both that "God plays only a secondary part in the system,"⁴⁴ and that contemporary political theory has no need of the 'God' hypothesis, Hobbes's references to God and scripture can and should be excluded from consideration. Similarly, John Rawls begins his most detailed exposition of Hobbes by blithely remarking, "The first thing I am going to ignore are Hobbes's theological assumptions."⁴⁵

This strategy of clearing away the parts of *Leviathan* that don't fit the concerns of contemporary secular liberal political theory allows for more focused attention on questions of importance to political liberalism.⁴⁶ For most of the past century, the standard approach to the *Leviathan* has been dominated by a concern with identifying and analyzing the most basic form of Hobbes' argument for absolute sovereignty. Thus, an emphasis has been placed on how and to what extent Hobbes derives his normative points from his scientific axioms. Debates amongst these

⁴³ Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, 178.

⁴⁴ Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, 178.

⁴⁵ Rawls, John. *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 26.

⁴⁶ Martinich helpfully characterizes the approach of Gauthier and others, who have expurgated Hobbes' theology in the following way: "Whereas Hobbes argues for a certain set of conclusion C, from premises P1, P2, ..., Pn, they purport to show that these conclusions are derivable from a subset of premises, P1, ..., Pi, which do not contain the concept of God. They then conclude that this proves that Hobbes himself did not rely upon the concept of God in proving C." A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 44.

readers have focused especially on the role of game theory in Hobbes's argument, etc. The dominant approach has been to study Hobbes's treatise as a means of thinking through difficult questions that are important to contemporary political theorists and philosophers: What is the nature of governance? What is the nature of sovereignty? How are the concepts of consent and authorization related? How does each of these concepts relate to governance and sovereignty? One would be hard-pressed to find any contemporary thinkers who find Hobbes's account of these matters ultimately compelling. Nonetheless, Hobbes's particular formulations of these problems provide rich fodder for theoretical inquiry and debate, both because of the power of Hobbes's thought itself, and because of his early and prominent place in the genealogy of liberal politics and modern theorizing about the state.

This approach has been especially fruitful for those interested in how to demonstrate the legitimacy of state governance. Though few—if any—modern commentators agree with Hobbes's conclusions, they find his text especially useful for thinking through problems of legitimacy, authorization, and representation. As Gregory Kavka remarks in the introduction to a monograph on Hobbes's moral and political theory: "This book is less concerned with what Hobbes said for its own sake than with what may be learned from what he said. In particular, it is concerned with his moral and political ideas insofar as they are relevant today. So the text corrects, modifies and departs from Hobbes where necessary."⁴⁷

This attitude is invited, partly, by Hobbes's elusive mode of argumentation: The intersections of the theological and scientific argument in *Leviathan* can be difficult to follow; it's often not immediately clear how different aspects of his

⁴⁷ Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), *xiv*.

argument are supposed to fit together. But the attitude is also rooted in the particular interests of those who have interpreted *Leviathan*: if all a reader wants from this text is fodder for a theory of governance, then one is likely to focus on its discussions of obligation and positive law rather than on the history of Israelite prophecy or the nature of the apostles' mission. After arguing that the best Hobbes scholarship since the 1960s has "typically been ahistorical," Martinich explains: "These philosophers have been concerned with the logical skeleton of Hobbes's argument. They have abstracted from both the larger conceptual issues of his philosophy . . . and their historical context . . . They do so out of a strange kind of respect for him. Since they aspire to ascertain the best argument for a certain position and read Hobbes because they think that he can often help them attain their aspiration, they are happy to abandon his own argument when they think he fails them." He concludes, "By focusing exclusively on the narrowly logical structure of his thought, they present a bloodless model of Hobbes's philosophy."⁴⁸

Perhaps the best-known account of the relationship between the two halves of *Leviathan* comes from Leo Strauss, the chief proponent of the second mainstream approach to interpreting Hobbes's treatise. Unlike adherents of the first model, Strauss acknowledges the importance of accounting for both halves, but also thinks the political theory articulated by the first half is patently incompatible with Christianity. Thus, he ingeniously but improbably argues that the second half has two intentions: first, to show that Hobbes's political theory in the first half is consistent with the tenets of Christianity, but at the same time (and primarily) to undermine his readers' belief in Christianity. Applying his famous thesis about

⁴⁸ A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 11.

persecuted philosophers to Hobbes,⁴⁹ Strauss takes a rather blithe view about this: “It is relatively easy to read between the lines of [Hobbes’s] books.”⁵⁰ Strauss’s claim that the twofold aim of Hobbes’s theological argumentation is, in fact, to undermine his readers’ belief in Christianity and to sneak the book past its Christian censors has highly vocal proponents to this day.⁵¹ Thus, the Straussian approach, although paying attention to the theological argumentation—even, in a certain sense, assigning Hobbes’s theology a central place in its interpretation of the text—ultimately renders the theology irrelevant to Hobbes’s argument, effectively concurring with those who simply ignore Hobbes’ theology. On both views, Hobbes’s politics and Hobbes’s theological vision of history are finally unrelated.

In either of its forms, the mainstream approach to interpreting Hobbes’s engagements with theology and scripture in *Leviathan* has been to dismiss them as being irrelevant to the treatise’s main aim, which is to sketch and defend a model of absolute state sovereignty. Commensurate with the dismissal of Hobbes’s theology is a corresponding decision either simply to ignore the second half, or to conclude that it has some instrumental function contrary to its literal meaning, and then

⁴⁹ “Rather than simply assuming that works like Plato’s *Republic*, Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*, or Locke’s *Second Treatise* mean precisely what they say on the surface, one must be attuned to contradictions, repetitions, and ambiguities down to the smallest points of detail as containing possible clues to what the author secretly intended. Strauss brought the skills of a literary detective to the study of philosophical texts.” Steven B. Smith, “Introduction” to *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

⁵⁰ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 34.

⁵¹ Michael Oakeshott argues that Hobbes’ political works contain both an esoteric doctrine for the initiated, and an exoteric doctrine for the common reader. The latter relies on ideas that have been implanted in us through cultural formation, whereas the former is consistent with, and depends directly upon, his philosophical system. Michael Oakeshott “Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes,” in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1978), 80-132. For a judicious account of the problem of negotiating the possibility of insincere religious confessions in early modern texts, see David Wootton, “Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period,” in *Journal of Modern History* 60 (December 1988), 695-730.

dismiss it from relevant consideration.⁵² In either case—that of Gauthier or Strauss—the consensus was that whatever Hobbes may have argued in terms of theology and scripture was irrelevant to the basic argument of the treatise, which was both derived from, and presented in, terms of reason alone.

2.4. Recent Challenges to Hobbesian Orthodoxy

Two strands of Hobbes scholarship in the last few decades have begun to challenge the older orthodoxy, which had not taken with sufficient seriousness the significance of Hobbes's historical context (both in terms of seventeenth-century Protestant developments and in terms of events surrounding the English civil war) or (within his work itself) of his engagements with Christian theology and scripture. As recent scholarship has increasingly shown, this approach has ignored two important aspects of *Leviathan*: its diversity of arguments; and its dependence upon theological and scriptural argumentation. This shift has been due, in large part, to the so-called "Cambridge School" of history, led above all by Quentin Skinner and his disciples. The principal features of this trend of reading Hobbes are an attention to the broader intellectual and historical context of Hobbes's career. "The process of recovering the historical Hobbes began with Skinner's call in the 1960s" for "a more detailed consideration of the actual interaction between Hobbes and the other

⁵² Distinct from Strauss's thesis that Hobbes deploys Christian theology in order subtly to undermine his readers' belief are authors who simply state that Hobbes is an atheist who openly mocks Christianity. See Jürgen Overhoff, "The Theology of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*," in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51 (2000), 527-554. One of the most remarkable—because outlandish—claims about Hobbes's supposed atheism is rooted in the fact that no bible is visible in the scene displayed on *Leviathan*'s frontispiece. Georges Barthel, "La bible dans le *Leviathan*," in *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 49 (1980), 187.

theorists of his time,” especially the so-called ‘Engagement theorists,’ suggesting that “their common response to political events might repay examination.”⁵³

This shift of attention by students of Hobbes to the broader intellectual developments that provide context for Hobbes’s writings has been accompanied by a formally unconnected trend by other scholars to attend more intentionally to the importance of Hobbes’s theology for his own thought, and as an interesting case in the history of Protestant theology after the Reformation but before the advent of high baroque rationalism.⁵⁴ Beginning perhaps with Pocock’s “Time and Eschatology” (1970), a case has been made for taking Hobbes’s theological arguments seriously—that is, neither ignoring nor dismissing his engagements with scripture, but, more importantly, attending to the work that theology achieves in Hobbes’s argument.⁵⁵ This has been a slow movement. Even as recently as 2013, a

⁵³ Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 112-13.

⁵⁴ It’s interesting that Locke—even though his thought is in many respects more radical than Hobbes’s in its proposed revisions to medieval Christendom—is typically taken more seriously as a Christian theologian than is Hobbes.

⁵⁵ The most prominent scholar amongst those who aim to take Hobbes’s theology seriously—and also the most controversial—is A. P. Martinich, who has insisted upon the outlandish claim that Hobbes is, above all, an “orthodox Calvinist,” and that attention to Hobbes’s “Calvinism” makes intelligible the overall argument of *Leviathan*. As the case of Martinich makes evident, a frustrating irony lies in the fact that many of those who most recognize the importance of theology in Hobbes’s work are themselves somewhat tone-deaf to Christian theology. Such tone-deafness leads them not only to make strange and tenuous claims, but also to miss important nuances. See especially A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*. Critiques of Martinich’s thesis abound. See, inter alia, Eric Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes’s Leviathan*, 10-12, 17. For a critique of Martinich that is attenuated by a stubborn insistence on Hobbes as being a “secret atheist,” see Edwin Curley, “Calvin or Hobbes, or Hobbes as an Orthodox Christian,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34 (1996), 257-71. This provoked a reply from Martinich and a counter-reply from Curley. A sober assessment of the Martinich-Curley debate is found in George Wright, “Curley and Martinich in Dubious Battle,” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40 (2002), 461-76.

There are two notable exceptions to this trend of tone-deaf interpretations of Hobbes’s theology. The first is George Wright, whose work is keenly attuned to Hobbes’s context as a Christian theologian, not just in seventeenth-century England, but in the broader context of the history of Christian theology, from antiquity on. See especially George Wright, *Religion, Politics, and Thomas Hobbes*. The other, is Michael Gillespie, a political theorist who not only attends to the theological shape of Hobbes’s argument, but does so with both theological nuance and keen attention to

scholar can complain that most of the attention paid by Hobbes scholarship to theological questions continues to be limited to two only marginally theological problems: whether Hobbes is a secret atheist, and whether his system needs God to work.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the shape of scholarship has evolved over the past several decades. Just as recent scholarship has challenged the long-held assumption that the argument of *Leviathan* is strictly in terms of the mechanistic civil science, so also has a recent trend emerged of reading the theological portions of the treatise more carefully. My twofold claim that *Leviathan* is of theological interest and that theology is significant for *Leviathan*, thus stands in line with a recent trend in Hobbes scholarship. “Although an orphaned subject among scholars of religion, the theology of Thomas Hobbes is now among the most contested issues in Hobbes studies and the study of early liberal political theory.”⁵⁷ As will be clear from what follows, both of these ‘revisionary’ trends in Hobbes scholarship provide helpful ways of approaching both of my questions about interpreting *Leviathan*.

In response to the first question, which concerns the place of theology in *Leviathan*, I contend that are good reasons, rooted both in Hobbes’s social context and in the text of *Leviathan* itself, for taking seriously the particularity of Hobbes’s Christian theological discourse. First, there is little reason to read Hobbes’s work as though he *thinks* otherwise than what he *says*. Moreover, we have no access to

Hobbes’s historical context in seventeenth-century Christian political theory. See Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ A. P. Martinich, *Hobbes* (Routledge, 2013), 176-207.

⁵⁷ Matthew Rose, “Hobbes as Political Theologian,” *Political Theology* 14.1 (2013), 5. Though the account Rose offers of Hobbes is itself unremarkable, it is perhaps the first careful and detailed engagement with Thomas Hobbes by a self-identified Christian theologian in many years. This claim should not be taken to discount what John Milbank has insightfully argued about Hobbes in *Theology and Social Theory*. But that engagement is hardly detailed, citing cursorily only six lines from Hobbes. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 14, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23.

Hobbes's mind itself, and thus without strong countervailing evidence, we must take *Leviathan* for what it claims to be, namely an exercise in Christian political theology. Certainly, Strauss's famous thesis seems *prima facie* plausible, namely that if an author's work is produced in a context where unorthodox views are liable to be punished, then her readers are well-advised to be alert for fissures in the text that might point to an esoteric meaning encrypted within the exoteric teaching available on a superficial reading. But Hobbes's positive account of Christian doctrine is hardly well-suited to protect him from being branded as heretical.⁵⁸ For just one instance, take his view of hell: he suggests that the language of "Everlasting Fire" is merely metaphorical, but that the everlastingness of hell is quite literal. He speculates that, following the Last Judgment, the damned are consigned to a place somewhere on earth, where—amidst "torture, both of body and mind"—they manage to marry, procreate, and raise children, before being killed at some unspecified time. There is no saving grace offered to the children of the damned, who, like their parents, live a tortured, but otherwise ordinary human existence, producing children of their own before likewise being tortured to death. This endless succession of generations of hellions is what enables hell to be everlasting, though (graciously) no individual hellion is given everlasting life.⁵⁹ Furthermore, J. G. A. Pocock adds to this a point about Hobbes's character: "the difficulty remains of imagining why a notoriously arrogant thinker, vehement in his dislike of 'insignificant speech,' should have written and afterwards defended sixteen chapters

⁵⁸ Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology," 167-68.

⁵⁹ For Hobbes's doctrine of hell, see III.38.242-45; 708-18; III.40.338-40; 970-76; III.44.344-46; 988-94; Appendix I; 1058-60. See also Christopher Scott McClure, "Hell and Anxiety in Hobbes's *Leviathan*," in *The Review of Politics* 73 (2011), 1-27.

of what he held to be nonsense, and exposed them to the scrutiny of a public which did not consider this kind of thing nonsense at all.”⁶⁰

This response, of course, leaves untouched the second half of Strauss’s thesis. If one wants to argue that Hobbes’s theological rhetoric in *Leviathan* is insincere, one would do better to argue not that Hobbes includes the theological material as a means of protecting himself from inquisitors, but that Hobbes’s rhetoric functions to subvert Christian theology by showing how absurd or simply undesirable many of its implications are.⁶¹ But second, whatever hidden authorial intention might lie behind the text (even if we could discern this) matters far less for its interpretation than what the text itself actually says. The specter of Strauss’s thesis still threatens those who take Hobbes’s theology seriously, but still, an ironic reading of *Leviathan*’s theological rhetoric would need to emphasize the *effect* of the text, rather than any purportedly conscious authorial intention.

Hence, third—and most important—is simply the historical fact that Hobbes writes as a Christian, to a predominantly Christian audience, employing explicitly Christian rhetoric. Whatever Hobbes himself may have thought, his text contributes to a particular conversation. And though one long-term effect of Hobbes’s contribution may be to subvert this tradition in certain ways, that fact hardly demands that we ignore its place within that tradition. Thus, because Lilla’s account is so determined by the claim that one long-term effect of Hobbes’s project is the

⁶⁰ Pocock, “Time, History, and Eschatology,” 162.

⁶¹ This view is articulated today most effectively and consistently by Edmund Curley, “I Durst Not Write So Boldly,” or How to Read Hobbes’s Theological-Political Treatise, in *Hobbes e Spinoza*, ed. by Daniela Bostrenghi (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1992), 497-593; cf. Edwin Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes” in J. W. Coleman and C. W. Morris, eds., *Rational Commitment and Social Justice: Essays for Gregory Kavka* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 90-121. For a slightly weaker form, see Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 13-16, et passim.

decline of 'political theology' in the West, he ignores the fact that, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues *theologically* to convince a Christian readership to see themselves, God, and the world in an "indissoluble divine nexus."⁶² So, even if we had evidence that Hobbes's Christianity was insincere, and even if that insincerity changed the way we read the text, such considerations would have little if any effect on the shape or the significance of the theological argument presented in *Leviathan*. In short, to dismiss its theological argumentation as insincere or irrelevant is to fail to take *Leviathan* seriously on the terms of its own self-presentation.⁶³

Granted, a purely secular account of politics might be extracted from *Leviathan* by attending only to those claims Hobbes derives from reason alone, effectively bowdlerizing the text by removing those passages where he appeals to Christian scripture and doctrine to buttress his political claims, or even worse, to make specifically political recommendations (such as a Christian sovereign's obligation to declare publicly that Jesus is the Christ).⁶⁴ Yet when the book is read from cover to cover, the account of politics one finds therein is self-consciously both informed by and responsible to what its author claims as authoritative Christian teaching about how humans are to live. However one interprets the significance of

⁶² I quote Lilla here tongue in cheek, because this is precisely the mode of vision he insists that Hobbes abolishes from political discourse. See *The Stillborn God*, 21, 50, 55, 57-58, and 218.

⁶³ I concur on this point with Wright, *Religion, Politics, and Thomas Hobbes*, 245: "Hobbes may have been sincere in what he said, but I do not think we can know. This would apply both to his inner convictions and to the passion one finds in *Leviathan*. The latter may be counterfeit, and we cannot know the former. But, were it possible to know, we would not be much assisted in understanding his thought. It seems clear however that he meant what he said; that is, he wished as a theorist to be taken at his word." Cf. Brandon, *Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 15: "[W]hatever Hobbes's true beliefs on these issues, it doesn't really matter when trying to understand *Leviathan*," because its interpretation "does not depend upon Hobbes's actual beliefs on the religious matters that he discusses."

⁶⁴ Something like this is what Gauthier does in *Logic of Leviathan*.

theology in *Leviathan*, it cannot be denied that explicitly theological argumentation comprises over half the book.

To focus on Hobbes's political recommendations in isolation from the broader context of this theological vision may yield interesting conclusions. But these will be primarily of interest to those whose secular political philosophers, whose aim in studying *Leviathan* is "not primarily in what he said, but in what [they] can accept and use of what he said" about such topics as obligation and authorization, in order to account for, to critique, and ultimately to defend the liberal political orders in which they live.⁶⁵ Such an approach fails to account for the importance of Hobbes's contribution to the ongoing conversation within Christian theology about the relationship of divine authority to human authority. As a theologian, rather than as a political philosopher, I am most interested in Hobbes's contribution to this broader conversation. Nor does this distinction, even if it largely absolves Gauthier, get Lilla off the hook. For a secular political philosopher's use of *Leviathan's* argument differs profoundly from what Lilla's project attempts. The former is unconcerned with the complexities of Hobbes's overall position: it wants simply to extract a useable model for theorizing about political order. Lilla's project, by contrast, purports to be an account of what Hobbes said. This subjects Lilla's account to a different set of standards, including, notably, the need to get Hobbes right.

Thus, while granting that these competing approaches have their own merits in certain contexts,⁶⁶ I assume that Hobbes's *Leviathan* is both sympathetically and

⁶⁵ Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, v.

⁶⁶ Indeed, if one is asking the question, 'Did Hobbes himself really believe in an imminent return of Jesus Christ?' or 'Did Hobbes really believe that his sins were atoned for by Jesus' blood?' then

fruitfully read precisely as an exercise in Christian political theology—both in Lilla’s sense of “political theology” (namely as a way of addressing political problems by appealing to the “divine nexus”) and in the more conventional sense of the term I sketched in the introduction (as an extended conversation about the mutual significance of Christian theology and state-centered modern politics). Rather than speculate about what Hobbes may have really believed, one would do better to attend to the concrete theological description of the world he offers in *Leviathan*, and to assess that vision as presented in the text itself.

2.5. On the Relationship of the Two Halves of *Leviathan*

Having answered the first question—about the role of theology in *Leviathan*—by concluding that it plays a positive role, and thus must be attended to, we must now turn to the second. What is the role of the second half in relation to the first? And in connecting the two questions, we may express the first in a new form: *What is the relation of the scriptural exegesis and theological argumentation in Leviathan to the argument for absolute state sovereignty and account of effective governance?*

One especially helpful strategy for approaching the question about the place of the second half in the overall argument of *Leviathan* is to attend to the role of rhetoric in the text, as well as to Hobbes’s shifting views on the value of rhetoric.

A recent trend amongst Hobbes scholars has been to acknowledge the complexity of *Leviathan’s* argument, and in particular, its way of appealing to different kinds of readers by use of correspondingly different modes of argument. In

the Strauss-Curley approach might be useful, though these sorts of questions are profoundly fraught, and—even if answerable, which seems unlikely—only marginally relevant to how one reads *Leviathan*. Likewise, if one is asking, ‘How might North American liberal democracies best insulate themselves from destabilizing popular unrest?’ then Gauthier’s approach may be most helpful. My set of questions simply differs from both of these.

one of the first studies to acknowledge the diversity of Hobbes's method in his overarching argument about political sovereignty, Marshall Missner identified three broad types: 1) the geometrical mode by which Hobbes derived his formal claims about human nature and politics, and which had received most attention from scholars; 2) a prudential appeal to the reader's "qualified introspection"; and 3) a set of arguments from scripture.⁶⁷ Hobbes employed the latter two rhetorically, Missner showed, in order to convince those readers either unable or unwilling to track the first, which is his more basic, scientific argument. As Missner explained,

the differences between science and prudence are that science is general, can be certain, involves reason, and is used by only a few men; whereas prudence is particular, probable, involves experience and is used by all men. [Yet] both methods can be used for the same general topics even though the results they will yield will have different characteristics . . . Hobbes is suggesting . . . that one can approach a topic and just use prudence or one can investigate the same topic with the method of science. Science is obviously the superior method, but unfortunately it is one that can be used only by a few men.⁶⁸

In so doing, he challenged the scholarly consensus that i) the argument of *Leviathan* depended entirely upon Hobbes's deductive, scientific method; and that ii) only those passages in *Leviathan* that either lay out the scientific argument, or articulate its consequences, are really worth attending to. Attention to Hobbes's introduction, which calls for prudential introspection, and the second half, which is littered with scriptural arguments, are also important parts of the treatise.

Yet Missner ultimately concluded that—although these other parts should not be ignored, neither should they be considered a proper part of Hobbes's philosophy:

⁶⁷ Marshall Missner, "Hobbes's Method in *Leviathan*," in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38.4 (Fall 1977), 607-21.

⁶⁸ Missner, "Hobbes's Method in *Leviathan*," 614.

Hobbes thought that his ideas formed a formal system like geometry and that his conclusions had the certainty of geometry. He included other types of arguments to convince people whom he thought would be unable to understand the more difficult, "scientific" reasoning, but actually these other types of arguments in general, and qualified introspection in particular, are not essential to his most basic ideas. To consider the method of qualified introspection to be an important part of Hobbes's ideas is to have a mistaken view of Hobbes's political philosophy.⁶⁹

Thus, in the end, the force of Missner's challenge is not, in fact, that scholars should study the long-neglected parts more carefully, but rather that they should be even more judicious in excluding the non-scientific parts of Hobbes's argument from his "political philosophy." That is to say, political philosophers would do well to ignore not only the theological and scriptural trifles, but also arguments from introspection.

David Johnston's important study *Rhetoric of Leviathan* builds on Missner's insight, but in the end, his conclusion runs counter to Missner's recommendations. Johnston argues that Hobbes—without ever abandoning or revising the strictly scientific account of politics he'd articulated in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*—comes to realize the significance of rhetoric for effecting long-term social change in England, and perhaps in other Christian nations as well. Thus, by the time Hobbes composes *Leviathan*, he has accepted the prudential need to supplement his strictly scientific argument with other modes of proving his central claim about the state. Johnston concludes that Hobbes pursues in *Leviathan*

two essentially distinct but intimately intertwined aims . . . The first and, to modern readers, vastly more familiar of these two aims is to demonstrate, once and for all time, the grounds and extent of the rights of sovereignty, and of the obligations of subjects, in any commonwealth on earth . . . But any interpretation that fails to see beyond this aim is radically incomplete. For the second and no less essential aim of *Leviathan* is to initiate a cultural transformation, a process of enlightenment by which Hobbes hoped to lay the

⁶⁹ Missner, "Hobbes's Method in *Leviathan*," 614.

foundations for a new kind of commonwealth . . . unlike any that had ever before existed . . . The commonwealth envisioned . . . would be truly everlasting because its foundations would, for the first time in history, be truly rational. Those rational foundations would have to be created before that commonwealth could be brought into being. The creation of those foundations is the very core of Hobbes's political aim in *Leviathan*.⁷⁰

Johnston makes two important points. First, that Hobbes's argument for absolute sovereignty is not monolithic. It does not appeal only to a deductive argument beginning with clearly defined premises about "right," "law," and "power," and concluding with the claim that all human beings are rationally obligated to obey a sovereign state where one exists, or to endeavor to establish one where there is none. It also appeals to imaginative intuition, etc.

Second, he draws attention to the specifically *rhetorical* aims of *Leviathan*. Johnston has made a plausible case for seeing Hobbes's attitude towards rhetoric as having three periods: an early interest in rhetoric, a later rejection of rhetoric as being inconsistent with the aims of genuine science, an attitude that ultimately reaches a synthesis when Hobbes set out to write *Leviathan*, and concludes that a calculated deployment of rhetoric is a necessary corollary to his purely scientific argument.⁷¹

Johnston argues that the chief impediment Hobbes identifies to a rational politics is the belief among Christians in divine revelation. Thus, Johnston tries to show, a chief aim of Hobbes's complex rhetorical argument is to show that,

⁷⁰ David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 213.

⁷¹ Quentin Skinner has since augmented Johnston's argument by undertaking a detailed study of several relevant factors: the features of classical rhetoric as Hobbes would have encountered it in sixteenth-century England, the evidence of Hobbes's own education in the art of rhetoric, his early embrace of classical rhetoric and sudden, decisive rejection of it in his early political treatises, followed—in *Leviathan*—by a new appreciation and appropriation of the art of rhetoric. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, passim.

according to the most rational, and thus the most authentic form of Christianity, any revelation that goes beyond what humans can derive from the natural law by means of reason alone is simply non-existent. Here, Johnston overstates the divergence of Hobbes from traditional Christian theology. While the first of Johnston's two theses—that the second half of Hobbes's treatise is intended to change the way his Christian readers conceive of their faith and see their world is compelling, I remain skeptical of his second thesis—that in so doing, Hobbes seeks to subvert the very notion of divine revelation. This goes too far. Granted, Hobbes provides a highly rationalistic account of prophecy and miracles, but that is by no means to deny the entire category of special revelation. Rather, as will become clear in part 2 of this essay, Hobbes holds a nuanced view about the relationship between two forms of divine revelation: the natural word of God accessible via reason, and the supernatural word of God promulgated via prophecy.

In short, two critiques can be leveled against Johnston's thesis. First, Johnston's account is deficient in its suggestion that Hobbes's engagement with scripture and theology is of little or no theological interest. The problem with this is that, while Johnston perceptively notes that Hobbes wants to change the way his readers see the world, he also suggests (at least implicitly) that Hobbes wants to direct his readers beyond Christianity. Thus despite himself, he reinscribes a Straussian reading. In so doing, second, he fails to take seriously enough the meaning of the second half for the argument.⁷² Johnston's argument, as Eric Brandon remarks, "presents a well-constituted reading of *Leviathan*, and it certainly has the

⁷² Quentin Skinner is even more explicitly 'Straussian' than Johnston in his account of Hobbes's theology, which he dismisses as "contriving a tone of irony and ridicule." Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 14.

virtue of being an interpretation of all four parts.” However, Brandon demurs, Johnston’s interpretation of the second half “rests exclusively upon the hypothesis that Hobbes has made use of his superb rhetorical skill in order to express ideas in the text contrary to those evident from a literal reading of the text” (10).

Nonetheless, just as Lilla accounted for Hobbes’s attempt to change the way Christians see the world, so do Johnston and Skinner helpfully highlight Hobbes’s concern not just to articulate a rational account of politics, but to try to mold the sorts of citizens who will embody a rational politics. Thus, in order to convince his readers—both in his time and later—to accept his political recommendations, Hobbes engages in a complex theoretical description of the world, narrates its history, and shows how its readers fit within that world, such that the political recommendations make sense. Thus, Hobbes offers both a revised metaphysics (his philosophical account of the world and its human inhabitants) and theology.

Indeed, even the rational argument of *Leviathan* has a broader scope than that of the strictly scientific argument that forms its core. Despite the emphasis that many commentators—as well as Hobbes himself—have placed upon Hobbes’s strictly scientific method, Hobbes does not simply present a set of geometrical axioms about human nature and politics and then point to the conclusion he deduces from them. His argument is far more complex than that. Indeed, as recent scholarship has shown, Hobbes comes to realize by the late 1640s that the careful presentation of his philosophical argument for sovereignty, even when buttressed by his quasi-geometrical proofs, would not suffice to change the shape of European, let alone English politics, which increasingly becomes Hobbes’s goal. As Quentin Skinner explains: “By the time he came to publish *Leviathan* in 1651, [Hobbes] had arrived at

the conclusion that, in the moral but not in the natural sciences, the methods of demonstrative reasoning need to be supplemented by the moving force of eloquence.” This “prompted him not merely to give a new account of his theoretical principles but to put them systematically into practice. The outcome . . . is a work in which the humanist ideal of a union between reason and rhetoric is not merely defended but systematically realized.”⁷³ Indeed, what Hobbes realizes is that even if his account is correct and his logic flawless, many of his readers might remain unable to follow his logic and see the full force of his argument. Thus Hobbes musters a complex set of arguments and other rhetorical devices to convince his readership to see the world in such a manner that his account of absolute sovereignty—which he has deduced from scientific axioms—makes sense even to those who don’t practice, or even understand, his form of science.

What motivates this complex form of argumentation is not simply a lack in the native capacities of his readers for abstract thought, though such readerly inadequacy is certainly an important part. But in addition, Hobbes must account not only for readers whose skill in reasoning or formal training in philosophy are lacking, but also for the profound influence of Christian theology on the way his readers habitually see the world. Given a predominantly Christian readership, this dynamic is crucial. For if Hobbes’s logically-deduced account of politics seems to such readers to conflict with their overriding theological commitments, his account will finally fail to convince them, no matter how logically compelling it may be. If Hobbes is to present an account that will convince his contemporaries, he must grapple with their predominant theological assumptions. Thus, in *Leviathan*, though

⁷³ Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 5.

without ever abandoning his geometrical method or mechanistic system, Hobbes expands his mode of argumentation to include additional support for the same conclusions.

So much, then, for Hobbes's complicated relationship to the art of rhetoric. How does *Leviathan* cohere internally—not just with regard to rational and theological components, but with regard to its two halves? Brandon suggests that the two halves are cleanly divided between a secular, rational argument in the first half, and a “religiously-oriented” theological argument in the second half. As Brandon's book convincingly demonstrates, however, the two halves, “the secular and the religious, are united by a common overall goal, parallel arguments for absolutism and the identification of the sovereign, and the identical foundation of materialism.”⁷⁴ Thus, both halves have the same goal of defending absolute sovereignty and explaining who properly wields it. Yet what even Brandon fails to emphasize is that the political argument of the first half, too, is littered with key theological and scriptural evidence.⁷⁵

Brandon goes on to argue, against critics who claim that the second part contributes nothing new to Hobbes's twofold case (the argument for an absolute sovereign, coupled with a set of conditions for identifying that sovereign), that the second half of *Leviathan* is, in fact, “necessary in order to achieve the overall goal of the work.”⁷⁶ Brandon convincingly suggests that, in the second half, Hobbes deploys theological reasoning “in order to argue that Christianity endorses absolutism and

⁷⁴ Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 5.

⁷⁵ One representative instance of this comes in chapter 20, well within *Leviathan's* first half, where Hobbes announces: “it appeareth plainly, to my understanding, both from reason and Scripture, that the sovereign power, whether placed in one man...or in one assembly of men...is as great as possibly men can be imagined to make it” (II.20.106-07; 320).

⁷⁶ Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 2.

that a proper understanding of philosophy and Scripture leads to the identification of the civil sovereign as the true absolute sovereign in a Christian commonwealth."⁷⁷ Hobbes does so, Brandon thinks, in order "to appeal to those who might not place much credence in reason but who do think it of the utmost importance to obey God's commands.... Hobbes needs to argue at least partially from revelation, which he does, that God commands obedience to the civil sovereign."⁷⁸ While "natural reason is the exclusive source of knowledge in the first half of *Leviathan*," divine revelation, "as long as it is rationally interpreted, represents another valid source of 'knowledge' in the second half."⁷⁹ What links the claims made in each half, Brandon suggests, is the foundational assumption that God reveals truths by means of both nature and scripture, and that such revelation will not be internally self-contradictory.

Thus, Brandon argues, the second half is necessary to achieve certain claims needed for the sovereignty argument in the first half to work. But in connecting the question about theology to the question about the two halves, Brandon adds: "Hobbes views religion as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, threat to civil peace . . . Hobbes knew that belief in some form of another of Christianity was a dominant factor in the political life of England (and of the other European countries), so he attempts to provide an interpretation of Christianity that removes it as a threat to civil peace."⁸⁰ Here, in his inattention to the connections between a Christian's account of politics (even when that account is presented in wholly *rational* terms)

⁷⁷ Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 4.

⁷⁸ Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 4.

⁷⁹ Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 14-15.

⁸⁰ Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 10.

and that same theorist's theological views, Brandon's account ceases to be helpful to a theological interpretation of *Leviathan*. An example from a very different context may help to illustrate my point.

A cookbook's author may have all sorts of views about cinematography, for instance, about the comparative merits of film and digital video, or about what makes an unedited single take powerful rather than a mere gimmick. But, in studying her cooking, these views may be treated in total isolation from her views on the best way to make a soufflé, or on the advantages of a stirred omelet over a classic one. This isn't to say that the two sets of questions—about film and about food—are wholly unrelated (indeed, she may have some strange views about pairing certain genres of film with certain dishes). But this is to say that a comprehensive treatment of her views of preparing egg dishes can be offered in complete isolation from her views on film. The latter bear no direct implications for the former. Were she to undergo a total conversion in her views about film, such conversion would place no obvious pressure on her views about food.

By contrast, if a cookbook's author has also written a treatise on nutrition, and in that treatise has advanced strong, concrete claims about the merits of certain foods (perhaps she's a neo-Empedoclean, who strongly urges human beings not to eat legumes⁸¹), then one would be remiss not to attend to these views in trying to understand her recipes. For this second author, cooking has concrete ethical import, and thus cooking—for her—is a practice instrumental to deeper modes of human flourishing. For this cook, by contrast to the first one, a profound conversion in one

⁸¹ "Wretches, utter wretches, keep your hands off beans!" Empedocles, Fragment 141 in *The Poem of Empedocles: A Text and Translation with Introduction*, trans. and ed. by Brad Inwood (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 273.

sphere (of nutrition) will indeed place pressure on the other sphere of her work (of cooking).

The upshot of this tale of two cooks is that, when an author has expressed views on two kinds of questions, and neither question is determinative for the other (as neither cooking nor cinematography, in the first example, determines the other practice), then the two questions may be treated in relative isolation from one another with no great loss. But on the contrary, when one question (*What's the purpose of human eating?*) is foundational to the other (*What sorts of recipes ought one craft?*), then it is distorting of the second question to treat it in isolation from the first. Hobbes's account of political institutions in the first half of *Leviathan* depends on the more basic views he sketches in his theological account in the second half. Hence, the relation of his political science to his theology is like the relation of the second cook's recipes to her views on human eating.

The dominant strand of scholarship on *Leviathan* treats Hobbes like the cook who also writes about cinematography: his theological work bears on his political theory the way the cook's cinematographical work bears on her writing of recipes—which is to say not at all. Thus, in both cases, the former is easily ignored when considering the latter. Johnston, however, treats Hobbes's work like that of a cook whose chief vocation is to write cookbooks, and who also writes treatises on nutrition on the side, but writes about nutrition in a purely cynical way, as a means of convincing her readers to eat the dishes she likes to make.⁸² Brandon, by contrast,

⁸² The metaphor would be more precise and descriptive—but clunkily overcomplicated—if we added another level by suggesting that the cook believed that nutrition is a bogus science, and that what humans really needed for their wellbeing was tasty food, so by convincing them (by crafty means) to think (falsely) that they were choosing her dishes because of their nutritional value, she in fact acts in their best interest in the long run, because eating her dishes (so she believes) ultimately benefits their health. Likewise, Hobbes uses theology and scripture

treats Hobbes like the cook who writes about film: he attends to both parts of *Leviathan*, recommends that his readers take both parts seriously, but in the end, neglects to show that the upshots of Hobbes's theology have profound import for his political proposals. To make this point sufficiently, I'll need to address Hobbes's complex view of the relation between science and prophecy, but it will suffice for now to say that, because Hobbes is a Christian, and because Christianity is a salvationist religion, his account of what human salvation means, and how that salvation relates to human social life, will unavoidably have determinative implications for any account of society and politics he might offer.

In the next section of this chapter, I build on the insights of Johnston and Brandon, demurring somewhat from both—from Johnston's Straussian assumption that Hobbes aims ultimately to subvert Christianity, and from Brandon's assumption that Hobbes's theology matters little for his politics—to offer a model for interpreting *Leviathan*. Unlike standard readings, such as Lilla's, it attends to the role of both halves in the argument of the treatise, and to the role of theology and scriptural exegesis in both halves. This model will serve as the basis for the interpretation I offer in part 2 of one crucial aspect of Hobbes's project, namely his attempt to offer a new way for Christians to see the world. Now, we turn to the chief topic of this essay, Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

instrumentally, to convince Christians to accept his way of ordering society, a way that (so he believes) ultimately achieves more effectively what Christians (falsely) think Christianity achieves, namely temporal and spiritual wellbeing.

2.6. What is Leviathan?

Though he wrote a handful of other works on politics,⁸³ Thomas Hobbes is best remembered for his *Leviathan* (1651 English; 1666 Latin), subtitled “The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill.”⁸⁴ R. G. Collingwood, perhaps evoking the book’s famous frontispiece, describes it as “a work of gigantic stature, incredibly overtopping all its successors in political theory from that day to this.”⁸⁵ Indeed, Hobbes’s masterpiece is not merely a “great book,” but has profoundly determined thought about politics in the modern West since its publication. And, although it is sometimes suggested that Hobbes’s political theory wasn’t widely influential until later decades, C. B. Macpherson explains to the contrary: “[t]here ought not to be any question as to whether Hobbes was in the main stream of English thought [by the time of his death]; it should rather be acknowledged that he dug the channel in which the main stream subsequently flowed.”⁸⁶ Even more strongly, Michael Oakeshott declares *Leviathan* “the greatest, perhaps the sole, masterpiece of political philosophy written in the English language. And the history of our civilization can provide only a few works of similar scope and achievement to set beside it.”⁸⁷

⁸³ These are, principally, *The Elements of Law* (1640), *De Cive* (1642), and *Behemoth* (1668). One might add two others: Hobbes’s early translation with commentary of Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War* (1629) and the largely forgettable *A Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws* (c. 1661-1670).

⁸⁴ Even the order in which these parallel adjectives—*Ecclesiasticall* and *Civill*—appear in the subtitle offers a signal of the indispensability of ecclesiology to Hobbes’s political theory.

⁸⁵ R. G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), *iv*.

⁸⁶ C. B. Macpherson, “Introduction,” in *Leviathan*, ed. Macpherson (London: Penguin Classics, 1968), 22.

⁸⁷ Michael Oakeshott, “Introduction to *Leviathan*,” in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1975), 3.

Yet since its publication, the treatise has been nagged by controversy. During Hobbes's lifetime, the English House of Commons condemned *Leviathan* in a 1666 bill against "atheism and profaneness" drawn up during the panic following the Great Fire of London;⁸⁸ in more extravagant prose, Alexander Ross—erstwhile chaplain to Charles I, and after the king's death an active controversialist—concluded a brief syllabus of errors in Hobbes by declaiming, in a complex metaphor comparing Hobbes's treatise to the sperm spewed by a whale that had swallowed a host of heretics:

Such, and much more like stuff and smoke, doth this *Leviathan* send out of his nostrils, as out of a boyling pot or caldron. This is the *sperma caete*, or spawn which this whale casteth out; a whale, I say, that hath not swallowed up *Ionah* the prophet, but *Cerinthus* the heretick, and vomited up the condemned opinions of the old hereticks; and chiefly the *Anthropomorphits*, *Sabellians*, *Nestorians*, *Saduceans*, *Arabeans*, *Tacians* or *Eucratits*, *Manichies*, *Mahumetans* and others [sic].⁸⁹

Ross spoke for many of his contemporaries in concluding that this *Leviathan* was "a piece dangerous both to Government and Religion."⁹⁰ Three centuries later, in rather different terms but with equal reproach, Leo Strauss blamed the book for having founded liberal politics.⁹¹ Yet one of today's most careful and insightful scholars of

⁸⁸ James T. Bird, *The History of the Town of Malmesbury and of Its Ancient Abbey* (Malmesbury, 1876), 229-30. This bill was left to die by inaction in the House of Lords after an inconclusive two-year investigation of "the book of Mr. Hobbs, called *The Leviathan*" (230). Yet, as Hobbes later reported, he was "flatly refused" permission from Charles II to publish anything more on politics (EW iv, 411). His Latin *Leviathan* had to be published in Amsterdam, while *Behemoth* was published only after Hobbes's death. On the controversy involving Parliament, see Richard Tuck, "Hobbes and Locke on Toleration," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1990), 157-59; A. P. Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 318-22; Paul Seaward, "General Introduction" to *Behemoth; or, The Long Parliament*, vol. 10 of *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. by Paul Seaward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-4.

⁸⁹ Alexander Ross, *Leviathan drawn out with a Hook: or, Animadversions upon Mr Hobbs his Leviathan* (London, 1653), sig. A 12.

⁹⁰ Ross, *Leviathan drawn out with a Hook*, sig. A 16.

⁹¹ "Hobbes's absolutism is in the end nothing but militant liberalism...in its most radical form. In this sense, Hobbes is the founder of liberalism; and hence whoever wishes to engage in either a

liberalism declares to the contrary: “it would be absurd to call Hobbes a liberal.”⁹² To this day, though its importance remains unquestioned, the proper interpretation of Hobbes’s masterpiece is hotly contested.⁹³

What remains largely undisputed across Hobbes scholarship is the book’s principal aim: to demonstrate that governance, when properly deployed by a sovereign state, ineluctably improves the human condition by providing security, stability, and peace.⁹⁴ A second, but closely related aim of *Leviathan*—and this observation is equally uncontroversial—is to set forth the framework for an effective

radical justification or a radical critique of liberalism must return to Hobbes.” Leo Strauss, “Some Notes on the Political Science of Hobbes,” 122.

⁹² Alan Ryan “Liberalism,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 298. Cf. Judith Shklar’s discussion of the “convoluted genealogy of liberalism that insists on seeing its origins in a theory of absolutism” and claim that “Hobbes is not the father of liberalism.” Judith N. Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 23-24.

Whether Hobbes is, or is not, a liberal, depends of course on how one defines “a liberal.” Stanley Fish and Ronald Beiner are more willing than Ryan or Shklar—though both are characteristically more nuanced than Strauss in putting the matter—to acknowledge Hobbes’s affinities with liberalism. See Stanley Fish, “Mission Impossible,” in *The Trouble With Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 178-85; Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 411-20.

⁹³ This and following chapters will focus on controversies surrounding the place of theology in *Leviathan*. For a survey of broader controversies in the recent interpretation of *Leviathan*, see “Enduring Debates and Open Questions,” in S. A. Lloyd, ed. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Thomas Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 263-326; M. M. Goldsmith, “Hobbes Industry,” *Political Studies* 39 (1991), 135-47; Eric Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes’s Leviathan*, 6-14; A. P. Martinich, *Hobbes* (London: Routledge, 2013), 208-37; Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 10-15; Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 4-16; Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, 205-11; James Martel, *Subverting the Leviathan: Reading Thomas Hobbes as a Radical Democrat* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 21-34. For a telling survey of the state of Hobbes scholarship just before its tilt in the 1980s away from an exclusive concern with whether *Leviathan*’s argument for sovereignty is logically sound, see W. H. Greenleaf, “Hobbes: The Problem of Interpretation,” in *Hobbes and Rousseau: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Maurice Cranston and Richard S. Peters (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 5-36.

⁹⁴ In qualifying this claim with “largely,” I have in mind the strange work of James Martel, *Subverting the Leviathan: Reading Thomas Hobbes as a Radical Democrat*. In it he argues that Hobbes, while paying “lip service” (64) to both the concept of absolute state sovereignty and to actual sovereigns, his intention in *Leviathan* is to undermine, by irony, any legitimacy that such sovereignty might hold for his readers, and instead pave the way for “radical democracy” (16).

science of governance in hopes of establishing relative peace on earth. This is no paltry task. But as Hobbes explains in the preface, he sees himself well suited for it:

He that is to govern a whole Nation must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-Kind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any Language or Science; yet, when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. (Introduction; 20)

Two features of this passage deserve closer comment. First, insofar as it sets out to train its readers how to “govern a whole Nation,” *Leviathan* stands in some continuity with the medieval *Fürstenspiegel*, or “Mirrors for Princes” genre.⁹⁵

Yet, second, the work is not simply a how-to guide in the techniques of governance. As Hobbes suggests, the ability to “read . . . Man-kind” is necessary to the task of governing. Such anthropology is the hardest science to master, “harder than to learn any Language or Science,” yet mastery of it offers unparalleled benefits. Thus, Hobbes roots his theory of governance in a detailed anthropology, providing a comprehensive philosophical account of human nature and society, beginning with the structure of the human soul, and moving to the structure of the commonwealth, thereby demonstrating how individual harmony relates to social harmony. In this sense, its closest kin may be Plato’s *Republic*. The material differences between Plato’s and Hobbes’s accounts are manifold—for instance, what each means by “justice” or “the soul” differs radically. But one important formal difference is that *Leviathan* “was intended to be read not by this or that special audience, but by the public at large, or at least by as large a segment of that public as

⁹⁵ For a helpful overview of the genre and its history, see Roberto Lambertini, “Mirrors for Princes,” in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (New York: Springer, 2011), 791-97.

could be persuaded to read any work of political philosophy.”⁹⁶ Keenly aware of the mercurial fluctuations of political power in seventeenth-century England, Hobbes—despite his preference for absolute sovereignty vested in a single person—offers a treatise addressed not only to monarchs or jurists, but to others who might find themselves involved in decisions about the use of sovereign power. *Leviathan* was thus “perhaps the first work in the history of political philosophy to be designed entirely with this aim in mind”⁹⁷ It may seem paradoxical that such an obstinate and vociferous foe of democracy would be responsible for this first significant appeal to the demos in political theory. But what resolves this paradox is Hobbes’s basic assumption that the sovereign’s power—which must be absolute and which ideally should be vested in a single person—is rooted in the authority of the people. What Hobbes advocates is popular sovereignty in the most radical sense, only exercised not by the people from which it derives, but by their head.⁹⁸

Yet for Hobbes, developing and defending this science of governance is not merely a political or philosophical endeavor, but a theological task as well. In this sense, Augustine’s *City of God* is its close—if unexpected—kin. If Augustine, in that epic work, responds to a crisis within Western Christendom (the sack of Rome) by narrating cosmic history to show how his own historical moment fits into the broader context of the history of God’s ways relating to the world from creation to eschaton, so does Hobbes undertake the same task (formally speaking) in *Leviathan*. The crisis facing Western Christendom in the mid-seventeenth century is the

⁹⁶ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 89.

⁹⁷ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 89.

⁹⁸ This is one feature of Hobbes’s political theory, among many, that is helpfully depicted in the icon of the Leviathan on the frontispiece.

twofold threat of its social dissolution via the discordant fallout of the Protestant Reformation, and the intellectual challenged posed to it by the new science. Where the upshot of Augustine's historical narrative was to urge his readers to be wary of identifying any particular human social arrangement with God's work in history, the upshot of Hobbes's is importantly different: he aims to show, positively, how the incipient nation-state—which he himself is beginning to theorize—fits into salvation history.⁹⁹ In the end, whatever genre one applies to it, there is far more to *Leviathan* than its much vaunted theory of political sovereignty, even though this theory is undoubtedly the centerpiece of the treatise.¹⁰⁰

2.7. Hobbes's Political Theory and its Background

Broadly speaking, three concepts are most basic to Hobbes's political theory in *Leviathan*. These are: peace, civil war, and sovereignty. Civil war is the problem, the governance of an absolute sovereign state the solution, and peace the end result.¹⁰¹ Above all, Hobbes proffers his science of governance in order “to show the

⁹⁹ To take *Leviathan* seriously as a work of Christian theology, as I do in this project, is a controversial stance, for doing so bucks the trend amongst Hobbes's interpreters. Indeed, the dominant view, which holds that *Leviathan*'s theology is irrelevant to his more significant political project is understandable, for it is not immediately clear how properly to relate the theological elements of *Leviathan* to its political and philosophical elements. Thus I will devote part of this chapter to defending and clarifying the claim that Hobbes's *Leviathan* is best read as a work of both Christian theology and political theory.

By calling *Leviathan* a work of “Christian theology,” I mean simply that it reflects critically on the implications of what it takes to be the normative doctrines and sacred texts of the Christian church, with an aim of making ultimate recommendations to Christian readers about how to think *as Christians* about matters of importance.

¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the standard approach to *Leviathan* by political theorists has been to try to extract the political theory from its wider context, typically claiming, as does Gauthier, that Hobbes's “theistic suppositions are logically superfluous” to his more basic political argument. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, 205.

¹⁰¹ Despite Hobbes's reputation as a cold-eyed realist, the notion of “peace on earth” is central to *Leviathan*. It is, after all, the telos of the sovereign state. The term “peace” occurs 125 times in the 1651 edition of *Leviathan*. (The word “peaceable” appears three times, while “peaceably” and

rulers and inhabitants of a commonwealth, notably England, how they can obtain lasting internal peace," thereby providing "his fellow countrymen, and others, with the knowledge that they would need to permanently eliminate civil war."¹⁰² The project is thus deeply marked by its context: Hobbes composed *Leviathan* after fleeing to France during the English civil war, and published it shortly after the war's conclusion. In fact, all the works that constitute Hobbes's constructive political science (*The Elements of Law*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan*) were composed with the civil war looming in the background. Hobbes wrote *The Elements* during the struggle between Charles I and Parliament that led finally to the war, and published it within a week of Charles' fatal decision to dissolve Parliament in May 1640. Hobbes had, in fact, made a failed attempt at election to that same session of Parliament earlier in the year.¹⁰³ Yet by that autumn, Hobbes had fled to Paris, where he would compose both *De Cive* and *Leviathan* as war raged across the Channel. Indeed, he would have occasion to present the first copy of *Leviathan* to the exiled Charles II, who had likewise fled to Paris in 1645, whereupon Hobbes was appointed his tutor. *Behemoth*, Hobbes's final work on politics, was a tendentious history of this war composed in his dotage and published posthumously.¹⁰⁴

"peaceful" each appear once.) By way of contrast, "war" or "warre" occurs 157 times. A recent book on Hobbes by Bernard Gert, the final of his career, is entitled *Thomas Hobbes: Prince of Peace* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

¹⁰² Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 1.

¹⁰³ On the election, see Noel Malcolm, "Hobbes and Spinoza," in *Aspects of Hobbes*, 27. Cf. Martinich, *Hobbes: A Biography*, 121. This belies the claim of Norberto Bobbio that Hobbes "never engaged in active politics," and "never was a political activist." Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, trans. Daniela Gobetti (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 29, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Hobbes wrote *Behemoth* in the late 1660s. For suggestions about the specific time of composition, see the editor's preface in *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, 2nd edition, Ferdinand Tönnies, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), vii.

For Hobbes, this term “civil war” has a broader use than that to which contemporary social scientists typically put it.¹⁰⁵ In Hobbes’s usage, it describes any situation in which some population lacks effective governance by a legitimate state. Such cases range from the theoretical “state of nature”—the concept for which Hobbes might be most famous today—that would obtain prior to the emergence of a civil sovereign, to any situation in which some previously recognized civil sovereign has lost his legitimacy, thus making it difficult to identify a nation’s proper sovereign.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, just two years before *Leviathan’s* publication, Charles I lost his head, an event which made it exceedingly difficult for his subjects to identify their sovereign.

On Hobbes’s view, civil war is not only the basic political problem, but the chief problem of the human condition. Governance, then, insofar as it staves off civil war, is deemed the most single most crucial human activity, and as the proper conduit of governance, the state becomes the most crucial of all earthly institutions. Indeed, Hobbes describes life outside state governance in the direst of terms:

In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea;

¹⁰⁵ E.g., “Civil war involves [large-scale armed conflict...within the boundaries of sovereign states] between the government and local rebels with the ability to mount some resistance. The violence must kill a substantial number of people (more than 1,000)”; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Nicholas Sambanis, “The Collier-Hoeffler Model of Civil War Onset and the Case Study Project Research Design,” in *Understanding Civil War: Africa*, Collier and Sambanis, eds. (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2005), 6, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Although I avoid using Hobbes’s generic “he” to describe all persons (whether male or not), I do follow his use of male pronouns to refer to the sovereign. As David Halliburton suggests, “Hobbes’s political model...is predominantly patriarchal, the leading personages in his discourse being made in the image of the supreme patriarch, God.” David Halliburton, *The Fateful Discourse of Worldly Things* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 57. Likewise, Julie Cooper defends her own use of the male pronoun for Hobbes’s sovereign because, following Carol Pateman, Cooper thinks “the original contract excludes women.” Julie Cooper, *Secular Powers: Humility in Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 178n13; Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death. (I.13.62; 192)

The aim of Hobbes's science, then, is to establish reliable principles concerning human nature and behavior, principles that will enable effective governance, the surest means of establishing peace on earth.

Hobbes's career wasn't wholly devoted to political philosophy. In fact, he seems to have been more interested in the "new science" generally than in its particular implications for politics. But the political turmoil surrounding the English civil war compelled him to devote much of his attention to political philosophy. Indeed, it seems that *Leviathan* was not the sort of book Hobbes ever intended to write, at least not until sometime around 1650. Indeed, after a series of events occasioned by his excursions to Europe as tutor to the wealthy Cavendish family, in which he met Galileo, first encountered geometry, and quickly became involved in debates amongst the *novatores* in Paris, Hobbes's aim was to write a philosophical treatise that would offer a genuinely modern account of human beings, their natural environment, and their artificial politics.

Three key themes—Hobbes's concern with rhetoric modes of persuasion, his interest in Galilean science, and his concrete political context in a tumultuous Stuart England—intersect in the political theory Hobbes articulates in response to the events surrounding the English Civil War. The basic political problem of civil war and its purported solution in the sovereign state represent the two principal themes of Hobbes's political theory. Furthermore, the sudden concern for politics that the English Civil War provokes in Hobbes not only disrupts his envisioned program for scientific reform, but also catalyzes his central conviction that a stable sovereign state

is not just the culmination of such scientific reform, but also a necessary condition for the flowering of science. That is to say, a well ordered scientific system will culminate in an effective civil science, and at the same time, the mode of effective governance that such civil science occasions is what provides the peace, stability, and leisure necessary for science truly to flourish.

Having first settled upon motion as his master concept in the late 1630s,¹⁰⁷ Hobbes initially set out to write a tripartite anthropological treatise entitled *Elementa Philosophiae*, with separate volumes devoted to bodies (*De Corpore*), human beings (*De Homine*), and political communities (*De Cive*). This detailed anthropology would lay groundwork “for the deduction of how men must behave, that is, what kind of political society they must maintain, if they are to ensure for themselves peace and commodious living.”¹⁰⁸ The particular order of exposition is significant, for Hobbes “seeks to construct a unified science, proceeding from a study of body in general to a study of that particular body, man, and then to a study of man-made artificial bodies.”¹⁰⁹ Yet the vicissitudes of history—and specifically of seventeenth-century English politics—frustrated his designs. Hobbes was forced to work on these

¹⁰⁷ See Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 250-56 for a helpful account and timeline of Hobbes’s conversion from the *studia humanitatis* to the natural sciences, which enabled Hobbes, to cite his own rhapsodic words, “to move from the various types of motion to the variety of things, that is, to different species and elements of matter, and from there to the internal motions of men and the secrets of the heart, and from there, finally, to the blessings of government and justice.” Thomas Hobbes, *Vita carmina expressa*, lines 133-36, translated by Skinner in *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 255-56.

¹⁰⁸ Macpherson, “Introduction,” 30. On Hobbes’s design for this trilogy, see also Tom Sorell, “Hobbes’s Scheme of the Sciences” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50-60; Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 256.

¹⁰⁹ Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, 2. Gauthier, however, comes perilously close at times to supposing that Hobbes takes his account of politics to be entirely deducible from his materialist ontology, as though once one understood the sort of bodies humans were, and the kinds of motion proper to them, that one could articulate the theory of absolute state sovereignty without any appeal to how humans behave historically. This is a common misreading of Hobbes. For a convincing refutation of it, see Sorell, *Hobbes*, 7-13.

volumes piecemeal, and out of the intended order.¹¹⁰ Although he failed to produce this trilogy in either the manner or the order he had hoped,¹¹¹ much of Hobbes's literary career is dominated by this project. Indeed, *Leviathan*, in a sense, serves as a compendium of this threefold project: it demonstrates the connections between bodies, persons, and states.

Yet, at the same time, it extends the scientific account of politics by buttressing it with key rhetorical, theological, and scriptural support, all of which is in service of Hobbes's project to convince his readers to see the world in a certain way. As a close reading of *Leviathan* reveals, it offers a complex account of how earthly peace is to be obtained, and a diverse set of arguments in favor of Hobbes's view of the world. At the center of this world Hobbes describes is the state, the agent of peace.

What Hobbes wanted, even before writing *Leviathan*, was a "geometrical deductive method" that would enable certain normative conclusions about politics.¹¹² Thus, his axioms are of the highest importance to Hobbes's political science, for they determine the shape of its conclusions. Indeed, Hobbes takes his own work to constitute the first genuinely scientific account of politics in human

¹¹⁰ He published *De Cive* in 1642, *De Corpore* in 1655, and *De Homine* in 1658. By then, he had published two further treatises on politics, *Elements of Law* (1650) and *Leviathan* (1651). See Martinich, *Hobbes: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 118-19 on the relationship amongst the parts.

¹¹¹ Hobbes apologizes in his preface to *De Cive* for the lack of the preceding parts: "my country, some years before the civil wars did rage, was boiling hot with questions concerning the rights of dominion and the obedience due from subjects, the true forerunners of an approaching war; and as the cause which, all those other matters deferred, ripened and plucked from this third part. Therefore it happens, that what was last in order, is yet come forth first in time." Bernard Gert, ed. *Man and Citizen* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973), 103. In the dedicatory letter to *De Homine*, Hobbes explains that he has finally fulfilled the promise he had made in *Elements* to ground his account of politics in a detailed anthropology. Thomas Hobbes, *De homine*, dedicatory epistle, EW IV xiii-xiv.

¹¹² Macpherson, "Introduction," 18.

history. He compares the entire history of political deliberation before him—from the ancient Greeks through the entire thirteen centuries of Christendom—to the prehistoric attempts of humans at domesticating plants:

Philosophy seems to me to be amongst men now, in the same manner as corn and wine are said to have been in the world in ancient time. For from the beginning there were vines and ears of corn growing here and there in the fields; but no care was taken for the planting and sowing of them.¹¹³

With the account of sovereignty he offers first in the *Elements of Law*, and again in *De cive* and *Leviathan*, Hobbes seems himself as having achieved—in only a few decades—for political deliberation what it had taken countless generations to achieve in agriculture. With this simple theory, Hobbes suggests, he has taken a wild apple tree (namely political theory up until his own work in the early 1640s) and produced a dense, well-tended orchard swelling with lush fruit (the scientific account of state sovereignty he offers his readers), if only his audience will heed his theory.

2.8. The Role of the State in Hobbes's Political Theory

The term “state” is notoriously vague, and can be deployed to describe a wide variety of historical and theoretical entities.¹¹⁴ Hobbes himself uses the term on

¹¹³ *De corpore* I.1.1, EW I 1.

¹¹⁴ This is not even to mention the dozens of other uses of the term “state” beyond those that refer to governance or related concepts. Of the several OED definitions that do entail governance, the most germane here is probably 27a, whose usage dates to the mid-sixteenth century: “A particular (implied or specified) form of political organization or government, as established in a country or territory.” See “state, n.” in OED Online. Oxford University Press, March 2014. For a helpful account of the historical development of this meaning of the word “state” (and such equivalent terms as *état*, *stato*, and *staat*) up until the seventeenth century, see Quentin Skinner, “The State,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 90-102. See also Skinner’s conclusions to *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:349-59.

occasion in *Leviathan*, but with little precision. More often, he prefers the term “Commonwealth.”¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, in engaging Hobbes’s account, I will employ the term “state” or, in some cases, the more precise term “sovereign state” to describe those entities—Hobbes’s envisioned Commonwealth being an ideal type of this sort—that have, since at least the sixteenth century, laid claim to legitimate and ultimate authority within some recognized set of geographical borders.¹¹⁶ Or in Weber’s sparse formula: “a State is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”¹¹⁷ The proper function of the state, for Hobbes, is to secure, legitimate, and wield this sovereign authority for the purpose of quelling violence, fostering peace, and promoting the common good of its subjects—in short, to stave off civil war. In doing so, the Hobbesian state first creates and then sustains human society itself. For society, on Hobbes’s account, is not natural, but “is constituted and held together by state power.”¹¹⁸ It requires a concerted act of human poesis, a fact captured by Hobbes’s comparison of the construction of the state to the divine fiat, “the ‘let us make man’ pronounced by God in the Creation” (Introduction; 20).

¹¹⁵ Holberton argues that upheavals in the mid-1600s “broadened the ambiguity of the word ‘state,’” and that Hobbes’s use of it to signify a republic is significant in effecting this development. He cites the poets John Dryden and Edmund Waller, both contemporaries of Hobbes, and both notable for their praise-in-verse of Charles II and the restoration of the English monarchy. Edward Holberton, *Poetry and the Cromwellian Protectorate: Culture, Politics, and Institutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91-92.

¹¹⁶ Indeed, the modern state is inconceivable apart from the concept of sovereignty: “[T]he state is a political form based on the distinctly modern concept of sovereignty, which may be defined as ‘supreme authority within a territory.’ As formulated by Bodin, Hobbes, and other lesser figures of the early modern period, the state claims legitimate authority—as opposed to mere coercion—a supreme authority that no lesser authorities within a recognized set of geographical borders may legitimately oppose.” Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 9. See Cavanaugh’s helpful discussion in pp. 7-39.

¹¹⁷ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78.

¹¹⁸ John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 75. Cf. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 18-24.

Because politics is finally reducible, for Hobbes, to governance, and because the state is the proper channel of such governance, to speak of political theory is in fact to speak of the workings of the state. As Quentin Skinner has shown, it is “Hobbes who first speaks, systematically and unapologetically, in the abstract and unmodulated tones of the modern theorist of the state.”¹¹⁹ Hobbes represents an early, influential, and especially vigorous articulation of what Weber would call “politics as statecraft. By this term, Weber meant “the leadership or the influencing of the leadership of a *political* association, hence today, of a *state*.”¹²⁰ Weber’s concept of politics “emerged with the Enlightenment and reached its pinnacle in Hegel.”¹²¹ On this view, “the realm where persons come together in a polity, in a politics, is rightly overseen by and finds its highest expression in the state; it is the investiture of the state with sovereign authority over the socius and, consequently, privileging the state as the fulcrum of social and political change.”¹²² As Weber adds elsewhere, “the concept of the state has only in modern times reached its full development.”¹²³

2.9. The rational argument for state sovereignty.

In terms of this state-centered political theory, the central thesis of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is twofold. First, that absolute sovereignty is the best form of governance;

¹¹⁹ Skinner, “The State,” 126.

¹²⁰ Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 77. Emphasis is in original.

¹²¹ Daniel Bell, *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 13.

¹²² Daniel Bell, *Liberation Theology After the End of History*, 13. On the alternative conception Weber offered to that of “politics as statecraft,” see Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, expanded edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 379-80.

¹²³ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, ed. with introduction by Parsons (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 156.

and second, that despite the competing claims that various agents might make to the right to exercise such sovereignty, “the *civil sovereign* [is] the true absolute sovereign in a Christian commonwealth.”¹²⁴ This dense formulation may benefit from further gloss: To say that Hobbes argues for absolute sovereignty is to say, first, that he thinks governance is best administered by a civil state that does not share political power with any other entity. Under such an arrangement, the sovereign rightly possesses all political power that obtains within a given realm. Or, to put the same claim negatively: insofar as any other entity exercises political power outside the sovereign’s purview, it does so illegitimately. This is thus to exclude any form of “mixed government” in which competing authorities might make conflicting claims on the same set of subjects. By definition, none of these entities would genuinely exercise sovereignty, because any claim one might make on a subject could be overridden by the contradictory claim of another—and civil war would loom constantly.

Hobbes’s account of absolute, unimixed sovereignty bears marked resemblance to Jean Bodin’s account of indivisible sovereignty, which, for Hobbes as much as Bodin, “meant that the high powers of government could not be shared by separate agents or distributed among them, but that all of them had to be entirely concentrated in a single individual or group.”¹²⁵ His rejection of mixed sovereignty

¹²⁴ Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes’s Leviathan*, 4. Emphasis is mine.

¹²⁵ Julian H. Franklin, “Sovereignty and the Mixed Constitutions: Bodin and His Critics,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns, with the assistance of Mark Goldie, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 298. See also Glanville, *Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect*, 4-37.

was highly unfashionable, even amongst his fellow advocates of absolute monarchy.¹²⁶ As Hinsely explains in his classic survey of political sovereignty:

The theory of mixed sovereignty or mixed government—the theory by which the sovereign power of law-making belonged jointly to King, Lords and Commons—vied so successfully indeed with the Divine Right absolutism of the Crown’s extreme supporters, and with the republican or Althusian insistence of men like Milton on the absolute sovereignty of the People, that it was subscribed to even by Charles I himself in 1642, and still remained the aim of the victorious Parliamentarians after they had executed the King. It was clear at the time, on the other hand, that this mixed government and similar compromise theories failed to check dissension, as they failed to avert the Civil War.¹²⁷

Hinsely’s diagnosis of this problem displays a deeply Hobbesian sensibility. He concludes: “And it is clear now that this was because they merely extended the dualism which it was the aim of the concept of sovereignty to overcome—merely shifted the conflict between dualism and the idea of sovereignty—by seeking to split or subdivide the rulership itself when it was in practice impossible to limit or subdivide the government power that was coming to be seen as sovereign power.”¹²⁸ This conclusion is indebted to Hobbes in its recognition that any form of governance besides absolute, undivided sovereignty, leaves open the possibility of “dualism,” that is, the presence of competing, authoritative commands, the upshot of which is—as Hobbes tirelessly reminds his readers—the danger of civil war. Hobbes, however, provides an explicitly theological reason for this, one which is notably absent in Hinsely’s account. For Hobbes, the reason state sovereignty must resist all such dualism is that the state—in whichever geographical area it governs—is God’s

¹²⁶ Discussions of mixed monarchy “began to appear in English political and historical writing around 1575.” Hiram Caton, “On the Basis of Hobbes’s Political Philosophy,” in *Political Studies* 22.4 (December 1974), 420.

¹²⁷ F. H. Hinsely, *Sovereignty*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 138.

¹²⁸ Hinsely, *Sovereignty*, 138.

appointed vice-regent, standing in for God during the long duration of history that lies between the original political unity proper to Eden, and the future, eschatological unity that humanity will enjoy during the resurrection when they are ruled by Jesus Christ under the true “Kingdome of God.” It is thus a claim of theological anthropology that ultimately undergirds for Hobbes’s strong conception of political sovereignty.

Likewise, Hobbes’s account of absolute sovereignty entails a second normative feature, namely that the sovereign is the final authority in all aspects of political life within a particular realm. This thus excludes any form of “limited sovereignty,” a view that would formally acknowledge that there is only one ultimate sovereign in a given geographical area, only one agent who makes laws, and ultimately decides on their interpretation, but then in practice, by limiting the scope of a sovereign’s purview, would thus create spaces within the body politic which eluded the sovereign’s ability to govern.¹²⁹ Combined, these two features entail that there is only one sovereign within any given realm (whether that sovereign is an individual or a corporation is a separate question), and that this sovereign possesses total power over the bodies within that realm. Thus, “only in a commonwealth ruled by a sovereign who exercises without limitation the rights of all his subjects, and whose power is sufficient to make that exercise effective, can men find security.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Carl Schmitt’s critique of Hobbes and the liberalism that develops in Hobbes’s wake, is that Hobbes, by permitting allowing a distinction between private belief and public confession, in effect limits the sovereign’s power. Once the internal domain of conscience is accepted and recognized, the myth of the “mortal God” crumbles, and sovereignty collapses. In his own defense, Hobbes would likely claim that private belief is not, in fact, a matter of political import, and thus not properly a matter of sovereignty at all. Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (London: Greenwood, 1996), 56.

¹³⁰ Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, 162.

Here his view fits with the standard “absolutist” position of early modern European political thought. As Sommerville argues, although there was much diversity across various theorists of absolute sovereignty, there are enough commonalities to make the term useful. Absolutism, he explains, entails

that the prince is accountable to God alone for his actions within his realm, that his commands ought to be obeyed by his subjects provided that they do not conflict with divine positive or natural law, and that he (and those acting on his command) ought never to be resisted actively by his subjects. A prince could be any specific person or persons, for though absolutists generally preferred monarchy to aristocracy or democracy, they seldom claimed that it was the only valid form of government . . . Though absolutists differed on important questions they did all look to the prince as the supreme maker and interpreter of human laws (at least in temporal matters), and they held that the prince could not be deposed by the church or by his subjects.¹³¹

Sommerville’s articulation of the logic of absolutism leaves unstated how the theological aspects of this scheme (how God’s authority is manifest, how divine law—both positive and natural—is to be discerned and interpreted) relate to its political aspects (the ruler’s exercise of authority and interpretation of human laws). Hobbes’s originality is not in his absolutism as such, but in his particular construal of these claims.

The second half of Hobbes’s thesis (that the acting civil sovereign is the only agent with any proper claims to exercising sovereign power) builds on the first (that absolute sovereignty is the best form of governance). Having defined the office and the purview of the civil sovereign, he then argues about who is properly to fill that role. To say that Hobbes identifies the proper sovereign with the *civil sovereign* is to say that whoever happens to control the civil power in some realm (as opposed, in

¹³¹ J. P. Sommerville, “Absolutism and Royalism,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns, with the assistance of Mark Goldie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 348-49.

Hobbes's context, specifically to *ecclesial* power) is the genuine sovereign, the agent who properly possesses this absolute and total political power. This specifically excludes the view that the sovereign's divine right to rule is channeled through a spiritual authority held by a pope, bishop, or any other ecclesial body. As we shall see, Hobbes makes effective use of his materialist metaphysics in excluding such views, which typically depended upon distinctions between "temporal" and "spiritual" powers. For now, we should note that Hobbes argues three things: a sovereign state is necessary; the sovereign power must be absolute; the sovereign power must be unmixed and unshared.

Given Hobbes's programmatic aim to describe and advocate a form of political absolutism, his argument must accordingly satisfy two conditions: "First, he must present arguments that absolutism is the best form of government for securing peace."¹³² This is because the creation of social peace and harmony is the proper aim of governance, and its sole criterion for judging effectiveness. If Hobbes can demonstrate that absolute sovereign rule is the most effective means to this end, then what remains is only the question of who is to exercise such rule. Thus second, "he must offer criteria that can be used to decide who ought to be the absolute sovereign in any given commonwealth... Hobbes believed that these conditions were necessary and jointly sufficient for putting a commonwealth on the path toward lasting internal peace."¹³³ Both conditions, of course, are crucial, because were Hobbes to establish only the first—the formal account of sovereignty—room

¹³² Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 1-2.

¹³³ Brandon adds: "the fact that these conditions must be satisfied is not in serious dispute among scholars." Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 2.

would remain for further dispute about *who* fills that role.¹³⁴ Other apparent candidates that Hobbes rejects include Presbytery and Pope.

In the course of making this case for the legitimacy and absolute authority of the civil sovereign, Hobbes seeks to convince his readers of four basic philosophical claims about the state and its relationship to its subjects: i) that it is in their best interests as human beings that the sovereign state succeed in its aims; ii) that the state must remain unfettered by any other internal powers in order to achieve its aims;¹³⁵ iii) that rationality dictates that each person co-operate with the state's aims; and iv) that justice likewise demands such cooperation.¹³⁶ These are the claims Hobbes derives from his "geometrical deductive" civil science. The rational argument of *Leviathan* employs the axioms of Hobbes's civil science to demonstrate that rationality, self-interest, and justice all coincide in demanding that every human actor be perfectly loyal to whichever sovereign state happens to lay legitimate claim on her loyalty.¹³⁷ Indeed, Hobbes's argument may be distilled to its purest essence by focusing exclusively on the argument for political sovereignty that Hobbes derives from his geometrical method.

¹³⁴ Indeed, this question was particularly pressing for Hobbes, who, as a notorious loyalist, fled England just before the deposing of Charles I, then returned in the midst of Cromwell's reign. See Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), passim. Quentin Skinner, "Conquest and Consent: Thomas Hobbes and the Engagement Controversy," in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 238-63.

¹³⁵ External powers are another matter entirely, for Hobbes sees the relations amongst sovereign states as essentially lawless, and thus equivalent to civil war.

¹³⁶ These claims appear in diffuse form and with varying degrees of explicitness throughout *Leviathan*. They are presented most schematically in part II, chapters 17 and 18.

¹³⁷ By "rational," I mean those parts of Hobbes's argument that appeal to three faculties: reason, experience, and intuition. This is to distinguish the rational argument from Hobbes's *theological* argument, which depends on appeals to special revelation and to claims derived from revelation.

This rarified version of the argument is certainly at the heart of Hobbes's civil science, but, as I suggested in my preliminary engagement with Johnston and Skinner, the overall argument cannot be reduced to its abstract, rational formulation. The account he offers in *Leviathan* is far more complex, and this abridgement fails to capture its full significance. Hobbes's treatise, in order to convince its readers of its political recommendations, describes the world in a particular way, narrates its history, and shows how its readers fit into that world, such that these recommendations make sense.

2.10. How to read (All of) *Leviathan*

This chapter has so far made two broad claims about the argument of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. First, that his concern with convincing as wide an audience as possible leads to his augmentation of a core scientific argument for absolute sovereignty with various rhetorical devices to convince readers who might not otherwise be convinced by. And second, that a responsible interpretation of *Leviathan* must grapple with the theological and scriptural aspects of the treatise. Here, in this final section of the chapter, I bring these two points together and finally offer my positive model for interpreting *Leviathan's* highly complex argument.

A crucial aspect of Hobbes's attempt to persuade his readers of his political conclusions is to convince them that these conclusions fit with their Christian convictions. We must keep in mind, after all, that these are citizens and lawmakers of a predominantly and officially Christian nation. As will become obvious, a central feature of Hobbes's theological argument for sovereignty is to show that even the

purely rational argument for sovereignty is itself revealed by God, and theologically relevant.

A closer look at Hobbes's account will show that at the heart of his project lies a theological description of the world and its history that entails particular recommendations for a Christian view of politics and of political engagement. To this end, in the final section of this chapter, I propose a strategy for interpreting *Leviathan* that shows both how its two halves relate to each other and how its scriptural and theological arguments relate to its chief aim, to articulate and defend a certain version of absolute state sovereignty. It will now be helpful to turn to the question of *Leviathan's* overall argumentative structure.

As I suggest, we should attend to two different, though intertwining, modes that run throughout Hobbes's argumentation. And within that argumentation, we should attend to two distinctions. First, the two modes: (1) the political argument, which expresses the most effective means of governing human communities; and (2) the theological argument, which expresses the proper way to benefit from God's salvific economy and to find a place in the kingdom of God.¹³⁸ Thus, Hobbes identifies absolute sovereignty as the best form of governance *both* because it is the most effective (the sum of the rational argument), *and* because it has been instituted by God (the sum of the theological argument). Likewise, though he articulates the basic problem of civil war in purely rational terms in chapter 13, it may also be expressed—though Hobbes never makes the connection explicitly himself—using the lexicon of Christian theology. Civil war is the definitive mark of fallen creation;

¹³⁸ Readers seeking a condensed account of Hobbes's purely philosophical argument for the absolute sovereignty of the nation state have many options. See, inter alia: David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, esp. 120-77; C. B. Macpherson, "Introduction," 25-63; Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction," 30-50; Michael Oakeshott, "Appendix" to "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 133-40.

likewise, its abolition, in Hobbes's theological account, is the very substance of God's redemptive work within history.

In short, the entirety of Hobbes's *Leviathan*—in both its philosophical and theological modes of argumentation—serves to demonstrate both why and how his readers are obliged to aid and defend the sovereign state in whatever form it may take.

In addition to these two modes of the one basic political argument (1 & 2), it is also crucial to keep in mind two broad distinctions at play in Hobbes's account of political order. Though these distinctions may not be obvious, they are helpful in navigating the murky relationships amongst *Leviathan's* various argumentative features. The first is a distinction between varieties of human political orders. For Hobbes, this distinction is most basically of two kinds: It is a distinction between Christian orders (those that publicly proclaim that Jesus is the Christ), and non-Christian orders (quite simply those that do not make such a public claim). It doesn't matter much, at this level of the argument, whether these states explicitly *deny* this confession, or confess something inconsistent with it, or else—as in many contemporary secular liberal democracies, such as the U.S. or France—simply remain publicly agnostic about such matters as messiahs and scriptures. Thus, we should distinguish (3) *Leviathan's* account of political order in general, which applies equally to all states; from (4) its account of Christian commonwealths, an account which builds on (3), but without ever contradicting it, adds to it a set of considerations that are ultimately irrelevant to non-Christian states.

So, in addition to the first distinction between the *terms* of its argument (i.e., the imminently political argument for absolute sovereignty; and the theological

argument for the same conclusion), *Leviathan* also distinguishes between two *objects* of argumentation (states in general; and specifically Christian states). When this pair of distinctions is jointly mapped onto the argument of *Leviathan*, it yields a threefold set of separate, but related modes of argument in *Leviathan*: a) Hobbes's basic, rational argument in support of a sovereign state, whether Christian or not; b) a theological argument in support of the same, i.e., a sovereign state, whether Christian or not; and c) a theological argument in support of a specifically *Christian* iteration of the sovereign state that he defends in (a) and (b).

a) The first mode is a purely immanent political argument for absolute sovereignty that applies to any human political community. This is where Hobbes uses the strictly political argument (1) to describe a generic account of political order (3). This appears primarily in Parts I and II.

b) The second is a theological argument for absolute sovereignty that applies to any human community, but is likely to convince only Christian readers. Here, Hobbes uses the theological argument (2) to describe a generic account of political order (3). Recall that even the natural law Hobbes defines as having been established and revealed by the God of the bible.

c) The third is a theological argument for absolute sovereignty in a specifically Christian form. Here, Hobbes uses (2) to describe (4). It appears exclusively in Parts III and IV. Though he derives his political argument primarily from the natural law, which applies equally to all rational agents at all times, we must remember that when Hobbes moves from general principles to particular political recommendations, it is specifically the *Christian Common-wealth* that he addresses. It is thus within this particular theological context that Hobbes's account of politics makes sense

It is with this third mode of argumentation that *Leviathan* functions most obviously as a work of Christian political theology, for its chief aim is to show how its thesis about political sovereignty relates to, and is ultimately derivable from, the normative claims of Christian theology. Indeed, in addition to the four philosophical claims

about the sovereign state and his readers' proper relationship to it,¹³⁹ Hobbes advances parallel claims in Christian theological terms: i) that it is the express will of God that the aim of the sovereign state succeed; ii) that until Christ inaugurates his eternal kingdom at the end of history, God's rule is indistinguishable from that of the local sovereign; iii) that scripture dictates that Christians obey their local sovereign; and iv) that eternal salvation depends on such obedience.

Especially important is Hobbes's extended account of God's dealings with creation: how God has interacted, now interacts, and will interact with the world, as its creator, sustainer, redeemer, and the one who destines some of these creatures for eternal life with God. Within this scriptural-theological narrative, most relevant to the political argument is the history of God's salvific economy, which entails an account of both how God saves and preserves creation *within* history, and how God saves the elect and destines them for eternal life in the eschaton.¹⁴⁰

Any intelligible interpretation of the theological history Hobbes sketches must attend to two important features of Hobbes's social and intellectual context. On the one hand, he is heir to a late medieval background in which Christian truths are typically taken to be articulable in terms of both faith and reason; on the other, he inhabits a robust form of Christendom: in Hobbes's England, the Christian church is established, religious tests are administered at the universities, and a vast majority of the population is baptized and identifies as Christians.

¹³⁹ See p. 132 above.

¹⁴⁰ In both its purely rational and its theological forms, Hobbes's argument for sovereignty bears almost entirely on immanent history alone. Eschatology is relevant in only two senses: negatively, insofar as Hobbes must account for eschatology in order to undermine subversive (mis)uses of Christian eschatology; and positively, insofar as God has imposed certain necessary conditions for human salvation that are to be fulfilled during history, principally that you must obey the sovereign now to have any part in Christ's future kingdom.

Given this context, if Hobbes's chief objective in *Leviathan* is to describe and advocate what he takes to be the best form of governance in a Christian commonwealth, then certainly he must do so in terms that will convince his Christian readership, even if Hobbes himself might find those terms underwhelming in comparison with the argument from reason alone. Moreover, Hobbes is no mere biblicist. Indeed, he argues from scripture to suggest that reason—when rightly guided—is more reliable than scripture alone in determining God's will.¹⁴¹ Thus, Hobbes uses various modes of argumentation to substantiate his political science; he appeals to both reason and revelation in order to articulate the conditions necessary to effective political order. This approach issues in a set of varied arguments in favor of absolute sovereignty, some of which appeal primarily to reason, without recourse to any specifically Christian argument. Others, however, are addressed explicitly to Christian readers, and are based in interpretations of Christian scripture.

The upshot is that Hobbes derives from Christian scripture and doctrine certain views of the human person, human society, and ultimately of political order. Such views sanction the form of political absolutism that he advocates. Indeed, it is in his account of absolute sovereignty that Hobbes's political theory and his Christian theology coalesce. As Joshua Mitchell explains:

The central feature of Hobbes's system of political order is the *unity* of sovereignty, political and religious, from which derives, among other things, the Leviathan's right to command obedience and the right of interpretation; while reason can conclude for the unity of *political* sovereignty, it cannot conclude for the unity of political and religious sovereignty. Of religious sovereignty, as Hobbes insists again and again, reason must be silent; consequently, the unity of political and

¹⁴¹ Some things in scripture might be *above* reason, but will never *contradict* it. Because the dictates of reason can be more reliably discerned than the proper meaning of a scriptural text can, an important principle of scriptural interpretation is to take reason as its measure (I.12.25; 79 and III.32.195-96; 576-78). When the sovereign is Christian, one should rely on his judgment in unclear cases (3.37.237-38; 694-96 and 3.38.241-42; 708).

religious sovereignty must be established on the basis of Scripture—which, of course, does not contradict the conclusions of unaided reason.¹⁴²

As we shall see, what Hobbes identifies as the chief threat to a healthy polity is a “double vision” that would delude subjects into thinking that there is any other authority within history that might stand above, or even next to, that of the sovereign state. Given the potential within Christianity for challenges to claims to authority, it becomes especially important that Hobbes account in theological terms for the relationship of civil sovereignty to other forms of authority.

Thus, Hobbes deploys scriptural and theological argumentation not merely as a reactionary attempt to destabilize traditional appeals to scripture and theology by the likes of Cardinal Bellarmine, the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, or the English Presbyterians.¹⁴³ On the contrary, Hobbes appeals repeatedly to Christian scripture and doctrine as authoritative sources of his positive claims about the relations amongst God, humanity, and the world.

Whether by appeals to reason, scripture, doctrine, or experience, what Hobbes needs is to convince his readers to imagine the world and their place in it as one in which absolute political sovereignty makes sense as a means of organizing their shared lives, and—in particular—their shared lives as Christians. To achieve his central aim of persuading a Christian readership that theirs is a world in which governance by absolute state sovereignty is the best sort of political arrangement,

¹⁴² Joshua Mitchell, “Luther and Hobbes on the Question: Who was Moses, Who was Christ?” *Journal of Politics* 53 (1991), 677.

¹⁴³ Hobbes identifies the first two of these figures as particularly dangerous instances of Christian thought about politics, and the third as responsible for “blaspheming and killing God’s anointed,” Charles I. But Hobbes wisely saves his acerbic critiques of the Presbyterians for the posthumously published *Behemoth* (EW VI, esp. 357). On Bellarmine, see *Leviathan*, IV.42.269-71; 778-82 and IV.42.300-20; 866-926; on the Fourth Lateran Council, see IV.42.315; 910-12 and IV.44.335-37; 962-66.

Hobbes needs to provide normative descriptions of other matters that bear on the question of political order. Crucial to this new political science is an anthropology—a theoretical account of human persons and communities—that will ground and inform the Hobbesian account of governance. Inextricable from this anthropology, moreover, is a set of metaphysical claims that Hobbes advances in order to reinforce that anthropology, and ultimately to shore up his civil science. Thus, the overarching argument of *Leviathan* includes justification of all three elements (Hobbes’s political science, an anthropology commensurate with that science, and a metaphysics to undergird that anthropology) in terms of both philosophy and theology, of both natural reason and revelation.

2.11. Conclusion

With careful rigor and in great detail, Hobbes attempts to demonstrate throughout *Leviathan* that his political science is not simply unobjectionable by orthodox Christian standards, but is, in fact, precisely what those standards demand, that the findings of that science are not merely consistent with, but constitute the most faithful possible expression of Christianity’s normative claims about God’s will for human political life. Hence, both civil science and Christian theology lead to the same conclusion: Human agents are obliged to establish a sovereign state where one does not exist, and to support the state when it does exist. Thus, even if we allow that Hobbes’s project ultimately paved the way for the “Great Separation” of religion from politics that has become a major feature of the contemporary social imaginary (and this part of Lilla’s thesis is unimpeachable) it does not follow from such an admission that Hobbes himself says, or even thinks, that questions of

politics can or should be separated from questions of religion. Indeed, Hobbes tells his readers quite the opposite, and he demonstrates, in *Leviathan*, that such questions are, at the very least for his seventeenth-century English context, inextricably and properly connected.

While it is true that Hobbes's political theory is rooted in a distinctively modern science of human behavior, Hobbes is nevertheless assiduous in his effort to show that the findings of this science are in utter conformity to what God has revealed in the Christian scriptures. Nor does Hobbes's argument stop with the negative claim that his scientific findings pose no threat to Christian piety. He goes much further than that: *Leviathan's* political argument purports to be revealed by God, and to provide in its positive claims an answer to that quintessential question of political theology, "What must I do to be saved?" In short, Lilla's programmatic claim that Hobbes abandons the long tradition of political theology by "changing the subject" is plainly wrong.¹⁴⁴

It is true that Hobbes goes to great lengths to discredit what he sees as unscrupulous claims to political authority by clerics who would root such claims in Christian scripture and doctrine. In fact, he denounces any use of theology to challenge the legitimacy of a sovereign state as an activity proper not to the Christian church, but to the "Kingdome of Darkness."¹⁴⁵ Yet to describe Hobbes's project in *Leviathan* as a wholesale rejection of political theology, as Lilla does, is

¹⁴⁴ The view Lilla attributes to Hobbes would more accurately be applied to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Puzzlingly, however, Lilla's narrative pits Hobbes *against* Rousseau, inaccurately suggesting that, whereas Hobbes excludes God from political theory, Rousseau invited God back in, to the peril of European politics ever since. See Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 111-69.

¹⁴⁵ "[T]he Kingdome of Darknesse, as it is set forth in these, and other places of the Scripture, is nothing else but a Confederacy of Deceivers, that to obtain dominion over men in this present world, endeavour by dark, and erroneous Doctrines, to extinguish in them the Light, both of Nature, and of the Gospell; and so to dis-prepare them for the Kingdome of God to come" (IV.44.333; 956).

patently inaccurate. For Hobbes, like all Christian political theologians both before and after him, couches his normative account of politics consistently and explicitly in terms of God's will for human society. He does so both directly, by proffering scripture to corroborate his claims about politics, and indirectly, by showing that his geometrically deduced political philosophy, though derived from "principles of nature only" (III.32.195; 576) is in fact grounded in the natural law legislated by God and more fully elaborated in scripture.¹⁴⁶

But Parts III and IV play a key role in Hobbes's argument, and not only for the reason Brandon highlights. Central to Hobbes's treatise, and the ultimate goal of his analysis in all four parts, is an account of proper political order, and an argument—or more properly, a set of arguments—defending that account. This account of political order entails accounts of human sociality, the need for politics, the best form of political order, the characteristic problems that plague human politics, and how best to solve those problems. Thus, when Hobbes addresses topics as disparate as the coronation of Saul, the nature of the human eye, the irresistible power of God, and the errors of the Fourth Lateran Council, what is ultimately at stake in all of this is this normative account of political order.¹⁴⁷ Thus, these disparate elements are all part of the overall argument for absolute state sovereignty.

In articulating and defending his complex account, Hobbes ultimately sketches a comprehensive vision of the world and its history. At the center of this

¹⁴⁶ Hobbes describes "our naturall Reason" as "the undoubted Word of God," and describes reason, as well as "our Senses, and Experience" as the "talents which [God] hath put into our hands to negotiate, till the coming again of our blessed Saviour; and therefore not to be folded up in the Napkin of an Implicite faith, but employed in the purchase of Justice, Peace, and true Religion" (IV.32.195; 576).

¹⁴⁷ On the coronation of Saul, see III.35.218-19; 640-42; on the organs and faculty of sight, see I.1-2.3-5; 22-30; also, chapter 3 below. On God's irresistible power, see II.31.187-88; 558-560; on the Fourth Lateran Council, see III.42.314-16; 910-16; IV.44.335-36; 962.

vision lies a nexus of God, humanity, and world. Should his readers find it compelling enough to adopt as their own vision, this mode of seeing will enable them to locate themselves within this cosmic history, and in particular, their place within salvation history. Thus, by seeing the world in this distinctive way, their self-conceptions of themselves as social agents become transfigured. By imagining and describing this world, and by helping his readers to place themselves imaginatively within it, Hobbes enables his readers to see, speak, and act in new ways that had been unavailable to them. Given the history of Christian politics since Hobbes, it seems many, in fact, have found this vision compelling, whether through an explicit encounter with Hobbesian thought, or simply because the world they inhabit has become increasingly hospitable to this habitus of seeing, speaking, and acting. And though Lilla is mistaken about many of the key details of Hobbes's project, he is right in suggesting that Hobbes's peculiar way of rendering the Christian imagination would prove fruitful, insofar as it inaugurated a liberal political tradition that sees the state as the primary locus of meaning in history. But Hobbes's aim would require not simply a positive articulation of the state's role in salvation history, but would also need—negatively—to redescribe certain elements of the predominant Christian worldview that might pose a threat to his new state-centered account of the Christian life.

Part Two: Squelching the Double Vision

Introduction

Part 1 of this essay examined the use of Thomas Hobbes in contemporary discussions surrounding ‘political theology,’ focusing especially on the deployment of Hobbes within a mythic narrative that modern liberalism tells concerning its own origins. On this view, Hobbes represents an early and important case of liberalism’s distinctive rejection of ‘premodern’ ways of connecting ‘politics’ to ‘religion’ and theological discourse to political discourse. As I suggested, the conscription of Hobbes in service of this myth is dubious, for—in terms of Mark Lilla’s twofold thesis—Hobbes neither advocates a ‘Great Separation’ of politics from the Christian church, nor does he put to rest ‘political theology’ by promoting or instantiating a principled demarcation of ‘political’ questions from theological and cosmological ones. To the contrary, I showed, an attentive and responsible reading of *Leviathan* discloses a book thoroughly suffused with Christian scripture and arguments from Christian theology.

One upshot of my argument in part 1 was that attention to various dynamics at play in the argument of *Leviathan* is crucial for making sense of its sometimes perplexingly complex shape. Hobbes’s treatise is written by a Christian author, addressed to an almost exclusively Christian audience, concerning the ordering of the common life of Christians in a polis that Hobbes explicitly calls “a Christian Common-wealth.” Thus, he supports his positions by deploying Christian language, and not merely in the form of scriptural citations and theological arguments, but in extended conversational address to his readers in shared Christian. Though entirely

foreign to modern, secular liberal political theory, this appeal makes sense in his own context, which is categorically different from that of modern secular liberalism. For liberal political theory concerns a non-confessional political order, aims intentionally and self-consciously at neutrality with respect to 'religion,' and typically addresses itself to an audience "unencumbered selves."¹ Hobbes, by contrast, aims to convince Christian readers, by appeal to Christian scripture and soteriology, to lend their support to a new way of ordering Christendom, namely a hyper-Erastian arrangement under which the incipient nation-state would possess absolute, unquestioned authority in all matters concerning its subjects' bodies—matters both 'political' and 'religious,' both 'temporal' and 'secular.'

While affirming the standard claim that the chief aim of Hobbes's treatise is to articulate and defend a particular account of governance, I urged that the argument of *Leviathan* comprises much more than its main deductive argument. If the 'thesis' of Hobbes's book is that the only effective form of governance is the absolute state sovereignty that he details in the fifteen chapters of part 2, his main argument for this claim takes two forms: (i) a scientific form, which—in accordance with the rigorous scientific method he articulates in chapter 46—begins with precise definitions, and proceeds by ratiocination to deduce certain and rationally binding conclusions; and (ii) a theological form, which appeals to scripture to show that God demands obedience of all human subjects to their various sovereigns, for each local sovereign is the very vice-regent of God, a "mortal god," but only in that territory. If this is the twofold main argument of *Leviathan*, Hobbes also offers ancillary arguments to demonstrate the broader consistency of his primary thesis with other

¹ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," in *Political Theory* 12.1 (1984), 81-96.

commitments his readers likely have. For instance, in defense of the argument's rational formulation, he shows that the findings of reason—especially the rational conclusion that humans are obligated to establish sovereignty when it's absent, and to obey it where it exists—are also divinely established laws. Thus, he shows that any rational obligation is, by virtue of its rationality, also a moral obligation. Such a claim remains of interest today even to those 'secular' interpreters of *Leviathan* who wish to think about the relationship between reason and moral obligation even without adverting to the possibility of divine law as the linchpin between them.²

Likewise, as part of this ancillary demonstration of the consistency of his argument for sovereignty with his readers' broader commitments, he makes a set of claims that remain untranslatable into 'secular' terms. For instance, in support of his theological formulation of the main argument, he augments his scriptural demonstration of the Christian obligation to obey the sovereign with a more schematic theological account of how the incipient nation-state, whose absolute sovereignty his task it is to theorize—fits into salvation history.

All of what I've just described—the rational argument for state sovereignty, and its corollary claim that rational obligations are also moral obligations, plus the scriptural argument for state sovereignty and its corresponding theological articulation in terms of salvation history—serve to support Hobbes's main 'thesis': the only effective governance is absolute sovereignty, and you—the reader—are obligated, for various reasons, to obey the claims your sovereign makes on you, and

² See, inter alia, Luciano Venezia, *Hobbes on Legal Authority and Political Obligation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, 27-30, 40-44, 57-119, 149-60, 171-203; Thomas Nagel, "Hobbes's Concept of Obligation," in *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), 68-83.

to do your part, whatever that might be, to ensure that a stable, effective sovereign state remains in place in your particular polis.

Careful attention to Hobbes's scriptural and theological argumentation, I showed, while not unprecedented, remains atypical of studies of *Leviathan*. Yet while such attention is salutary, I suggested, simply to recognize the importance of these other arguments is to fall short of acknowledging the full significance of Hobbes's specifically Christendom context. For not only does Hobbes engage with scripture in *Leviathan* in order to offer a parallel theological argument to the strictly rational argument for state sovereignty. He also aims to change the way his readers imagine the world, and this means changing their theological imagination.

A strict understanding of "argument" is the sense it takes in formal logic as a valid arrangement of truth-bearing premises within a deductive system that yields a specific conclusion that—when the premises themselves are true—is also true, and should for that reason be adopted by anyone who considers the argument. Secondly, it may also include induction, which "extends deductive logic to less-than-certain inferences."³ Both Hobbes's scientific and scriptural arguments for state sovereignty, as well as their moral and theological corollaries, can all be easily formulated in terms of such argumentation. Indeed, he takes himself to have made the case for all them deductively, and thus with the certitude that such conclusions entail. His readers may disagree with Hobbes's self-assessment, and instead interpret some or all of them as merely inductive, entailing not certain conclusions about the necessity of the state and obligation of its citizens, but merely probable

³ James Hawthorne, "Inductive Logic," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/logic-inductive>.

ones.⁴ But in either case, whether properly deductive or inductive, these arguments are easily formulable in a system of evidential support.

Part two of this essay focuses on another feature of Hobbes's argument in addition to these basically deductive arguments in support of his 'thesis.' As I show in what follows, Hobbes aims in *Leviathan* at another broad and complex task, one that is slightly more difficult to define, since it is not readily articulable in terms of isolable premises and conclusions. As I suggested in chapter 2, one way to understand *Leviathan's* various argumentative features is in terms of from ethos and pathos. But much of what I'll trace in the following chapters does not readily fit into the classical distinction amongst logos, ethos, and pathos. Rather, these other claims Hobbes brandishes for his readers constitute "arguments that are not mere rhetoric which nonetheless do not fit the deductive mould."⁵ Here, I speak of his aim at redescribing the world his readers inhabit, and thus recommending to them a new "background picture" that will both liberate them from the older—medieval and scholastic—picture that has held Christendom captive, and will offer them a new way of seeing the world and imagining their roles as agents within it.⁶

To return to the terms of Wittgenstein's metaphor, Hobbes aims gradually but fundamentally to alter the picture that lay within the language of medieval

⁴ See, inter alia, Jean Hampton, "The Failure of Hobbes's Social Contract Argument," in *The Social Contract Theorists: Critical Essays on Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau*, ed. by Christopher W. Morris (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 41-58.

⁵ Andrew Mason, *Explaining Political Disagreement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38.

⁶ "Background picture" is another term coined by Charles Taylor, and closely but complexly related to the term "social imaginary" I used in chapter 1 above. On "background picture," see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 565-66; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 4-8, 41-42; Michael Morgan, "Religion, History, and Moral Discourse," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor*, ed. James Tully (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51-54.

Western Christendom, but without making much change to the words themselves.⁷ In other words, he aims to reinterpret the Christian vocabulary, so that Christendom might be truly reformed—in what we might call a rational transfiguration, not a radical transformation.⁸ After all, if there is something valuable about the kernel of Christian faith, as Hobbes clearly affirms—then it needn't be discarded, but only stripped of its husk, and planted in a new plot, where it can flower as truly intended. One way to conceive of Hobbes's redescription project in *Leviathan* is as the cultivation of a new plot of soil in which to plant the kernel of Christianity, once it has been stripped of its irrational husk. Hobbes's rationalizing of Christianity involves both a destructive mode—in which he demonstrates the untenability of certain traditional views—and a constructive mode that shows how these views might be revised without having to reject the broader constellation of Christian thought and practice.

Thus, the crucial aim of Hobbes's reform project, which I've described as 'squelching the double vision' comprises *both* a formal argument against conceptual dualisms that might provide reasons for rejecting state sovereignty *and* an informal argument, a reconfiguration of the Christian imagination intended to show his readers a truly rational way of seeing the world and their place in it. The aims of these arguments, while distinct, are intertwined. The first is necessary because the

⁷ We might say that, on Hobbes's account, the particular signs and syntax of Christian discourse remain the same, but their semantic meaning changes, given Hobbes's intended reform.

⁸ Here, against Jürgen Moltman, who claims that transfiguration entails transformation, I hint here at an important distinction between them. Insofar as form determines essence, to transform something is to change its essence, to make it something other than what it was. To *transfigure*, something, by contrast, would mean as radical a change possible without making it something other than what it was. Thus, to point to an example from Christian metaphysics—and one that would sit uneasily with Hobbes's nominalism—because grace presupposes but does not destroy nature, we may say that grace does not transform, but transfigures nature. Jürgen Moltman, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981), 122-25.

'double vision' that had predominated in Christendom since the fourth century, Hobbes thinks, profoundly threatens his proposal in the short term. His account of politics, and in particular of absolute state sovereignty, represents a sharp departure from traditional Christian ways of thinking about politics. Thus, he must face a host of counter-arguments from Christian scripture, ecclesiology, soteriology. In short, nearly all features of the medieval synthesis which continued to exercise a stronghold on Christian language, imagination, and practice, combine to place the burden of proof on Hobbes's proposals, for they represent such a sharp departure from the tradition.⁹ But the second is necessary because, in the long run, Hobbes's aim is to transfigure Christendom, not merely to articulate a theory of effective governance.

Hobbes sketches a materialist ontology that achieves both these aims. First, it provides an overarching framework for establishing the plausibility of the other claims he will offer in *Leviathan*. In this sense, it provides theoretical scaffolding for his intellectual system. Second, it recommends to his readers a way of seeing the world. This materialist ontology—rooted in the claim that all entities that we can meaningfully think or speak of are bodies of a certain kind—doesn't *exhaust* the vision he recommends to his readers, but it does entail a number of claims that will be non-negotiable on Hobbes's account. For anything that we can think about, speak about, or act upon in a meaningful way must be accounted for in terms provided by this ontology. This excludes a host of purported entities that some Christians have

⁹ Eric Brandon helpfully explores this implication of Hobbes's materialism in *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*: "the political philosophy of *Leviathan* gains viability from a monistic metaphysics, such as materialism, which immediately combats metaphysical double vision. Finally, since Hobbes believes that it will be difficult to induce political double vision without its proper foundation, metaphysical dualism, Hobbes thinks that materialism makes his political theory stronger and more accurate" (80).

posited. A rationally construed world, Hobbes thinks, must exclude them on principle.

In what follows, I trace several key features of Hobbes's project of redescription, attending in a 'thick' way to the world he offers his readers, with special attention to the way such an account seeks to retrain the imaginations of his Christian readers, and thus to 'squench the double vision' that threatens the rationally reconstructed commonwealth properly ordered by the state.

To understand what Hobbes means by 'double vision,' it is worth considering several related kinds of dualism and the role they play in Hobbes's account. In short, there are four dichotomies that Hobbes aims to explode, and to replace with a unified and coherent vision of the world. Each is rooted in a binary pair: matter-spirit, body-soul, temporal-spiritual, and state-church. Hobbes's philosophical, scriptural, and theological arguments serve to oppose each of them, in an extended informal argument that stretches across the 46 chapters of *Leviathan*. The first is substance (or ontological) dualism: the construal of the world in terms of two kinds of substance, matter and spirit. This ontological dualism informs, though it doesn't necessarily entail, a corresponding anthropological dualism. In classical Christian metaphysics, human beings are composite creatures, consisting of a material body and an immaterial soul. Hobbes's rejection of ontological dualism entails his rejection of this particular version of body-soul dualism. He allows that "soul" has legitimate use in describing the human person.¹⁰ But in accordance with his

¹⁰ It refers properly to "either the Life, or the living Creature; and the Body and Soule jointly, the *Body alive*" (IV.44.339-40; 974). See David Johnston, "Hobbes's Mortalism," in *History of Political Thought* 10 (1989), 647-63. Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, 15-25. Samantha Frost, *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker: Hobbesian Reflections on Ethics and Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 21-23.

reductive materialism, he must reject any view that would account for the human person in terms of “incorporeal substance.”

These metaphysical dualisms often issue in corresponding ecclesial and political dualisms: one is rooted in the binary pair of temporal-spiritual, and the other in ecclesial-civil. As with the relationship of ontological dualism to anthropological dualism, so too here, these ecclesio-political dualisms don't ineluctably follow from the anthropological dualism.¹¹ These third and fourth dualisms are intimately related, for the temporal-spiritual distinction is drawn almost exclusively in ecclesial discourse: it suggests suggestion that the kingdom of God is substantially distinct from, though temporally coextensive with, the present world. One practical manifestation of this temporal-spiritual distinction is that a corresponding distinction obtains between two spheres of authority in Christendom: a temporal sphere (the proper purview of civil authorities), and a spiritual sphere (with which ecclesial authorities are properly concerned). This dualistic account of authority is typically rooted in the first kind of dualism, such that the temporal authority governs the body, and the spiritual authority governs the soul. Thus, the 'double vision' Hobbes seeks to overcome “begins at the level of metaphysics and advances to the political level.”¹² Hobbes says: “Temporal and spiritual government are but two words brought into the world to make men see double and mistake their lawful sovereign” (III.39.248; 732-34). The chief danger of the division between spiritual and temporal government is that such division will lead to “faction and civil war in the commonwealth: between the Church and State, between spiritualists

¹¹ Hence, the spiritual-temporal distinction is not entirely reducible to implications of metaphysical dualism (it doesn't necessarily follow from it), nor does it require it.

¹² Brandon, *The Coherence of Hobbes's Leviathan*, 4.

and temporalists; between the sword of justice and the shield of faith; and (which is more) in every Christian man's own breast, between the Christian and the man" (III.39.248; 732). Thus, the double vision Hobbes wishes to collapse has both political and eternal consequences.

The alternative theoretical framework Hobbes offers in *Leviathan* has two aspects. One is chiefly historical and theological: it narrates salvation history to show its readers where they fit in the broad sweep of God's actions in history, and what they ought to do—in constructing and defending the sovereign governance of the state—as faithful Christians to participate in this economy of salvation. This aspect of Hobbes's argument lies outside the scope of this essay. The second aspect—which I explore in the chapters to follow—is more properly philosophical than theological: in order to mitigate the threat that bad metaphysics poses to a healthy Christian commonwealth, Hobbes opens the first part of *Leviathan* with a treatise "On Man" in which he sketches a materialist ontology, a theory of mind commensurate with his materialism, and an account of language rooted in both this ontology and this theory of mind. These positions he sets in stark opposition to metaphysical dualisms of various kinds, most obviously the Christianized Aristotelianism of medieval scholasticism, but also some version of the 'new science' itself that are insufficiently 'new,' such as Descartes's mind-body dualism. But this philosophical redescription is partly in service of an equally revisionary theological account. In demonstrating that various and complexly related dualisms (matter-spirit, body-soul, temporal-spiritual, church-state) are philosophically illegitimate, he shows that they cannot be used to legitimate challenges to the absolute sovereignty of the nation-state.

The foundation of Hobbes's attack on dualism is a reductively materialist ontology. In Chapter 3, I sketch the essential elements of this ontology, and suggest that, instead of offering abstruse philosophical arguments in favor of it—as he does in the *Elements of Philosophy* trilogy—Hobbes instead recommends this reductive picture to his readers in *Leviathan* by assuming it, and showing that it can make coherent sense of human experience of the world. The overall aim of Hobbes's materialist ontology, then, is to collapse these various dualisms and to assert instead a programmatic monism: the universe comprises one kind of substance, of which all structural features of the human person are constructed; likewise, authority over human bodies is simple and direct, rather than complex and diffuse, and is exercised by a single head of both church and state. Hobbes's monism, I argue, thus has broad implications for three different spheres: scriptural interpretation, theology, and civil science.

Here, my argument makes a brief but important detour (chapter 4) to show the theological and ecclesial implications of Hobbes's monism. As I showed in part 1 of this essay, Hobbes's vision of a truly reformed Christian society entails an Erastian arrangement of church and state (chapter 2). Only such an arrangement, Hobbes insists, can coherently account for both the visible nature of the church and for the real authority of the state. Thus, he defines “a CHURCH to be a company of men professing Christian religion, united in the person of one sovereign, at whose command they ought to assemble, and without whose authority they ought not to assemble” (III.39.248; 732).¹³ Thus, “a church . . . is the same thing as a Civil

¹³ The ecclesiology articulated here—which makes no reference to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit—has definitive consequences for christology and pneumatology. While it this account doesn't exclude the traditional affirmation of Christian theology that Jesus is the head of the church, which is gathered, built up, and sent by the power of the Holy Spirit, it does mean that Christ's authority

Common-wealth, consisting of Christian men; and is called a *Civill State*, for that the subjects of it are *Men*; and a *Church*, for that the subjects thereof are *Christians*” (III.39.248; 732). Chapter 4 draws a connection between Hobbes’s Erastian ecclesiology and the materialist ontology sketched in chapter 3, showing that on Hobbes’s view, scripture is to be read free of extrabiblical (and ultimately irrational) prejudice that takes spirit to be a nonmaterial substance, and which supposes there are two distinct modes of authority depicted in scripture—the spiritual and the temporal. Likewise, theology—which we might stipulatively define as the examination of claims about God for their bearing on Christian life—must reject dualistic assumptions, because theology ought to be responsible to both reason and special revelation (both are forms of God’s word).

After the theological interlude of chapter 4, the argument proceeds by articulating specifically anthropological implications of the reductively materialist ontology outlined already in chapter 3. But here, in chapter 5, the focus is on the structure of the human mind, and particularly on those features that make possible the peculiar self-transfiguration that Hobbes attributes to the human mind. Here, the importance of the distinction between nature and artifice becomes central. Appealing to the materialist account of mind that Hobbes lays out in the ‘prolegomenon’ to part I, “On Man,” I argue that Hobbes subtly demarcates natural human features from artificial ones. Indeed, I suggest that the most important

is exhaustively represented by the sovereign, and likewise, that the Spirit’s work is chiefly mediated through the workings of the sovereign state. Hobbes comes close to saying as much when he identifies the Holy Ghost with the apostles—“the Holy Ghost, that is to say, the Apostles and their successors, in the Office of Preaching and Teaching” (III.42.267; 776)—then later explains that, after Constantine, the apostolic office was subsumed under the office of the sovereign, once “Kings were Pastors,” and “Pastors Kings” (III.42.281; 812). Thus, if in the primitive church the apostles represented the Holy Spirit, the state does so now until the Second Coming.

feature of Hobbes's philosophy of mind is its distinction between the 'natural mind' and the 'worded mind,' made possible through human linguistic artifice.

In chapter 6, I describe Hobbes's account of language, showing its consistency with the ontology and theory of mind offered in chapters 3 and 5. But here, I point more emphatically to another theme that emerges from Hobbes's foundational accounts of matter, mind, language, and reason—given that language, reason, society, and governance are all artificial, and thus arbitrary, humans have the freedom, and the responsibility, to develop the corresponding arts. Having traced the proper limits and types of language, Hobbes is able to show how each kind of language might properly and rationally be used, that is, how they *ought to be used* in a rationally reconstructed Christian Commonwealth. Thus, by the end of this second half, I will have displayed Hobbes's theoretical account of the world his readers inhabit and which he claims properly defines their possibilities for speaking and acting, and ultimately in creating a world.

Chapter Three

Desufflating the Christian Imagination: on Hobbes's Materialist Ontology

There is a *latent Atheism* at the root of SADDUCEAN Principle: for too many deny *Witches*, because they believe there are no *Spirits*; and they are so perswaded because they own no Being in the world, but *matter*, and the results of *motion*, and consequently, can acknowledge nothing of a *God*.

—Joseph Glanvill, *A Whip for the Droll, Fiddler to the Atheist: Being Reflections on Drollery & Atheism*¹

An important element in the ancient and medieval Latin baptismal rite—one that survives today in only an attenuated form—was insufflation, the breathing of the Holy Spirit onto either the baptizand or the baptismal waters.² This ritual was sometimes spoken of as accomplishing not only the *insufflation* of the Holy Spirit into the initiate, but also of the *exsufflation* of evil spirits to make way for the indwelling of God.³ As Cyril of Jerusalem explains:

As goldsmiths achieve their effect by directing their breath into the fire through narrow pipes and blowing on the gold hidden in the retort and stimulating the flame underneath, so too the exorcists inspire fear through the Holy Spirit and, so to speak, enkindle the soul inside the retort of the body. Our enemy the devil departs.⁴

1 Joseph Glanvill, *A Whip for the Droll, Fiddler to the Atheist: Being Reflections on Drollery & Atheism* (London, 1668) 176-77.

² On breathing rituals in the history of Christian liturgy, see H. A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), *passim*.

³ Augustine, for instance, complains to Macrobius in Letter 108 of Donatist rebaptism practices. Insofar as they perform the exsufflation ritual on someone who has already been baptized into the church, he remarks, they blasphemously treat the Holy Spirit as an evil spirit to be exorcised like a devil.

⁴ Procatechesis, 9. In *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977).

This ritual was the target of harsh attacks by the Protestant Reformers. Calvin, for instance complains that “the only begotten son of God wanted baptism to be carried out with water, but it has pleased men to add . . . exsufflation.”⁵ He admits “how ancient the origin of this alien hodgepodge is,” but nonetheless insists that “all pious men” ought “to reject whatever men have dared to add to Christ’s institution.”⁶ The priests who carry out this ritual are not like “like actors whose gestures have some art and meaning, but like apes, which imitate everything wantonly and without any discrimination.”⁷

Hobbes never mentions the practices of either insufflation—breathing in the Spirit—or exsufflation—blowing out the evil spirits. But he complains for dozens of pages in Part IV of *Leviathan* of the superstitious and idolatrous liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, characterized above all by

ceremonies that have been left in the Church, from the first conversion of the Gentiles; . . . and if a man would well observe that which is delivered in the histories, concerning the religious rites of the Greeks and Romans, I doubt not but he might find many more of these old empty bottles of Gentilism, which the doctors of the Roman Church, either by negligence or ambition, have filled up again with the new wine of Christianity, that will not fail in time to break them. (IV.45.366; 1050)

I refer in this chapter to Hobbes’s ‘desufflation’ of the Christian imagination to capture the point that his aim in reforming Christendom is neither an insufflation (to “breathe on” the Holy Spirit), nor an exsufflation (to “blow out” evil spirits). Both of these, as we shall see in chapter 4, would constitute superstitious and irrational approaches to spirit. Rather, Hobbes’s aim is to *desufflate* Christendom, by expelling

⁵ John Calvin, in a letter dated April 5, 1558 Cited in *Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Advice*, trans. by Mary Beaty and Benjamin W. Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 93.

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* IV.15.19.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* IV.19.29.

the very notion of spiritual substance from the theoretical machinery of Christendom.

3.1 The 'prolegomenon' to *Leviathan*

After Hobbes discovered, sometime in the 1630s, that the elements of philosophy can be helpfully divided into three kinds—body, man, citizen—he set out to write a systematic treatment of these parts that would begin with the laws of bodies in motion, and would end with the rationally constituted commonwealth. His envisioned trilogy, he later reports, would expound the “first Elements” of philosophy in their proper order, beginning with a treatment of “body and its general properties,” followed by an examination of “Man and his particular faculties and passions,” and culminating in a treatise on “the Commonwealth and the duties of citizens.”⁸ When the vicissitudes of English politics interfered with these plans—ultimately provoking a self-imposed exile in Paris—Hobbes felt pressured to produce first, and out of order, the part of this trilogy that would treat the commonwealth.⁹ Two things became increasingly evident to him while in exile. First, that a stable political order was a needed prerequisite to the flowering of the sciences. But second, that this would require a broader cultural transformation. Hence, he went to work on a book that would be likely—at least more likely than his abstruse scientific trilogy would be—to change popular attitudes in England. What he wrote was *Leviathan*, which he hoped would not only be studied by the

⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *De cive*, ‘Praefatio ad Lectores’, p 82. English translation in Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, trans. and ed. by Richard Tuck (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

⁹ “It happened that my country, some years before the civil war broke out, was already seething with questions of the right of Government and of the due obedience of citizens, forerunners of the approaching war.” Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 13.

intellectual and political elites, but would be adopted as a textbook in the universities, and thus would have a 'trickle down' effect through its influence on pastors, bishops, and noblemen.¹⁰

In Part I of *Leviathan*, "Of Man," Hobbes begins the catechesis of his envisioned Christian reader by offering a philosophical account of sensory perception. Hobbes's account of perception, determinative for his overall project, thus serves three aims. First, as a showcase of the plausibility of the reductively materialist ontology that governs his further descriptions of human beings and the world they inhabit. Second, as theoretical groundwork for his account of cognition, language, and reason: here, he articulates a theory of sensation which, given his reductively materialist ontology and radically empiricist epistemology, will ground and determine his account of human perception, thought, and volition. All human cognition and volition are, without exception, dependent upon sense. Third, to show that—prior to human artifice—nothing distinguishes humans from the other animals. Thus, his theory of perception shows that language and politics are not given, but must be made. From its creation, humanity has faced the task of constructing, via artifice, the world of language and politics.

But these aims are not innocent of political and theological motives. The ontology and corresponding anthropology that Hobbes articulates here have direct consequences for theology and politics. If, as David Johnston suggests, "Hobbes

¹⁰ In the penultimate paragraph of the "Review and Conclusion" to *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes his intentions explicit: "To conclude, there is nothing in this whole Discourse . . . as far as I can perceive, contrary either to the Word of God, or to good Manners; or tending to the disturbance of the Publique Tranquillity. Therefore I think it may be profitably printed and more profitably taught in the Universities. . . . For seeing the Universities are the Fountains of Civill, and Morall Doctrine, from whence the Preachers, and the Gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same (both from the pulpit and in their Conversation) upon the People, there ought certainly to be great care taken, to have it pure . . . from the Incantation of Deceiving Spirits" (1140).

came to the conclusion that both theology and metaphysics were of direct political importance, that political consequences flowed from the widespread adoption of certain theological and even metaphysical views,” and “that certain features of the imaginative world of his contemporaries were inherently antagonistic to the establishment of political authority upon any rational basis,” then his attack on these features, and his attempt “to replace them with doctrines . . . both more enlightened and more compatible with a rational political society” begins in this description of the world his readers inhabit.¹¹ Hobbes thus aims first to squelch the “double vision,” rooted in dualist metaphysics, that plagues seventeenth-century Christendom, then to offer an alternative, and more rational, account of human perception and language, on which he builds his account of science and the state. In so doing, Hobbes hoped to initiate “a cultural transformation” through which he might “lay the foundations required for any truly rational polity to come into being.”¹²

After considering the concepts of ‘thought experiment’ and ‘world-picture’ as they bear on Hobbes’s treatise ‘On Man,’ this chapter traces two key features of his philosophical anthropology: its radically reductive ontological materialism, and the account of perception that forms the link between that ontology and his important philosophy of mind. This chapter traces the reductively materialist anthropological ‘prologomenon with which Hobbes begins his *Leviathan*. This ontology, I suggest, serves three major functions: i) to provide a theoretical foundation for the extended ‘rational’ argument of the treatise; ii) to encourage his readers to see the world in a way commensurate with the findings of his rational argument; and iii) to attack the

¹¹ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, xix-xx.

¹² Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, xx.

dualistic metaphysics that he sees as undergirding Christian resistance to the modern science—including his own civil science. In short, Hobbes aims to ‘desufflate’ Christendom by describing the world, and its human inhabitants, in reductively material terms, showing that the role typically played by ‘spirit’ in theoretical accounts of the world can be played just as well—indeed better—by reductive materialism. The account in this chapter sets the stage for discussions in chapters 4 (on Hobbes’s ‘rational’ exegesis of scripture), 5, and 6 (Hobbes’s account of language).¹³

3.2. ‘Thought Experiments’ in *Leviathan*

In the popular imagination—at least for those sufficiently familiar with English literature to have some acquaintance with *Leviathan*—mention of this title typically evokes Hobbes’s famous “state of nature” hypothesis, and more specifically his description of human life in its natural condition as “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (I.13.62; 192).¹⁴ By means of this provocative thought experiment, Hobbes aims to show his readers how intolerable human life would be in the absence of law—whether positive (custom backed by force) or natural (apprehension of the laws of reason)—and governance, neither of which has yet emerged in this imagined primitive condition. In so doing, he takes himself to have demonstrated the need for law and governance to secure the minimally necessary

¹³ The primary focus of this treatment will be on the first ten chapters of *Leviathan*, but I will cite texts from corresponding passages in *De Corpore*, *De Homine*, and *Elements of Law* as appropriate. Thus, this chapter will continue the practice of citing passages from *Leviathan* parenthetically in the main text.

¹⁴ The term “state of nature,” though popularly associated with *Leviathan*, does not appear in the text at all. Though he employs that term in the earlier *Elements of Law* (1640) and *De cive* (1642), *Leviathan* instead speaks of “the naturall condition of mankind” (I.13.60; 188).

conditions for a tolerable human life, a need, he will go on to argue, can be realized only an absolute sovereign state.

But this famous passage appears in chapter 13, in the wake of twelve lesser-known chapters that detail an even more radical thought experiment. In these earlier explorations, Hobbes aims to elicit the most basic and genuinely natural features of the human mind—its cognitive and motive powers—by stripping away not only law and governance, but society of any kind, as well as reason and even language.¹⁵ What is left, it turns out, are precisely those features that humans share with all other animals: perception, experience, memory, deliberation, and will. Such faculties compose what I shall call, following Philip Pettit, the “natural mind.”¹⁶

Though I use the term ‘thought experiment’ to describe both Hobbes’s appeal to a hypothetical presocial human condition in chapter 13 of *Leviathan*, and his speculations in chapters 1-10 about the prelinguistic human mind, the term is not Hobbes’s own.¹⁷ Nonetheless, what he offers in each case is clearly an idealization rather than a historical reconstruction—he never suggests that either state ever really obtained in human history.¹⁸ Thus, the term ‘thought experiment’ serves to capture

¹⁵ By “basic,” I mean those features without which the human species would cease to be human; by “natural,” I mean those logically prior to any human artifice, and prior to any receipt of supernatural revelation. On Hobbes’s account of the human mind, as we shall see, “basic” and “natural” turn out to refer to the same set of features.

¹⁶ He applies this term to “the simple mind that human beings share with other animals.” Philip Pettit, *Made With Words: Hobbes on Mind, Language, and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4. See 13-18 for his treatment of the natural mind in Hobbes’s thought.

¹⁷ Indeed, the term itself didn’t appear until 1811, when a Danish Kantian named Hans Christian Ørsted introduced it in his “Prolegomenon to the General Theory of Nature,” though the concept is at least as old as the Ring of Gyges to which Glaucon appeals in *Republic II*, 360C. For the reference to Ørsted, see Tamar Szabo Gendler, *Thought Experiment: On the Powers and Limits of Imaginary Cases* (London: Routledge, 2014), 20n28.

¹⁸ I. C. Hungerland and G. R. Vick, “Hobbes’s Theory of Language, Speech, and Reasoning,” in *Computatio Sive Logico* by Thomas Hobbes, ed. by I. C. Hungerland and G. R. Vick (New York: Abaris Books, 1981), 25.

two features of these hypotheses: their non-historical nature and their appeal to the readers' intuitions about the way things are. In both cases he asks his readers to imagine a world like their own, but missing certain features. By asking them to think abstractly about how things would be different in the absence of key features such as law, governance, language, or reason, he aims to provoke them to consider their significance, and thus to effect their agreement with his own intuitions.¹⁹

Some, however, have suggested that the concept 'thought experiment' is at risk of losing usefulness when used too often and imprecisely. At the end of the last century, George Bealer complained about a tendency "within recent philosophy" toward "an unfortunate blurring of traditional terminology."²⁰ The chief target of Bealer's scorn is what he takes to be an inappropriately loose deployment of the term 'thought experiment':

Rational intuitions about hypothetical cases are often being erroneously called *thought experiments*. This deviates from traditional

¹⁹ Thus, both of Hobbes's thought experiments are formally similar to the concept in Christian theology of *pura natura*, a hypothetical state that conceives of human nature apart from any effects of grace or any ordination to a supernatural end. This hypothesis enables theologians to make a speculative distinction—within fallen, historical human nature—between those human capacities and features proper to God's gift by way of nature itself, and those attributable only to God's additional gift by way of grace. This distinction enables us "to acknowledge the proper difference that obtains *realiter* between nature and grace, in order to do justice to the specific gratuity of the grace of predestination" as well as "to develop a coherent account of the relative and limited integrity of the principle of nature, which preserves the proper gratuity of the first gift," and hence "does justice to the ineluctable double gratuity entailed in the economy of salvation." Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 182. The aim of such discourse is to enable Christians to speak coherently about human nature: to identify which features of our existence are proper to us, simply as God's creatures, and thus would be just as true of undamaged, pre-lapsus humans, and to distinguish these from those other features that obtain only for damaged creatures, and thus proper to the devastation. The additional set of hypothetical distinctions serves to distinguish further between those features of our existence that are due not to nature alone, let alone to damaged nature alone, but are due to the discrete gifts of divine grace, which serve both to heal damaged nature, and to raise it beyond its merely natural capacities to share in supernatural goods.

²⁰ George Bealer, "The Autonomy of Philosophy," in *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. by Michael R. DePaul and William Ramsey (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 207.

use, and it blurs an important distinction that we should keep vividly in mind. Traditionally, in a thought experiment one usually elicits a physical intuition (not a rational intuition) about what would happen in a hypothetical situation in which physical, or natural, laws (whatever they happen to be) are held constant but physical conditions are in various other respects nonactual and often highly idealized . . . A classic example is Newton's thought experiment about a rotating bucket in an otherwise empty space. Would water creep up the side of the bucket (assuming that the physical laws remained unchanged)? Rational intuition is silent about this sort of question. Rational intuitions concern such matters as whether a case is possible (logically or metaphysically), and about whether a concept applies to such cases . . . [T]o call [such cases] thought experiments is, not only to invite confusion about philosophical method, but to destroy the utility of a once useful term.²¹

To describe both Hobbes's 'state of nature' hypothesis and his imagined world of prelinguistic humans as 'thought experiments,' as I do in this chapter, would surely draw Bealer's ire. For in both cases, the intuition Hobbes wishes to elicit goes beyond the obviously "physical or natural laws" with which a true thought experiment, in Bealer's sense, is properly concerned.

But Hobbes's exhaustive materialism, I suggest, collapses the determinative distinction Bealer draws between physical cases (concerning bodies in motion) and logical or metaphysical cases (concerning our language, or the real existence of immaterial objects). For Hobbes, imagining how humans would behave in their imagined "naturall condition," absent any law or political order, is on par with Newton's imagining the rotating bucket of water in an empty space. In both cases, Hobbes would want us to think, the hypothesis considers the movement of bodies (in one case, the mass of water in the bucket, in the other, a mass of human bodies no less governed by the mechanistic laws of physics) when something about their ordinary movement (populated space for the bucket of water, governance for the

²¹ George Bealer, "The Autonomy of Philosophy," 207-08.

human beings) is removed. Thus, any force that Bealer's critique of prodigal uses of the term 'thought experiment' may have is weakened if Hobbesian materialism is true. This is because, on the terms provided by Hobbes's own theory, there is no room for the kind of clear distinction Bealer wants to make between physical and non-physical intuitions.

But there is an even more compelling reason to deem these devices of thought Hobbes uses in *Leviathan* 'thought experiments.' This has to do with their intended rhetorical effect on the reader. In a monograph on thought experiments in both science and philosophy, Roy Sorenson flatly contravenes Bealer's view when he suggests that "[t]he official role of thought experiment is to test modal consequences."²² The language of modality typically conjures not physical laws, but logic and metaphysics. But Sorenson adds that this 'office' is bigger than it might look at first:

The apparent narrowness of its function eases once we realize that there are many kinds of necessity: logical, physical, technological, moral. But the real flexibility of thought experiments wriggles up from the *indirect* uses of this official procedure. Just as jokes, metaphor, and politeness are conveyed through trick bounces off conventions governing literal conversation, thought experimenters use the standard format obliquely to transact a rich array of side tasks: concocting counterexamples to definitions and 'laws,' expanding the domain of theories, exhibiting modal fallacies, deriving astounding consequences, suggesting impossibility proofs.²³

Thus, Sorenson concludes, not only is thought experiment's official task of testing modal consequences capacious, but it also admits of a host of extra-official functions. For instance, Sorenson points out, "in addition to being experiments and paradoxes,

²² Roy A. Sorenson, *Thought Experiments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6.

²³ Sorenson, *Thought Experiments*, 6.

thought experiments are stories.²⁴ With this consideration in mind, we may draw two conclusions about Hobbes's use of thought experiments. First, Hobbes's radical materialism blurs the lines between physical, metaphysical, and logical intuitions that Bealer wants to preserve. Second, Hobbes also presents this materialism by means of a 'story' he tells about human beings in the world; the picture he sketches by means of thought experiment establishes the background setting for this story.

As will become evident from what follows, the picture of the human being Hobbes elicits from his thought experiment about language and its relation to the mind issues in a detailed account of the natural (that is, pre-linguistic and pre-rational) mind. Once more, here I use 'natural' primarily in contrast with 'artificial' (what depends on human volition, such as baseball, a practice whose invention and continued existence depends entirely on willful human decisions to engage in, and thus sustain the practice) and secondarily in contrast with 'supernatural' (what is known only by faith, such as the claim that God created the world *ex nihilo*). Neither of these categories are the proper subjects of physics, which is, for Hobbes, the study of natural bodies. An interesting middle term between these concepts of "natural" and "artificial" would be the recently introduced hybrid of a plum and nectarine, the nectaplum, which would not have emerged apart from human intention, but once released into the world, becomes one more natural body, since the life of this new species will continue apart from active human cultivation.²⁵

²⁴ Sorenson, *Thought Experiments*, 6.

²⁵ As we shall see in chapter 5, there is a third way (besides non-artificial and non-supernatural) that Hobbes uses natural, namely to distinguish between innate capacities and learned ones (as between a natural ability to tell sweet from bitter, and a learned ability to distinguish the hints of grapefruit in a Sauvignon Blanc wine from New Zealand from those of lime in its Bordeaux equivalent). But this latter distinction is simply a subtler version of the first.

Hobbes account of the ‘natural’ mind begins with human modes of perception, for—so he insists—all mental entities and operations begin with sense. He announces, programmatically: “The Originall of [all mental conceptions], is that we call SENSE; (for there is no conception in a mans mind, which hath not first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense.) The rest are derived from that originall” (I.1.3; 22). This radically perception-based picture of the human mind that Hobbes sketches in the opening chapters of *Leviathan* is foundational to his entire project.

3.3. Hobbes and the Modern ‘World-Picture’

Although I have spoken of ‘pictures’ throughout this project, the concept is especially fitting here, where it describes Hobbes’s self-consciously modern, scientific account of the world. In a 1938 essay entitled “The Age of the World Picture,” Martin Heidegger treats the relation of the modern scientific worldview to the concept of philosophical representation. After considering the question of whether “every epoch has its distinctive world picture,” he concludes that only “a distinctly modern conceptualization . . . raises the question concerning the world picture.”²⁶ Thomas Pfau comments:

As it turns out, “world picture” for Heidegger constitutes not merely, indeed, not even primarily, some second-hand depiction (*Abklatsch*) of the world as it is ostensibly at hand. Rather, it furnishes us with a distinctively modern kind of orientation. That is what is meant by the colloquial phrase of “we get the picture” (*wir sind über etwas im Bilde*). Not only does such a picture “represent” the world *for us*, but it denotes “all that belongs to it and all that stands together in it—as a system” (*daß es in all dem, was zu ihm gehört und in ihm zusammensteht,*

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” 86. English translation in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, translated and with an introduction by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 129.

als System vor uns steht). This attitude of a resourceful, autonomous self fully equipped for its encounter with and mastery of the world . . . Heidegger intends as a kind of allegory of the modern era.²⁷

Heidegger's point is that, in modernity, only that which can be presented in 'clear and distinct' representations counts as rational discourse. The modern 'world picture' is thus characterized both by "its strictly immanent character" and "its ongoing legitimation" by increasingly more precise representations. Again, Pfau: "The age of the 'world picture' captures the world of phenomena by liquidating their specificity, their distinctive and incontrovertible valence and resonance as *qualia* within the human agent. Yet as a result, the *Weltbild* also confines the knower."²⁸ Only because the human knower has imposed her own arbitrary limits on the world she perceives is she able to know with certainty. The dynamic Pfau identifies here is certainly present in Hobbes's account of language and reason, the topics of chapters 5 and 6. But the same dynamic is present throughout Hobbes's project of redescription, which is characterized throughout by a tension between the sharp limits he places on rational discourse and the human freedom he seeks to articulate within those limits. This relation between the limits of nature and the proper shape of human freedom within those limits will represent a recurring theme in the chapters to follow.

Hobbes's world-picture begins with a treatise "On Man," in which he offers what he takes to be entirely rational answers to the basic questions philosophy poses about human beings: What kind of creatures are they? What sort of environment do they inhabit, and what is their proper relationship to that environment? What are the

²⁷ Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 21-22. Citing Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," 86; English translation, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 129.

²⁸ Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 25.

fixed boundaries that structure their existence, and where do they have freedom to determine their own existence? As Hobbes suggests, genuinely rational answers to such questions must begin with the study of sense perception, which is not just the means by which the inner mind connects with the outer world, but forms the very basis of that mind.²⁹ And given Hobbes's uncompromisingly empiricist epistemology, his theory of sensation is foundational to the overall picture he offers of the world.³⁰ But one feature of the persuasive aspect of *Leviathan* is that Hobbes does not always 'show his work,' which is often too tedious and dense for the ordinary reader. Thus a key feature of his method in this first part of *Leviathan* is simply to sketch a convincing picture to offer his readers. To this picture—and the theory it carries—we now turn.³¹

3.4. Hobbes's Universe: Matter in Motion

Hobbes is a thoroughgoing materialist. This is simply to say that, on his account, there is only one kind of substance in the universe: matter. And this matter

²⁹ In this sense, Hobbes diverges markedly from contemporary philosophical sensibilities, and even more so from those of contemporary political theorists. As Cees Leijenhorst remarks, *Leviathan* "does not begin with a discussion of sovereignty, political laws, the concept of society or other issues contemporary political philosophers get excited about. Quite the contrary, Hobbes commences his work with the genesis and function of sense perception, a topic that contemporary philosophers of whatever denomination would not even dare to touch upon anymore, leaving it safely in the hands of the scientists." Cees Leijenhorst, "Sense and Nonsense about Sense: Hobbes and the Aristotelians on Sense Perception and Imagination," in *Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82.

³⁰ Indeed, in this way, Part I of *Leviathan* reverses the order of the earlier *Elements of Philosophy*, which began with philosophical method (*De corpore*, I.1-III.24) before treating sense perception (*De corpore*, IV.25-30), then optics (*De homine*, 2-9), before treating anthropology proper (*De homine*, 9-15). *Leviathan* begins with sense perception, but otherwise treats these topics in a different order in its opening ten chapters. The remainder of Part I, plus Parts II and III (chapters 11-43), then, constitute an expansion of *De cive's* topics (Liberty, Government, Religion), while Part IV (chapters 44-47) comprises a treatment of polemical issues that don't appear in the trilogy.

³¹ Because Hobbes elsewhere offers more careful accounts of the matters treated in *Leviathan* part one, this chapter will refer frequently to those accounts, especially in *De corpore*.

is arranged in various ways and to varying degrees of complexity to form bodies of various sorts. Indeed, Hobbes generally seems to prefer the word “body” to “matter” in describing the stuff that makes up the world. The former he defines as “that, which having no dependance upon our thought, is coincident or coextended with some part of space.”³² This definition has two relevant features: i) bodies are ‘real’ objects that exist independently of human cognizance;³³ and ii) they are extended in space. On both points, he agrees with his contemporary and rival, René Descartes: to be a body is to be a *res extensa*, a thing extended in space. But he differs decidedly from Descartes in his insistence that bodies account exhaustively for everything in the world. He explains:

The World (I mean not the Earth onely, that denominates the Lovers of it Worldly men, but the Universe, that is the whole masse of all things that are) is Corporeall, that is to say, Body; and hath the dimensions of Magnitude, namely, Length, Breadth, and Depth: also

³² *De corpore* II.8.1, EW I 102. Hobbes never seeks to prove his assertions of materialism within *Leviathan*. This he attempts in the first volume of his philosophical trilogy, *De corpore*, by means of a thought experiment involving the annihilation of the world except for one human in it. What would this solitary survivor know of the world? Only what survives in her memory of the past: her mind would be populated by “the memory and imagination of magnitudes, motions, sounds, colours, &c. as also of their order and parts.” Were she to conceive of some other body that existed prior to the annihilation, and focus exclusively on its existence beyond her own mind, omitting its particular characteristics, she would have the idea of space. “Space is the phantasm of a thing existing without the mind simply.” He continues this process of reduction until he takes himself to have proven that all features of the world can be reduced to properties of mind except for two: body and motion. *De corpore* I.VII.1-VIII.5, EW I 91-105.

³³ Hobbes thus qualifies as a “metaphysical realist,” if that means simply that he affirms the mind-independent existence of bodies in the world. This puts him in obvious and trenchant disagreement with the idealism articulated the following century by Bishop Berkeley, who contends that bodies exist substantially only within the mind of some perceiver. Yet to call Hobbes a realist in this sense is to make no further claims about his relation to other, more complicated forms of metaphysical, linguistic, or epistemological realism, on which see Edward Craig, “Metaphysical Realism,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998), <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/realism-and-antirealism/v-1>. See also Alexander Mill, “Realism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/realism>, and Drew Klentzos, “Challenges to Metaphysical Realism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011), Edward N. Zalta ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/realism-sem-challenge>. On Berkeley’s idealism, see Ian Tipton, “George Berkeley (1685-1753),” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998), <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/berkeley-george-1685-1753/v-1>, esp. section 3, “Berkeley’s Metaphysics.”

every part of Body is likewise Body, and hath the like dimensions; consequently, every part of the Universe, is Body, and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe; And because the Universe is All, that which is no part of it is Nothing; and consequently no where. (IV.46.371; 1076)

Hobbes's view here is clear: There is nothing in the universe other than body. If something is not a body, then it is, for that very reason, not part of the universe; it is rather *nothing* and *nowhere*. Should someone deem something incorporeal, Hobbes insists, she is necessarily mistaken. The thing so described either is in fact corporeal, or else does not, in fact, exist at all. Descartes's other substance category, *res cogitans*, is thus subsumed by Hobbes into the universal category of body.³⁴ Because there is no other kind of substance, anything by the name of "spiritual" or "mental" is ultimately reducible to material bodies extended in space and time.³⁵

Just as all substance is body, so are all causes efficient causes.³⁶ It is axiomatic for Hobbes that every event in the world is reducible to bodies in motion, and their causes to the differences of motion amongst these bodies. Accordingly, every event in the world is exhaustively accounted for in terms of bodies in motion, "the continual relinquishing of one place, and acquiring of another"³⁷ in a causal chain of bodies first set into motion by God, the prime mover. As we shall see, this

³⁴ Descartes lays out the distinction between these two substances in his Sixth Meditation (AT VII, 71-90; CSM II, 50-62). René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by John Cottingham, revised edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50-62; see also his *Principles of Philosophy*, II.1-4 (AT VIIA, 40-42; CSM I, 223-24), in René Descartes, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. with introduction by Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 253-55.

³⁵ This presents, *prima facie*, a problem for the possibility of Hobbes's Christianity, for it seems to entail that either God has a body, or that God does not exist, both of which would, at the very least, test the outer limits of Christian theism. This is a highly contested question amongst Hobbes scholars, and will receive further attention in the conclusion.

³⁶ Strictly speaking, Hobbes permits us to speak of two kinds of causation—efficient and material—but in effect reduces them to one. See discussion below.

³⁷ *De Corpore* II.8.10, EW I 109; see also III.15.1, EW I 203-06.

reductively materialistic way of imagining the world is central to many aspects of Hobbes's thought. As one scholar remarks: "What unifies Hobbes's philosophy, relating his study of politics to his physics, is in fact not the thread of deductive materialism, but the stitch of mechanical explanation. And the name of this stitch is Motion—for motion is Hobbes's conceptual key to the understanding of all reality."³⁸ Although Newton's laws of motion weren't published until the *Principia Mathematica* (1686-87), which appeared seven years after Hobbes's death, the world Hobbes describes in *Leviathan* anticipates the classical mechanics to which Newton's name would forever become attached.³⁹ Bodies move only because and to the extent that they are moved by other bodies, and such movement is determined by the force that each body exerts upon the other. Thus, the Hobbesian universe is "a great continuum of matter, devoid of spirit,"⁴⁰ in which bodies in motion collide constantly with one another.

Hobbes's mechanistic materialism stands in sharp and self-conscious contrast to the classical—that is to say, scholastic—physics still dominant in the seventeenth-century.⁴¹ On Aristotle's view, taken up by the mainstream of late-medieval scholasticism, all motion is explained in terms of the act/potency distinction.⁴² Interactions between bodies, therefore, are to be described in terms of these bodies'

³⁸ David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, 2.

³⁹ See Abel B. Franco Rubio de la Torre, "Hobbesian Reaction: Towards and Beyond Newton's Third Law of Motion," *teorema*, Vol. 20.1-2 (2001), 73-93. De la Torre argues that, while only the first two of Newton's laws are explicitly present in Hobbes, his "view of reaction differed from Newton's, explicitly, only in the idea that the reaction is equal to the action—which is not present in Hobbes. But if we focus on Hobbes's use of the idea, that difference is not so obvious" (87).

⁴⁰ The phrase comes from Samuel Mintz, *Hunting the Leviathan*, 23.

⁴¹ "Hobbes's doctrine of causes may be seen as a systematic attempt to discard the scholastic view on causality and replace it with strict mechanistic explanatory principles," Cees Leijenhorst, "Hobbes's Theory of Causality and Its Aristotelian Background," *The Monist* 79.3, 426.

⁴² *Physics* VIII, c. 5 (257b8): "Motion is an incomplete fulfillment of the movable" (*estin d' hē kinēsis entelecheia kinētou atelēs*).

inherent powers: an active body (the agent) acts upon a passive body (the patient) by means of its inherent active powers, which determine what kinds of action it can exercise on other bodies.⁴³ Likewise, the range of responses of the patient to the agent is determined by the patient's inherent potentiality. Leijenhorst explains:

The doctrine that active and passive power are inherent accidents is . . . part and parcel of scholastic natural philosophy. The scholastics maintained that agents act on patients by means of inherent "active qualities," also known as active faculties or powers. Fire can heat my hand by means of its inherent heat. The heating itself can be considered as an activation or actualisation of this heating power, just as it can be seen as an actualisation of the "passive" elementary heat . . . inherent in my hand.⁴⁴

Undergirding this logic is a crucial assumption about natures: each substance has a particular nature, "a principle and cause of change and stasis in the thing in which it primarily subsists."⁴⁵ Each body, then, has some natural principle of change and motion proper to it, and this nature determines what counts for that substance as natural motion or—by contrast—violent motion.⁴⁶ Natural motion was defined as the actualization of the inner potentiality of some substance. This tendency can be superseded by violent motion: by throwing a stone, we overrule its natural tendencies, and propel it away from the earth's core.⁴⁷

Intrinsic to the Aristotelian concept of natural motion is a robust teleology: any given body moves because it strives for some end proper to its nature. A stone,

⁴³ Here, I sketch only the broad outlines of Aristotle's view: The topic of agent and patient is "the most puzzling part of Aristotle's theory of change," on which "[i]t is difficult to determine his position . . . and difficult to see its philosophical sense." Sarah Waterlow and Sarah Broadie, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics: A Philosophical Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 159.

⁴⁴ Leijenhorst, "Hobbes's Theory of Causality," 427-28.

⁴⁵ *Physics* II.1 (192b8-23).

⁴⁶ "Things 'have a nature' which have a principle of this kind." *Physics* II.1.

⁴⁷ On violent motion, see Helen Lang, *The Order of Nature in Aristotle's Physics: Place and the Elements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 208-10.

for instance, falls downwards because of its inner tendency to reach its natural end, the center of the cosmos, which is the earth's core.⁴⁸ Its natural motion is determined by this innate impulse to be reunited with the core. This account of motion issues in the well-known fourfold account of causation (material, efficient, formal, and final causes). "Thus, a causal explanation in the Scholastic tradition might include reference to a substance's form (the formal cause), its matter (the material cause), the process that produced it (the efficient cause), and the end or purpose for which it was produced (the final cause)."⁴⁹ Likewise, for Aristotle, there are four kinds of change that an agent can effect in a patient (change in local motion, substantial change, qualitative change, and quantitative change). These four kinds of causes and four kinds of change provide a rich and complex framework for natural events in the world.

Hobbes, by contrast, thoroughly reduces all change to one kind—local motion—and limits all causation to efficient causes.⁵⁰ "Convinced that all natural processes could be explained in terms of bodies acting on external stimuli, he denied

⁴⁸ See Lang, *The Order of Nature*, 258-61. Cf. Leijenhorst, *The Mechanisation of Aristotelianism*, 171-72.

⁴⁹ Douglas Jesseph, "Hobbes and the Method of Natural Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 86.

⁵⁰ To be precise, Hobbes affirms two causes: "all properties present in the agent, if taken collectively, are termed 'an efficient cause', and those causes in the patient, taken collectively, are called 'a material cause.'" Thus, both an efficient and a material cause "are but a part of an integral cause . . . a cause that produces an effect." *De motu* 27.2, folio 294v. English translation from *Thomas Hobbes: Thomas White's De Mundo Examined*, the Latin translated by Harold Whitmore Jones (London: Bradford University Press, 1976), 314-15. But on this account, the efficient and material causes are easily reducible to the same phenomena, for in rejecting the act/potency distinction, Hobbes leaves no room for any real distinction, in a given collision of bodies, between an agent and a patient—the one acting and the one being acted upon. He then reduces final causality to efficient, and denies the very intelligibility of formal causality. What's left, then, is one "integral cause," which I'll continue to speak of loosely—though not inaccurately—as "efficient causality." See Leijenhorst, "Hobbes's Theory of Causality," 437; and A. P. Martinich, *A Hobbes Dictionary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), 58, 212-16.

any form of inner potentiality or spontaneity.”⁵¹ The one mode of motion Hobbes does admit—local motion—has two basic principles: the principle of exteriority and the principle of contiguity. According to the first, what is at rest will always remain at rest unless some other, external body forces it to leave its state of rest. Likewise, what is in motion will not stop unless forced to do so by some other, external body. According to the second principle, that of contiguity, a given body’s motion can be caused only by some other body, which is in motion, and which is in contact with the moved body.⁵²

Hence, Hobbes reinterprets the Aristotelian concepts of inherent active and passive powers as mere accidents of bodies. This has clear implications for the regnant scholastic view of agents and patients: on Hobbes’s account, these work on each other not because they are agents and patients *simpliciter*, but because they are this or that agent and patient, and because they happen to encounter one another under this particular set of circumstances. In other words, they work “according to some certain accident or accidents, with which both it and the patient are affected; that is to say, the agent hath its effect precisely such, not because it is a body, but because such a body, or so moved.”⁵³ Taken together, the accidents of the agent and those of the patient form one single cause, the *causa integra* or entire cause.⁵⁴ The efficient and material cause are reduced to the aspects of this entire cause, being no

⁵¹ Leijenhorst, *The Mechanisation of Aristotelianism*, p. 171.

⁵² *De corpore* II.8.19, EW 115-16; see also III.15.3, EW 213.

⁵³ *De corpore* II.9.3, EW I 121

⁵⁴ “The aggregate of all the accidents both of the agents how many soever they be, and of the patient, put together: which when they are all supposed to be present, it cannot be understood but that the effect is produced at the same instant; and if any one of them be wanting, it cannot be understood but that the effect is not produced” (*De corpore* II.9.3, EW I 121-22).

more than accidents in the agent and patient, respectively.⁵⁵ Under this description, active and passive powers are reduced to mere accidents, while both causes and effects are likewise nothing but aggregates of accidents. Accidents, of course, are but the motions of bodies. Thus, by means of his reduction of all relations amongst bodies to efficient causation, Hobbes in effect has reduced the agent's active power to motion.⁵⁶ Hobbes's elision of the act/potency distinction in turn elides the distinction between natural and violent kinds of motion. Any motion whatsoever, it follows, is natural so long as it's effected by some other body. All this, it should be clear, constitutes a radical break with the Aristotelian dynamic conception of causality, on which motion is understood as the actualization or fulfillment a body's potential. On Hobbes's view, bodies have no specific inner potentialities that may or may not be fulfilled. Rather, the only potential that any body has—and all bodies, simply because they are bodies, have it—is for colliding with other bodies, and in that collision, subsequently and necessarily effecting other motions. Thus, in rejecting the conceptual machinery of act and potency, Hobbes leaves no room for any real distinction, in a given collision of bodies, between an agent and a patient—the one acting and the one being acted upon.

This reduction of bodily motion to events of efficient causation manifests itself, for instance, in Hobbes's remarks about magnetism. Although by Hobbes's time, science had not yet articulated any worthwhile hypotheses about magnetism, Hobbes conjectures that it will turn out to be explainable in terms of the principles of local bodily motion. Because "there is no such thing as an incorporeal movent, and

⁵⁵ *De corpore* II.9.4, EW I 122.

⁵⁶ Hobbes's logic is as follows: Since the cause of motion in a patient cannot be but a motion of the agent, the efficient cause is nothing but motion. Because the efficient cause and active power are *realiter* identical, active power is nothing but motion as well. See *De corpore* II.10.6, EW I 131.

magnetical virtue is a thing altogether unknown," he concludes that "whensoever it shall be known, it will be found to be a motion of body."⁵⁷ Elsewhere he adds, "You know I have no other cause to assign but some local motion, and that I never approved of any argument drawn from sympathy, influence, substantial forms, or incorporeal effluvia. For I am not, nor am accounted by my antagonists for a witch."⁵⁸ Hobbes's own hypotheses of natural philosophy, he never tires to remind his readers, are simpler and (he thinks) more rational than those of the bewitched and bewitching schoolmen. This simplicity is grounded, above all, in his mechanistic materialism.

Leijenhorst helpfully sums up Hobbes's revision of Aristotelian physics, and offers a normative assessment about the resulting account: "Although Hobbes's agents share important traits with the scholastic ones, they appear also seriously handicapped when compared to them. Whereas the latter ones can effect four kinds of change in their patients, the Hobbesian ones seem to be able to produce local motion only. In other words, Hobbes combines an Aristotelian dynamic definition of causality in terms of active and passive powers with an anti-Aristotelian reduction of change to local motion"⁵⁹

Despite what Leijenhorst suggests here about the 'hobbling' of Hobbesian physics—rooted in his radical reduction of causation to efficient cause, and of

⁵⁷ *De corpore* IV.26.7, EW I 430. Although contemporary science would not wholly concur with Hobbes's description of magnetism, his account stands up far better than that of Alexander Ross, author of *Leviathan drawn out with a Hook*. Ross insisted in a 1652 earlier refutation of Francis Bacon that garlic—or at least that "stronger kind of garlick" possessed by the ancients, which Horace called "poison . . . worse than hemlock"—hinders magnetism, and that Bacon's modern experiments stood up poorly to the testimony of the ancients. Alexander Ross, *Arcana Microcosmi* (London: Tho. Newcomb, 1652), Book II, Chapter 18, 192.

⁵⁸ *Decameron Physiologicum* 9, EW VII 155.

⁵⁹ Leijenhorst, "Hobbes's Theory of Causality," 428.

substance to bodies—Hobbes’s account does not discount the richness and complexity of the world. For instance, while extension in space is the hallmark feature of bodies, it is not the extent of what we can say about them. Each body has various features—Hobbes calls them “accidents”—which distinguishes it from others.⁶⁰ He defines an accident simply as “the manner of our conception of a body.”^{61, 62} These accidents, like the bodies to which they belong, are ultimately reducible to matter in motion. Each body has particular modes of motion that create distinctive patterns of resonance. These patterns are translated through contextual media (Hobbes describes this as “that most fluid ether, which so fills all the rest of the universe, as that it leaves in it no empty place at all”⁶³) and then through the bodies of animals with sensory organs.⁶⁴ By virtue of these accidents—or, more precisely, of our perception of them—we are able to recognize bodies, and then to distinguish amongst them.

⁶⁰ Descartes similarly contended that extension is the only substantial feature of body, and that all accidents were due to their motions. See *Principles of Philosophy* II.23 (AT VIIA, 52-53) in René Descartes, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, 261.

⁶¹ *De Corpore* II.8.2, EW I 103. To avoid the impression that a body has no intrinsic connection to its accidents, Hobbes provides a parallel definition of accident, one that emphasizes the causal origin of an accident in the body itself: “that faculty of any body by which it works in us a conception of itself.” As Pettit points out: “Hobbes says nothing on what makes [a conception] fit to count as a representation of an object, but we might well construe him as if he meant only to say that it covaries with the object’s presence” Philip Pettit, *Made With Words*, 14.

⁶² The more technical distinction between bodies and their accidents is that accidents, unlike bodies, can be generated and destroyed. Indeed, all change is merely the generation or destruction of accidents in bodies. “[I]t is manifest that all other accidents besides magnitude or extension may be generated and destroyed . . . and therefore bodies, have this difference, that bodies are things, and not generated; accidents are generated, and not things.” *De corpore* II.8.20, EW I 117; see also II.9.1, EW I 120.

⁶³ *De corpore* IV.26.5, EW I 426. On this point, Hobbes saw himself in substantial agreement with both Epicurus and Descartes, even though both used different terms (“vacuum” and “subtle matter” respectively) to describe the ether. Thomas Hobbes, letter to Sorbiere, 27 January/6 February 1657, in Ferdinand Tönnies, *Studien zur Philosophie und Gesellschaftslehre im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. E. G. Jacoby (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1975), 71-73.

⁶⁴ See chapter 4 for a more detailed account of Hobbes’s view of perception.

Because you are a human being, an animal with sensory organs, everything you encounter is mediated to you via such patterns of resonance. Your lover's face, her voice, the touch of her hand to your face, all of this is ultimately reducible to and explainable in terms of these motions, patterns that your sensory apparatus apprehends and then sends, in the form of sense data—further resonances of matter—to your brain and heart, which are themselves nothing more than complex arrangements of matter, but which are able to interpret these patterns as being *this* face, *that* voice, *her* touch.

This world of matter in motion, Hobbes thinks—and aims to convince his readers as well—is the matrix in which first mind and then language emerge, and thus what provides both thought and language their conditions of existence and the parameters within which they operate. Matrix is a fitting image, because neither thought nor language is some other kind of substance, subject to different laws or explanatory hypotheses. Rather, they are simply other sorts of bodily accidents, new patterns of matter in motion, whose generation is exhaustively accounted for by the interaction of body with other bodies. As a thoroughgoing materialist, Hobbes describes mind as “nothing more than a complex mode in which matter is organized and the motions of matter are channeled to systematic effect.”⁶⁵ On this account, thought and language are just as completely bodily phenomena as breathing, eating, or mating. Hobbes insists that even as we taste the flesh of an apple, inhale the odor of a pine tree, or caress the body of a lover, all those “qualities called *Sensible*, are in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversly. Neither in us that are pressed, are they anything else,

⁶⁵ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 12.

but divers motions; for motion produceth nothing but motion” (I.1.3; 24). Thus, the entire complex of human life, from its most basic ‘natural’ encounters of the human body with other bodies, to the ‘artificial’ thematization of those encounters in language, art, and reason, is reducible to so many bodies in complex patterns of motion.

Indeed, Hobbes’s materialism is intimately related to what we might call ‘mechanism,’ and ‘determinism’: as a materialist, he held that nothing exists but matter; as a mechanist, he held that all causes operate through the mutual force that material objects exert on another; and as a determinist, he held that every event has a cause, each cause being necessary. Each cause is necessary because determined by the arrangement of bodies and their motion at the moment of causation. This radical determinism is rooted squarely in Hobbes’s mechanical materialism: “In a world consisting wholly of matter and governed by the laws of motion, every event...was physically and antecedently and externally caused.”⁶⁶

While many commentators have pointed to the role that Hobbes’s determinism plays in account for human behavior, an equally—if not more—significant implication of materialism is its exclusion of immaterial or “spiritual” substances, precisely because a spirit could not take up space, and thus could not act on another body. These foundational, monistic claims determine the shape of Hobbes’s claims not only in the realms of physics and metaphysics, but in the civil and ecclesial realms as well. Hobbes’s metaphysical materialism, with its consequent denial of spiritual substance, represents a key element in his case for absolute state sovereignty, and in his corresponding case against of illegitimate political theologies.

⁶⁶ Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 112. See also A. P. Martinich, *Hobbes* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 24.

The exhaustively materialist ontology just described is foundational to Hobbes's project in *Leviathan* in at least three broad ways.⁶⁷ First, it establishes parameters for determining what kind of concepts and claims are really plausible. On Hobbes's account, any description of the world, to be not only plausible but meaningful, must be articulated in terms of matter in motion, of material bodies and their equally material accidents. This ontology thus defines the kind of world Hobbes conjures for his readers. Second, in terms of his assault on the irrational and dangerous "Kingdome of Darknesse," it offers a sharp delineation between the account of the world that Hobbes offers his readers, and alternative accounts by scholastic philosophers and demagogues who, by positing immaterial substances, suggest that there is some other realm behind or beyond the bodily, thus making "men see double." And third, the consequences of such double vision aren't merely intellectual or philosophical, but social and political: the metaphysical "double vision," Hobbes suggests, lends itself to an ecclesio-political "double vision," and makes those suffering it "mistake their lawful sovereign." And since, as we shall see, sovereignty is the most crucial human institution, this is a mistake with the direst of consequences.

In short, Hobbes opens *Leviathan* by delimiting its scope—and that of all philosophical discourse—to bodies, thus taking the first step in convincing his readers to see this world of matter in motion as the world in which we all 'move,

⁶⁷ Although many commentators speak freely of Hobbes's "metaphysics," I intentionally avoid the term, preferring instead the more precise term, "ontology." While the former connotes a realm that exists *above* or *beyond* the immanent field of matter in motion, a realm which cannot be treated philosophically, the latter captures the sense that—for Hobbes—science is limited to the realm of bodies. On the difference between these terms, see Leijenhorst, *Mechanisation of Aristotelianism*, 18-27, 34-37; Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy*, 383-414; David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 57-58.

and breathe, and have our being.’ By providing a plausible account of the human mind and its functions as rooted exclusively in sensory perception, and of sensory perception as involving nothing but bodies, Hobbes makes a strong case for seeing human beings and the world we inhabit as composed, without remainder, of material bodies whose defining feature is motion.

3.5. Sensory Perception: The Basis of Mind in Matter.

It is important to remember that the materialist ontology Hobbes sketches in *Leviathan* appears in the context a philosophical anthropology. *Leviathan’s* first part “Of Man,” consists of sixteen chapters that treat topics ranging from perception and imagination (1-3), language and reason (4-5, 7, 9), passions and the will (6, 8), to human power (10-11), natural religion (12) and the natural state of humanity (13), before concluding with the laws of nature and their proper derivation (14-16). In short, it presents an account of the human being logically prior to either the invention of politics or the receipt of the supernaturally revealed truths that commences with Israel and persists in the ‘Christian Common-wealth.’ Yet Hobbes’s account proceeds in stages of logical—if not historical—progression, for as Hobbes suggests, a fully and radically ‘natural’ human set of human capacities is one prior to any augmentation via art (language, reason, governance) or grace (revelation, which comes by way of both natural law and supernatural prophecy).

This anthropological précis begins with an account of human thought, which, in turn, begins with perception. As we’ve seen so far, Hobbes insists that the world is composed of just one kind of thing, namely body, and that the history of these bodies’ interactions is mechanistically determined by just one kind of cause, namely

efficient causation. Thought, he argues, is simply one more instance of matter in motion. Nevertheless, this amalgam of bodies is not simply a homogenous solution of undifferentiated bodies, suspended in the ether, knocking into each other willy-nilly. Rather, the world Hobbes describes is organized according to a taxonomy of capacities proper to different kinds of bodies. And these differences matter.

The taxonomy of bodies that Hobbes sketches in the opening chapters of *Leviathan* is principally defined by two distinctions.⁶⁸ The first of these is natural, which is to say that it exists apart from and prior to any act of the human will, and the second is artificial, which is to say it is introduced by willful human artifice or *poesis*. Both distinctions are drawn according to bodies' capacities to respond to their environments. The first is a distinction between sentient and non-sentient bodies. This capacity for sensory perception turns out to mark the difference between animals, which have it, and all other kinds of natural bodies, which do not. Second—within the first set of those bodies capable of sensory perception—Hobbes draws another distinction: Some animals, namely humans, are capable of inventing language, an artifice that expands their capacities beyond the merely natural, and thus distinguishes them from the beasts, which are incapable of these higher functions. This view in itself, that humans are the only creatures with the use of language, is unremarkable in seventeenth-century thought. But Hobbes further insists that such language has its origins in purely physical, mechanistic processes.⁶⁹ This makes his view both novel and controversial for his time. In what follows, I

⁶⁸ Though this taxonomy is definitive for Hobbes's account of the world, he doesn't explicitly employ it to organize his presentation. Rather, I have imposed it here to highlight the fact that, for Hobbes, the two most significant human capacities are sensation and linguistic invention.

⁶⁹ The following section draws from Philip Pettit's excellent study *Made With Words*, esp. 13-18, for the language of "natural mind" and the distinction within it between "cognitive powers" and "motive powers."

describe Hobbes's account of the basis of mind in sensory perception, and then explore the two principal faculties of the natural (pre-linguistic) mind: its cognitive and motive powers. This lays the ground for chapter 5, which traces Hobbes's account of how humans invent language to augment these powers and thus to transcend their merely natural condition.

3.6. The Mechanics of Perception

It is proper to all bodies, by virtue of their inclusion in a mechanistic universe, to respond to any encounter with some other body according to the laws of motion. When a pebble is cast into a puddle, for instance, the puddle responds to the pebble's action on it by producing a splash. Or, to describe the phenomenon at a closer level, each particular drop of water responds to the action of the other drops surrounding it by being pushed, and in turn pushing, all of which taken together constitutes the splash. This chain of motion, composed of the serial actions and reactions of the discrete bodies involved, can be analyzed in part—as in this case, the splash of a pebble into a puddle—or in terms of a longer chain of action, one that could, in principle, be traced all the way back to some first motion that caused, and continues to cause, all other motion in the world. In this most general sense, then, all bodies react to their environments—that is, to their encounters with other bodies—according to the laws of motion, to which all bodies are subject.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The interchangeable use of "action" and "motion" in this paragraph should not be taken as implying any broader metaphysical claim about the moral significance of rational agency. Rather, "action" here refers simply to the "exertion of force or influence by one thing on another." *OED*, 'action,' n. 2.13. For instance, in *De corpore*, Hobbes makes it clear that he uses the terms interchangeably: "When . . . one Body having opposite Endeavour to another Body, moveth the same, and that moveth a third, and so on, I call that action Propagation of Motion." *De corpore* III.22.3, EW IV 248. This non-technical use of "action" stands in contrast to the views of Elizabeth Anscombe and Donald Davidson, which have become widespread since the mid-twentieth century. As Davidson insists, for some event to count properly as an *action*, the agent's movement

Some bodies, like the puddle or pebble just described, are capable only of the simplest sort of reaction: the pebble splashes into the puddle and sinks to the bottom, there to lie until moved by some other body, perhaps a child who, attracted by its glitter, picks it up and takes it home. Other bodies respond to their environments in more complex ways. A sunflower, for instance, responds to the sun by producing leaves and flowers, by taking in carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, by following the sun's daily motion with its buds, and eventually by blooming, producing fruit, and decaying. Yet despite its clear responses to its surroundings, even the sunflower does not properly *perceive* its environment, for it lacks the sensory organs necessary for such a response.

Other bodies, however, are capable of an even more complex kind of reaction to their environments, a reaction that consists in sensory perception, and makes possible other, even more complex kinds of motion: thinking and willing, or cognition and volition. As we shall see, this distinction between the brute response of a sunflower and the intelligent perception of an animal has nothing to do with one's being any more or less mechanistic than the other. For the more complex responses proper to animals are no less mechanistic for their complexity. And while human beings, on Hobbes's account, are the bodies with maximal capacity for engaging with their environments in complex ways, other animals share this

must be "intentional under some description." Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, 46-47. Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), *passim*. However, as Wilson and Shpall point out, "it is tricky to explicate the purported ties between . . . genuine action, on the one hand, and intention, on the other." George Wilson and Samuel Shpall, "Action," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/action>. Hobbes, by contrast to these later intention-oriented accounts of action, draws no distinction between motion simpliciter and action. Nonetheless, he does draw an important distinction that may serve the same function as the later distinction between motion and action: for those bodies capable of volition, he distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary action. See, for instance, *Leviathan* I.6.28; 92; *Elements of Law* 12.3-5.

capacity for sensation, and thus, as Hobbes shall explain, for both cognition and volition. How, after all, could a body's response be anything but mechanistic in a world composed exclusively of bodies and determined exclusively by efficient causation?

A substance dualist, such as Descartes, would account for the difference between the sensory perception proper to human beings, and the brute reflex of the sunflower, in terms of different kinds of substance. Bodies, Descartes thinks, are passive, insensate things whose actions simply and reflexively follow the laws of mechanics. On Descartes' view, a stray cat's cries of hunger are no different in kind from a sunflower's heliotropic motion. Both the cat and the sunflower are machines, acting by mere reflex to the forces that act on them, but unperceiving, unconscious, and brute. All this is precisely because they are bodies. On the opposite of the spectrum from bodies are minds—here, God and the angels are ideal-types—which are also incapable of sensory perception, because they have no need to contemplate things in the material realm. Humans, then, are the only beings with the need and the corresponding capacity for sensory perception.⁷¹

Hobbes, it should be obvious by now, has little patience with appeals to non-bodily substances. The Cartesian attempt to account for mind in terms other than matter in motion, he thinks, is unnecessarily complicated, and ultimately incoherent. For this reason, though Descartes aims at the revolutionary innovation characteristic of the *novatores*, Hobbes deems the Cartesian account little better than the

⁷¹ See Alison Simmons, "Cartesian Consciousness Reconsidered" in *Philosophers' Imprint* 12.2 (January 2012), 1-21, <http://www.philosophersimprint.org/012002>. See also Daniel Garber, "Soul and Mind: Life and Thought in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, 766-69.

bewitchment of the Schoolmen. In contrast, Hobbes offers a thoroughly materialistic account of the phenomenon of sensory perception.⁷²

Some bodies—and Hobbes’s chief example here is the human being, though his account of perception will apply also, *mutatis mutandis*, to other animals—possess sensory organs: eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and skin.⁷³ For instance, when I encounter something in the world—say a sunflower—it affects me by sending motions through the plenum and striking my sensory apparatus. When the “Externall Body, or Object,” here the sunflower, “presseth [some] organ,” here my eyes and my nose, this effects a series of reactions in my body. First, this “pressure, by the mediation of Nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body,” is transmitted “inwards to the Brain, and Heart.” As Tom Sorell explains, “The process that culminates in sense-experience affects the entire living creature, but it begins with pressure on some external and sensitive part of the creature’s body.”⁷⁴ This is what Hobbes calls “the uttermost part” of the sense organ, and when “it is pressed it no sooner yields, but the part next within it is pressed also; and, in this manner, the

⁷² Here, my exposition follows Hobbes’s account in chapters 1-3, and 6 of *Leviathan*, but makes reference to other relevant discussions when fitting. Indeed, he begins his treatment of perception in chapter 1 with a disclaimer, by saying: “To know the naturall cause of Sense is not very necessary to the business now in hand; and I have elsewhere written of the same at large. Nevertheless, to fill each part of my present method, I will briefly deliver the same in this place.” The “elsewhere” of which he speaks is surely *De Corpore* IV.25, the locus classicus of Hobbes’s account of perception. See also *Elements of Law* I.2-4, 7, 12. *De motu* XXX, and the so-called *Tractatus Opticus* I (chapter VII of *Universae Geometriae Mixtaeque Mathematicae Synopsis, et Bini Refractionum Demonstrarum Tractatus*, published by Mersenne in 1644, and collected by Molesworth in OL V 215-48). See Leijenhorst, “Sense and Nonsense About Sense,” 87, for a brief discussion of this question.

⁷³ Hobbes “thinks of sense-organs in a rather inclusive way. In the case of vision, for example, the sense organ is not just the eye, but the eye taken together with the nervous and arterial systems to which it is connected. In fact, any part of the body is part of the sense-organ appropriate to vision if damage to that part would prevent visual experience.” Sorell, *Hobbes*, 69. See *De corpore* IV.25.4, EW I 392. Indeed, Hobbes explains, “we speak more correctly, when we say a living being seeth, than when we say the eye seeth.” *De corpore* IV.25.3, EW I 391.

⁷⁴ Sorell, *Hobbes*, 69.

pressure or motion is propagated through all the parts of the organ to the innermost.”⁷⁵ Because every action of one body on another issues in an equal and opposite reaction, both inner organs—brain and heart—respond by resisting in the form of some “counter-pressure, or endeavour” (I.1.3; 22). Thus, sensation is most basically motion within some creature’s body, even though such motion is imperceptible.⁷⁶

An endeavour, perhaps better known by its Latin equivalent *conatus*, is the most basic form of motion in Hobbes’s metaphysics.⁷⁷ An endeavour is to motion what the atom is to matter: the smallest conceivable, and ultimately unmeasurable, unit of motion. He explains:

Although unstudied men, doe not conceive any motion at all to be there, where the thing moved is invisible; or the space it is moved in, is (for the shortnesse of it) insensible; yet that doth not hinder, but that such Motions are. For let a space be never so little, that which is moved over a greater space, whereof that little one is part, must first be moved over that. These small beginnings of Motion, within the body of Man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called ENDEAVOUR. (I.6.23; 78)

Hobbes’s answer to Zeno’s paradox, then, is that the motion of Achilles or his arrow may be divided again and again, until it finally reaches that most basic level of endeavour, which we cannot perceive, but whose existence we intuit through reason.^{78, 79}

⁷⁵ *De corpore* IV.25.3, EW I 390.

⁷⁶ Hobbes defines this pressure in accordance with the laws of natural motion: one body presses another when “with its endeavour” the first body displaces the other, or some part of it. *De corpore* III.15.11, EW I 211.

⁷⁷ Cf. Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, all of whom—like Hobbes—revise the medieval concept of *conatus*, exemplified by Jean Buridan. For an overview of the history of *conatus* in Western thought, see Steve Fuller, “Conatus,” in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. by Michael Grenfell (Stocksfield, UK: Acumen Press, 2008), 171-81.

⁷⁸ The *conatus* provides an instance of something that the senses cannot apprehend, but which reason intuits. This might, prima facie, seem to fit uncomfortably with Hobbes’s empiricist

In the case of sensory perception, the endeavour of the heart and brain provoked by motion transmitted from the external object, through the nervous system, moves outward toward the object provoking it. From the proto-Newtonian principle that every action provokes an equal and opposite reaction, Hobbes concludes that “it must follow from this that the action or motion in sensation is propagated and continued in reverse toward things outside: from the heart to the brain and thence into the nerves as far as the outer surface of the body.”⁸⁰ This “endeavour because *Outward*, seemeth to be some matter without,” even though the event is entirely within our bodies (I.1.3; 22).⁸¹ It seems to me, then, that I see a complex array of yellow petals surrounding a disc of smaller, dense, orange flowers, all perched jauntily atop a pale green stem, and that I smell the slight musk of its stalks and leaves. And “this seeming, or . . . original fancy, caused . . . by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of external things upon our eyes, ear, and other organs thereunto ordained” is sense. Hobbes sums up this process in his fuller definition of sense in *De corpore*: “a phantasm, made by the reaction and endeavour

reduction of all thought to what is based in sensory perception. But see my discussion of first philosophy in chapter 4 below.

⁷⁹ Giambattista Vico, a student of Hobbes, also identifies *conatus* as providing a solution to Zeno’s paradoxes. See Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians: Drawn Out From the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. by Jason Taylor, ed. by Robert Miner (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 57-69. On the influence of Hobbes on Vico, see Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 180-83; Noel Malcolm, “Hobbes and the European Republic of Letters,” in *Aspects of Hobbes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 484, 511-12; Jeffrey Barnouw, “Vico and the Continuity of Science: The Relation of his Epistemology to Bacon and Hobbes,” *Isis* 71.4 (1980), 609-20.

⁸⁰ *De motu* XXX.3, folio 338v. English translation from *Thomas White’s De Mundo Examined*, 365. Cf. *De corpore* IV.25.2, EW I 390-91.

⁸¹ The Latin edition slightly revises this description: “conatus Cordis deliberantis se à pressione per motum tendentem extrorsum; qui motus propterea apparet tanqua aliquid externum,” or “the endeavour of the heart delivering itself from the pressure by means of an outward motion, which motion therefore appears to be something external” (I.1.3; 23).

outwards in the organ of sense, caused by an endeavour, inwards from the object, remaining for some time more or less."⁸²

Thus, every phenomenon that counts as human sense consists in such a bodily reaction of a human's heart and brain to an encounter with some external body. This is a two-part process: an action is caused by the external body, and then propagated through a plenist medium to the sense organs, brain, and ultimately to the heart, where there is a reaction.⁸³ Though Hobbes emphasizes that the same explanatory mechanism applies to the four other senses, he gives special attention to vision. Any visible thing "is nothing but a fancie, made by the lucid object by such pressure" which "is really & actually a local motion of the parts, both of the lucid object which comes a little forward every way and also of the organ, that is to say of the spirits in the hart, and the parts of the braine and of the optique nerve (though the said motion be imperceptible)."⁸⁴ Each phantasm has the particular qualia that make it distinctive in part because of the particular sense organ that mediated it to the inner organs. These qualia seem "as to the eye, in a Light, or Colour figured; to the Eare, in a Sound; to the Nostrill, in an Odour; To the Tongue and Palat, in a Savour, And to the rest of the body, in Heat, Cold, Hardnesse, Softnesse, and such other qualities, as we discern by Feeling" (I.1.3; 22). Thus, we will characterize sensory perceptions differently, depending on which senses are involved, but all five modes of human sensation (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) follow the same pattern: an object in the world acts upon the subject via some medium, and the

⁸² *De corpore* IV.25.2, EW I 391.

⁸³ See Juhana Lemetti, "Sensation and Perception," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Susan A. Lloyd (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 112-15.

⁸⁴ *A minute or first Draught of the Optiques* I.2,5; folio 7v. British Library, Harley MS 3360, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_3360.

subject reacts in a twofold way: a conception of the object (a thought, image, idea, or phantasm) is generated⁸⁵ and (as we shall see below) an appetite or desire is provoked.

Hobbes does not address the question of what caused this “seeming, or fancy” to emerge within the matrix of matter in motion.⁸⁶ This question about the genesis of consciousness is what David Chalmers has famously called “the hard problem” in philosophy of mind, and it has persistently vexed those thinkers who have taken up Hobbes’s materialist legacy.⁸⁷ Nor does Hobbes account for why some encounters between bodies (the pebble and the puddle, for instance) don’t involve sensory perception on the part of either body. He does admit, in his most extended discussion of sensation, in *De corpore* IV.25, that his account provides no criteria for knowing which bodies are genuinely sentient, i.e., capable of “understand[ing] the judgment we make of objects by their phantasms; namely by comparing and distinguishing those phantasms.”⁸⁸ After all, if “sense perception is simply a mechanically provoked motion in our bodies, surely stones and other inanimate objects also have sense?”⁸⁹ Here, he can neither appeal to the Scholastic answer that humans—unlike stones—have a sensitive soul, nor to the Cartesian solution that roots sense perception in a judgment of the immaterial mind. Thus, all he is left to

⁸⁵ He uses these words indifferently. See, inter alia, *De corpore* IV.25, EW I 387-410.

⁸⁶ Cf. Philip Pettit’s remark: “To a contemporary eye, one of the surprising aspects of Hobbes’s response to the naturalistic predicament is that he gave no attention whatsoever to consciousness—to the fact that there is something like it, for example, to perceive things.” Pettit, *Made With Words*, 156. Furthermore, as Bernard Gert points out, it is not entirely clear whether—to use the terminology of contemporary analytic philosophy—Hobbes’s ultimately counts as reductive materialism or epiphenomenalism. See Gert, *Thomas Hobbes: Prince of Peace*, pp. 22-23.

⁸⁷ See David Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2.3 (1995), 200-219; and “Moving Forward on the Problem of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4.1 (1997), 3-46.

⁸⁸ *De corpore* IV.25.5, EW I 393.

⁸⁹ Leijenhorst, *Mechanisation of Aristotelianism*, 98.

offer his readers here is the formal—and apparently arbitrary—claim that only those bodies possessing organs of sense perception are properly to be called sentient. Although it cannot be ruled out that the same motion can be found also in stones, a stone by all accounts lacks the proper organs necessary to register and retain a phantasm.⁹⁰

3.7. Sense and Sensibility

Somewhat puzzlingly, Hobbes concludes his account of sense in the first chapter of *Leviathan* by insisting that these qualia themselves are properly motions of the external bodies that cause them, rather than of the perceiving body: “all . . . qualities called *Sensible*, are in the object that causeth them” and “presseth our organs diversly” (I.1.3; 22-24). But it’s unclear why it should make any difference to Hobbes’s account *where* precisely these qualities are said to be, since on his account what produces them is the collision of some external object with a sense organ, which provokes mutual reactions, one of which is the perception of them, which in turn is reduced to motions within the perceiver’s mind. After all, he tirelessly reminds his readers, there is in sensory perception no transfer of matter from one body to another, but only motion, namely “the pressure...of externall things upon our Eyes, Eares, and other organs, thereunto ordained.” In short, “the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another.”⁹¹ And as he argues in *De corpore*, “it is more

⁹⁰ “Though all sense...be made by reaction, nevertheless it is not necessary that every thing that reacteth should have sense . . . For unless [inanimate] bodies had organs, as living creatures have, fit for the retaining of such motion as is made in them, their sense would be such, as that they should never remember the same.” *De corpore* IV.25.3, EW I 393. Both Leijenhorst and Sorell remark upon the unconvincing nature of Hobbes’s response. See Leijenhorst, *Mechanisation of Aristotelianism*, 98; Sorell, *Hobbes*, 74.

⁹¹ As we shall see, “image” and “fancy” are terms of art for Hobbes. Image, or sense, “is Motion in the organs and interiour parts of mans body, caused by the action of the things we See, Heare, &c.” Likewise, “Fancy is but the Reliques of the same Motion, remaining after Sense” (I.6.23; 78).

accurately said, that we see the sun, than that we see the light. For light and colour, and heat and sound, and other qualities which are commonly called sensible, are not objects, but phantasms in the sentient."⁹² So, whether the motions resulting from this collision are said to be the transmission of some quality (tartness, for instance) from the object (the juice of a lemon) to the perceiver (a woman drinking lemonade), or else simply the end sum of a collision of bodies, what really matters to Hobbes is that nothing else is going on in such an encounter but "so many several motions of matter." Indeed, Hobbes reminds us, "motion, produceth nothing but motion" (I.1.3; 24).⁹³ But why, then, should it matter to Hobbes *where* these qualia are said to lie?⁹⁴

One reason Hobbes emphasizes this point is to fortify his position for an attack on the scholastic account of perception. This is, in fact, the opening volley of an extended battle that will last forty-seven chapters, and will contend for an immense ground that ranges from sense perception to principles of biblical interpretation, from the relationship between philosophy and theology to the nature of episcopal authority, and many points in between. Here, he complains, "the Philosophy-schools, through all the Universities of Christendome, grounded upon certain texts of *Aristotle*, teach another doctrine," namely that objects of perception possess species that are transmitted from an object to the perceiver. For instance,

⁹² *De corpore*, IV.25.3, EW I 391-92.

⁹³ Thus, while qualia belong properly to the mind of the perceiver, rather than to the object perceived, any similarity here to Berkeleyan idealism is due to its antithetical relationship to it. Both Hobbes and Berkeley reject Cartesian dualism. Berkeley claims that only *immaterial* ideas have any substance, and that the material world is an illusion. Hobbes, by contrast, claims that only matter exists, and that all ideas are reducible to matter in motion. Both are thus led to affirm that qualia are properties of mind, rather than of external objects. But while Berkeley's sharp distinction of inner from outer motivates this claim, for Hobbes, inwardness is just more matter in motion; both inner and outer are part of precisely the same mechanistic system of cause and effect, action and reaction.

⁹⁴ Indeed, Hobbes himself seems to have recognized the impertinence of this point, since the Latin version of 1666 says instead: "Quae qualitates . . . sunt in ipso Objecto nihil aliud, praeter material motum" (I.1.3; 25), or "these qualities are in the [external] object itself nothing but motion."

“for the cause of Vision, that the thing seen, sendeth forth on every side a visible species (in English) a visible shew, apparition, or aspect, or a being seen; the receiving whereof into the Eye, is Seeing.” The scholastics posit the same, *mutatis mutandi*, for hearing, smelling, and—most absurd of all, Hobbes suggests—even “for the cause of Understanding also, they say the thing Understood sendeth forth intelligible species . . . which coming into the Understanding, makes us Understand.”⁹⁵ The problem Hobbes identifies with the scholastic account of perception is that it suggests that some incorporeal substance is transferred—in the act of perception—from the body perceived to the mind of the perceiver.⁹⁶ This is absurd not only because it posits an incorporeal substance (a patent absurdity, Hobbes thinks, since that would literally mean “incorporeal corpus”), but also because of the far-fetched, unnecessarily complicated positing of entities that are superfluous on the mechanistic account. For Hobbes, sensation is nothing more than a complex arrangement of matter in motion, and there is no need to confuse the issue by inventing more complicated—and ultimately incoherent—categories to account for it.

⁹⁵ On Hobbes’s apparent anxiety about the continuity of many of his claims and categories with those of Aristotle, see Leijenhorst, *The Mechanisation of Aristotelianism*, esp. 1-7, 18-34, 219-22: “Hobbes’s engagement with Aristotle and the Aristotelians is complex. Hobbes insults the Aristotelians, while using their vocabulary and even their definitions. This complexity is perhaps characteristic of any struggle with such a dominating father figure as the Stagyrte and the enormous tradition he inaugurated. Perhaps here, the degree of rebellion reflects the dependence” (220).

⁹⁶ Hobbes’s characterization of the scholastic doctrine of species is, unsurprisingly, unfair: “Like Descartes and other *novatores*, Hobbes in fact misrepresents the species by portraying them as images flying through the air. To make some sense of the doctrine of species he assumes that they move locally. In judging all that moves necessarily to be corporeal, Hobbes is obliged to conceive of species as nothing other than bodies. He thus concludes that the notion of species illustrates how the scholastics confound appearances and real things.” Leijenhorst, “Sense and Nonsense About Sense,” 92.

Hobbes's placement of this critique of scholasticism as the conclusion of *Leviathan's* very first chapter seems to serve several purposes. Each is commensurate with the reason he opens the treatise with perception in the first place. First, it ridicules scholastic discourse, thus setting the tone for the overarching critical project of *Leviathan*, and its "amending" of standard views within Christendom. Indeed, he concludes this brief attack by clarifying that he doesn't disapprove "the use of Universities" in general. Rather, Hobbes explains: "because I am to speak hereafter of their use in a Common-wealth, I must let you see on all occasions by the way, what things would be amended in them." Second, this critique shows that the schoolmen employ an antiquated, pre-scientific account of perception, and defend that view by means of "insignificant speech"—words that quite literally mean nothing. Third, it suggests that the difference between the mode of seeing the world that he recommends to his readers, and the mode deployed by the scholastics—those ardent defenders of "the Kingdome of Darknesse"—goes 'all the way down,' even to their competing accounts of something as basic as how humans perceive the world.⁹⁷

So much, then, for the mechanics of sensory perception. As we shall see in chapters 5 and 6, the grammar of perception that Hobbes has sketched will govern his account of thought (the arrangement of collected sensory data within an animal's brain) and of mind (the locus of thought), and of the mind's two basic *natural* functions: its cognitive powers (imagination and prudence), and its motive powers

⁹⁷ Indeed, key to Hobbes's rhetorical strategy throughout *Leviathan* are his carefully chosen examples, illustrations, and anecdotes. He stops at various points in expositing his natural philosophy in Part 1 to show how different his scientific account of the world is from scholastic accounts. In the first five chapters alone, he differentiates his view from scholasticism on the following points: the mechanics of sensory perception (I.1.4; 24), the cause of motion (I.2.4; 26), the scholastic tolerance of pagan superstition in order to cultivate popular credibility (I.2.7; 34), the origin of mental entities, I.2.8; 34-36), the absurd use by scholasticism of "insignificant speech" (I.3.11; 46, I.4.17; 60-62, I.5.19; 66-68, I.5.20-21; 70-74), and the misguided trust of the scholastics in traditional definitions (I.4.15; 56-58).

(desire and will). These powers, like all the mind's capacities and operations, are grounded originally in the mechanics of perception just sketched.

Here, one must reply to Lilla's account of Hobbes once more with a *sic et non*.

He writes:

The aim of *Leviathan* is to attack and destroy the entire tradition of Christian political theology . . . Yet the treatise begins, not with theology, politics, Gods or kings, but with physiology. Specifically it begins with an exploration of the human eye and how it perceives the world. On the very first page of his work Hobbes makes an implicit profession of faith: that to understand religion and politics, we need not understand anything about God; we need only understand man as we find him, a body alone in the world.⁹⁸

Lilla is right in recognizing the centrality of Hobbes's account of sense perception to the entire argument of *Leviathan*. Understanding the mechanics of human sense perception is, Hobbes suggests, a necessary prerequisite to understanding human cognition, which is, in turn, necessary for understanding human language and the practices (such as politics and theology) that such language makes possible. But Lilla goes too far in his attempt to make explicit this "implicit profession of faith." Hobbes makes no claims here about the sufficient conditions for "understand[ing] religion and politics," nor does he ever suggest that we find the human being "a body alone in the world." Whatever that curious phrase is intended to mean, it surely doesn't characterize the dense world of bodies constantly acting upon one another that Hobbes describes in these opening chapters. Nor can Lilla be excused here by pleading that the later parts of *Leviathan* justify this interpretation of his brief opening remarks about sensation. What Hobbes *does* suggest by beginning with the mechanics of sensory perception is that any scientific account of human life—whether politics, religion, or the language that makes both possible—must be rooted

⁹⁸ Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 75-76.

in a rational view of the world and its laws, and that the hypotheses about human thought he adduces are as good a candidate as any.⁹⁹ He concludes *De corpore*, for instance, with the following admission: “[I]f any other man from other hypotheses shall demonstrate the same or greater things, there will be greater praise and thanks due to him than I demand for myself, provided his hypotheses be such as are conceivable.”¹⁰⁰

3.8. Conclusion.

This chapter has traced the ‘prologemenon’ to the treatise “On Man” with which Hobbes begins his *Leviathan*. In it, Hobbes asserts that the universe exhaustively comprises one kind of substance, namely body, and that all contents and operations of the human mind are both caused by bodily motion, and are themselves utterly reducible to bodily motion. This materialist account of perception and its ontological groundwork, I have argued, serves three principal aims: i) to provide a theoretical foundation for the extended ‘rational’ argument of the treatise; ii) to encourage his readers to see the world in a way commensurate with the findings of his rational argument; and iii) to attack the dualistic metaphysics that he sees as undergirding Christian resistance to the modern science—including his own civil science.

As his account of the invention of language will make evident, though humans are, like all other things in the world, wholly material, they can nonetheless

⁹⁹ Lilla’s misreading here might be characterized as a conflation of necessary and sufficient conditions. Hobbes claims that a materialistic account of human thought is a *necessary* condition for rationally understanding both religion and politics; he does not—as Lilla states—suggest it’s a *sufficient* condition.

¹⁰⁰ *De corpore* IV.30.15, EW I 531.

expand the limits of their natural condition by the use of artifice. Once humans have invented language—their first and most foundational artifice—they are able to shape the world they inhabit, and to make a new world with new possibilities, though—as Hobbes’s strict rules of discourse suggest—always within the limits provided by the world of matter in motion.¹⁰¹ We are radically free to make the world we live in, but such freedom is always determined by boundaries. Hobbes’s account of free will and determinism was highly controversial, but as we shall see in chapter 4, is quite simple: an agent wills freely insofar as her actions are rooted in an intentional act of volition. As Susan Lloyd explains:

A free human person is one who is not stopped by external impediments from doing that which she has the will and capability to do. A person is responsible – and so liable to praise or blame – for those of her actions that result from her will, that is, from her own deliberation. Although a person is not free to choose how she wills, she is properly said to be free when she can do as she wills, and is properly held responsible for those of her doings that result from her willing. Hobbes articulates a genuinely compatibilist position, judging that no other position permits us to honor God as both omnipotent and just.¹⁰²

In short, Hobbes suggests that attention to the salient features of this world is needed if we are to know how to use language rightly, and thus to see the world and ourselves rightly. Chapters 4 and 5 will further explore how the boundaries provided by this materialist ontology shape Hobbes’s account of the natural human mind and determine his account of some of their implications for the human ability to ‘make’ the world.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Phillip Pettit, *Made With Words*, 11-13, 24-39, 59-66, 70-75, 107-111, 115-119; Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 6-7.

¹⁰² Susan Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Cases in the Law of Nature*, 372.

Given that the ultimate concern of *Leviathan* is the articulation and defense of a particular model of state sovereignty, the sovereign nation-state is the artifact—the made object—of highest importance. But Hobbes’s program for perfecting the art of governance, via articulating a new, rational foundation for a truly reformed Christian society begins by describing the human being, and aiming to uncover the basic distinction between the natural, or given, on the one hand, and the artificial, or made, on the other. The former, if correctly identified, displays bounds that determine what humans are or are not, and what they can and cannot properly do. As it turns out, on his account language, reason, and society are all unambiguously artificial entities, things that humans have made by dint of will, and which they likewise continue to sustain by their conjoined acts of will. Because artificial, and because both created and sustained by arbitrary acts of sheer will, these entities—linguistic conventions, social orders—are ultimately matters of human preference.

One effect of Hobbes’s account, then, is to show the arbitrary nature of such arrangements. Another, which might seem to be in tension with its emphasis on the arbitrary nature of artifice, is his stringent account of the natural limits that govern human life. Indeed, there is a parallel between two kinds of ‘freedom in limitation’ central to Hobbes’s thought. The natural boundaries that the world of matter in motion imposes upon us—we are limited by time, space, the laws of physics, our own mortality—set the limits upon what is possible. But beyond that, humans are free to do anything they can imagine and have the power to execute. Likewise, once they have constructed a state and authorized a sovereign, they are limited by the artificial boundaries of sovereign law—whatsoever the sovereign commands, the subject must obey—set limits upon what is licit. But beyond that, humans are free to

pursue whatever ends they wish and have the power to execute. Thus, both the natural state of humanity—prior to any artifice whatsoever—and humanity within the civil state—after the artificial series of language, reason, state, and society—are defined by radical human freedom, but always within particular limits.¹⁰³

To the complex relationship of natural limits to human freedom to make the world through art, we will turn in chapters 5 and 6. But first, chapter 4 provides an important interlude exploring the use to which Hobbes puts his materialist ontology in dispelling the notion of ‘spiritual substance’ from Christendom, and showing how scripture is to be read in a manner consistent with the ‘new science’ and materialist ontology sketched above.

¹⁰³ I take the phrase “freedom in limitation” from Karl Barth’s account of freedom in *Church Dogmatics* III.4, §56. See also Karl Barth’s essays on the freedom he finds exemplified by Mozart. Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, foreword by John Updike, with a new foreword by Paul Louis Metzger (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

Chapter Four

Clearing the Mist: Hobbes's Subversion of Sola Scriptura

Whence comes it, that in Christendome there has been, almost from the time of the Apostles, such justling of one another out of their places, both by forraign, and Civill war? ...and such diversity of ways in running to the same mark, *Felicity*, if it be not Night amongst us, or at least a Mist? wee are therefore yet in the Dark.

—Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapt. 44, “*Of Spirituall Darknesse from MISINTERPRETATION of Scripture.*”

As I have suggested, the aim of Hobbes's materialist ontology is threefold: i) to offer an intelligible account of the world consistent with the 'new science' and Hobbes's corresponding account of reason; ii) to convince his readers, via careful and compelling description, to embrace this new understanding of the world; and iii) to undermine a nexus of dualisms that he thinks threatens the form of state sovereignty he has articulated in *Leviathan*. All three of these aims require him to show further how this new way of seeing changes the way Christians think about revelation, authority, and scripture. It is one thing simply to offer a compelling counter-ontology to the traditional Christian metaphysics that Hobbes finds both unintelligible and dangerous. It is another to illustrate the superiority of this ontology to its competitors by applying it to the same set of questions to which the traditional scholastic view had provided answers. This brief chapter will show one way in which Hobbes—having offered an exhaustively materialist account of the world, and shown how such an account makes sense of human experience—argues for its consistency with Christian theology and scripture.

Most of the passages I engaged in chapter 3, like those I will explore further in chapters 5 and 6, come from the first few chapters of *Leviathan*, what I've suggested constitutes an informal prologemenon to Part I, "On Man." But in Parts III and IV, Hobbes explores some of the broader implications of his theoretical apparatus for scriptural, theological, and practical questions concerning Christendom. One of the most extended engagements Hobbes offers with any single concept in *Leviathan* is found in chapter 32, where he treats the relationship of *body* to *spirit*. This chapter appears toward the beginning of Part III, "Of a Christian Common-wealth," a series of chapters notable for the density and lucidity of its argument—a pair of features not always present in Hobbes's book. Hobbes opens Part II by signalling a key methodological shift: where the book's first half argued from "the Principles of Nature onely," namely prudence and science,¹ the second half will also consider "Supernatural Revelations of the Will of God" (III.32.195; 576). This remark leads immediately to he provides what we might call a 'discourse on method' in the study of supernatural revelation. This comprises a few pages of discussion of how one is to navigate the difficulties of supposing—as he takes Christianity to entail—that God, an invisible, incomprehensible being, has spoken somehow to human beings (III.32.196-98; 578-84). Hence, this brief discourse on method treats three chief points: i) the proper relationship of reason to revelation; ii)

¹ That Hobbes is speaking specifically of prudence and science as constituting these natural principles is clear from his gloss on these principles: "such as Experience has found true, or Consent (concerning the use of words) has made so; that is to say, from the nature of Men, known to us by Experience, and from Definitions (of such words as are Essentiall to all Politicall reasoning) universally agreed upon" (III.32.195; 576). For Hobbes, there are two basic kinds of natural knowledge: knowledge of fact, which when accrued is called prudence; and scientific knowledge, which consists of deductions made through careful ratiocination based on precisely defined words. I provide a fuller treatment of the difference between prudence and reason, and the implications of this difference for Hobbes, in chapters 5 and 6.

the proper source of special revelation; and iii) the proper criteria for recognizing reliable revelation.

When Hobbes speaks of “supernaturall revelation,” he means, above all, the Christian scriptures.² As we shall see, the question of what counts as scripture, and by what authority it so counts, is crucial. But in following the order of Hobbes’s exposition in chapter 33, we turn first to the theoretical question of the relationship of reason to revelation.

4.1. The relationship of reason to revelation.

Knowing how properly to interpret scripture depends on knowing both the *purpose* of scripture and the *scope of its authority*. The scriptures, Hobbes argues consistently throughout *Leviathan*, have two very simple purposes: to prepare humans to be God’s obedient subjects; and to show them the way to salvation: “The Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdome of God; and to prepare their mindes to become his obedient subjects” (I.8.38-39; 120).³ This view of scripture’s purpose corresponds to the two scriptural conditions for salvation Hobbes repeatedly emphasizes: belief that Jesus is the Christ, and obedience to the earthly sovereign. This view, too, is formally—if not materially—in keeping with the Reformation principle that everything necessary for salvation is contained in Holy

² Hobbes distinguishes amongst three sorts of divine communication: the natural word, the revealed word, and the prophetic word. Each constitutes a different form of the “triple Word of God.” The first mode of divine legislation comes by way of “the Dictates of Naturall Reason.” This constitutes the rational word of God, and is perceived by means of “Right Reason” by humans. The second way God legislates, by contrast, is “by Revelation,” which constitutes the sensible word of God, and is properly apprehended by “Sense Supernaturall.” The third mode of divine legislation, which is ultimately reducible to the second, refers to human mediation of supernatural revelation. This occurs when, “by the Voyce of some man, to whom by the operation of Miracles he procureth credit with the rest.” Hobbes calls this the “prophetic word of God”

³ See also IV.45.355; 1020-21

Scripture. This is, after all, the subject of Article Six of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, entitled ‘Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.’ This article plainly affirms that “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.”

Awareness of this twofold purpose makes clearer the proper relationship of reason to revelation. Hobbes explains:

We are not to renounce our Senses, and Experience; nor (that which the undoubted Word of God) our naturall Reason. For they are the talents which he hath put into our hands to negotiate, till the coming again of our blessed Saviour; and therefore not to be folded up in the Napkin of an Implicite Faith, but employed in the purchase of Justice, Peace, and true Religion. (III.32.195; 576)

Several crucial points in this brief passage are worth emphasizing. First, reason isn’t opposed to faith, in the sense that faith would somehow require suppressing reason or prudence.⁴ Rather, the faculty of prudence and the art of reason are the “talents” God has given human beings with which to “negotiate” this time between the inauguration of the Christian Common-wealth and its fulfillment in the Kingdome of God that will commence with “the coming again of our blessed Saviour.” Here, Hobbes clearly refers to the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the closely related parable of the ten pounds (Luke 19:12-27). This context makes clearer a subtle metaphor at play here. The intransitive verb “to negotiate”—now obsolete—meant “to do business or trade, to engage in commerce.”⁵ His point in using this

⁴ Hobbes’s account of the proper relationship between prudence (“our Senses, and Experience”) and reason will become clearer in chapters 5 and 6. For now, it suffices to say that prudence, the skill of learning inductively from one’s experience, is a natural faculty that is improved upon by the use of reason—an artificial skill that humans have invented and developed, and which Hobbes avoids calling a *faculty*. Reason, in contrast to prudence, is the strictly deductive calculus of deriving consequences from properly defined words. Reason doesn’t make prudence obsolete, but in some contexts—chiefly in scientific reasoning—the art of reason is so vastly superior to the faculty of prudence that it makes prudence irrelevant.

⁵ OED, ‘negotiate,’ v. 1.b.

commercial figure is that, within the economy of this epoch between Christ's ascension and second coming, our livelihood is tied to our "Senses, and Experience" and "our naturall Reason." To "fold [them] up in the Napkin of an Implicite Faith" is to commit the same mistake that the "wicked servant" made with his talent.⁶ This "Implicite Faith," of course, refers to the theological concept of *fides implicita*, a faith which trusts primarily in the authority of the church's teaching office. The force of the play on words here is that to suppress one's natural senses and reason, so as to accept what a purportedly magisterial authority demands, is to share in the error of the wicked servant, who squandered the money his master expected him to invest for profit.

The point here—to go beyond the letter of Hobbes's words, but to extend the metaphor in accordance with their spirit—is that, when properly invested by human beings, through their invention and cultivation of language and reason, these natural "talents" multiply, yielding massive interest, and leading ultimately to a truly rational society. But, if our rationality is squandered, if we allow the Kingdome of Darknesse to snuff out the light of reason, then these talents waste away, and the wicked servant ultimately sins against both reason (by way of neglect) and faith (by abusing it, in taking it to be fundamentally opposed to reason).

Hobbes continues:

For though there be many things in Gods Word above Reason; that is to say, which cannot by natural reason be either demonstrated, or confuted; yet there is nothing contrary to it; but when it seemeth so, the fault is either in our unskillfull Interpretation, or erroneous Ratiocination. (III.32.195; 576)

⁶ Strictly speaking, the "wicked servant" of Luke 19 was given not a talent, but a pound, which he "kept laid up in a napkin." The "wicked and slothful servant" of Matthew 25 instead buried his talent in the earth. Hobbes skillfully weaves references to both parables in his metaphor.

Clearly, Hobbes doesn't deny that the Bible contains mysteries that lie beyond human comprehension. Yet these mysteries will not—in principle—contain anything contrary to reason. This is because God is author of both reason and scripture; and God's word can be relied upon not be contradict itself. Thus, when the claims of scripture and those of reason appear to conflict, such conflict is merely apparent, and must be rooted in either our "unskillful Interpretation" of scripture or the failings of our reason via "erroneous Ratiocination," that is, by committing some mistakes in our process of deducing consequences from definitions.⁷

Hobbes draws two corollaries from this claim: First, the teachings of scripture cannot be understood to contravene logic: "For both parts of a contradiction cannot possibly be true; and therefore to enjoyne the believe of them, is an argument of ignorance" (I.12.58; 182). Any author who does so thereby discredits himself "in all things else he shall propound as from rvelation supernaturall" (III.12.58; 182). Supernatural revelation is no more capable of contravening reason than is the written word of God itself; because both sorts of truths are "the Word of God," no supernaturally revealed truth will contradict a naturally revealed one. Second, no interpretation which appears to bring the scriptures into conflict with our knowledge of the natural world should be brooked without extremely close, careful scrutiny. Every effort should be made to reconcile the plain sense of the text with our experience, since experience and reason are the voice of God's natural word, just as the texts are the voice of God's prophetic word. Here, he depends on a key but implicit assumption: truths of reason are more easily discerned than truths of special revelation. Precisely because such revelation is above nature, it cannot be tested in

⁷ Again, Hobbes's account of reason, including errant reason, is the focus of chapter 6.

the same way we might test our observations of nature, or our exercise of reason. Thus, while both reason and scripture constitute the “undoubted Word of God,” the former—given both our human capacities, which cannot conceive God apart from the divine accommodation of revelation, and the nature of scripture itself, which aims at articulating the means of salvation, and not to transmit any rational knowledge—is subject to more certainty.

Yet, sometimes we will encounter things in God’s Word that, though not against it, are “above Reason.” When this happens, and we’re genuinely unable to comprehend a text, we’re called

to captivate our understanding to the Words; and not to labour in sifting out a Philosophicall truth by Logick, or such mysteries as are not comprehensible, nor fall under any rule of naturall science. For it is with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect. (III.32.195; 578)

So to captivate our understanding does not mean to abdicate our power of reasoning. It is rather to demonstrate a willingness to obey God’s commands even when the reason for those commands is beyond our understanding: “All that is NECESSARY to *Salvation* is contained in two Vertues: *Faith in Christ*, and *Obedience to Lawes*” (III.43.322; 930). Yet, in no event should we allow the words of scripture to confute the knowledge we derive from experience and reason. To do so would be precisely *not* to obey God’s commands, because it would constitute explicit disobedience of God’s natural word, promulgated via reason. Indeed, “Obedience to his Lawes (that is, in this case to the Lawes of Nature) is the greatest worship of all. For as Obedience is more acceptable to God than Sacrifice; so also to set light by his Commandments, is the greatest of all contumelies. And these are the Lawes . . . which naturall Reason dictateth” (II.31.192; 570). Thus, one should not aim to

conform the special revelation of God's "Prophetic Word" to the rules of philosophical discourse. For, though God speaks to human beings in these two broad ways (via the laws of reason, which we uncover through ratiocination; and via supernatural revelation), each mode of discourse is governed by different principles. Those governing reason are, obviously, rational principles, while those of scripture are either extra-rational directives to supplement those of reason, or else supra-rational directives that go above, but never against reason.

Though many of Hobbes's interpreters have pointed precisely to this apparent subordination of scripture to reason as evidence of his attempt to "undermine Scripture's authority" as part of a "larger attempt to undermine the authority of revealed religion,"⁸ the case is far subtler. Hobbes's emphasis on reason as a legitimate, even divinely mandated, source of human knowledge constitutes in itself no break with the Reformation, or even the later Reformed tradition. As Hobbes's younger contemporary Francis Turretin wrote in 1679: "The question is not whether reason has any use in theology. . . . But . . . simply whether it bears the relation of a principle and rule in whose scale the greatest mysteries of religion should be weighed, so that nothing should be held which is not agreeable to it, which is not founded upon and cannot be elicited from reason."⁹ Such a view Turretin vehemently denies. At first glance, this might seem to stand in tension with the account of Hobbes I have just sketched, and indeed many of Hobbes's most vociferous early critics accused him precisely of subordinating scripture to reason. However, what both Turretin and Hobbes affirm is that certain mysteries of faith

⁸ Haig Patapan, "Politics of Immortality: Hobbes on 'Humane and Divine Politiques,'" in *Political Theology* 16.6 (November 2015), 14.

⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. J. T. Dennison, Jr., trans. G. M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1992-97), vol 1, p. 27.

exceed reason's capacity, and thus its authority, and that no appeal to reason may legitimately contravene what scripture claims.¹⁰

Where Hobbes's statement goes beyond Turretin's, and offers more conceptual precision, is in his further claim that because God has instituted both reason and scripture, each for a particular purpose, it is illegitimate not only to submit the mysteries of faith to reason—as Turretin concurs—but also to submit clear findings of reason to irrational claims that have been illegitimately drawn from misreadings of scripture, for an irrational claim—by the very virtue of its irrationality—must constitute either a gross misreading of scripture (such as the claim that the soul and body are separable essences)¹¹ or a misapplication of some passage to a question it does not properly address (such as the claim that Christian martyrs can be produced within Christendom).¹² Of course, terms like “illegitimate” and “misreading” are highly contestable. Few, if any, of his contemporaries were more conscious of that point than Thomas Hobbes. This is precisely why he goes on in this chapter to treat the question of authority in scriptural interpretation. But here, his point is simple: insofar as an interpretation drawn from scripture is irrational—and once a reliable scientific method has been developed, this can be known with certainty—it is for that very reason a misreading, and thus illegitimate.

¹⁰ Whether this places Hobbes in conflict with other strands of the Reformed tradition, most notably the Puritans, is a more difficult question. My point here is simply that his emphasis on reason as a valid source of divine revelation that should be considered when interpreting scripture is by no means a view excluded by, or even marginal within, the Christian tradition Hobbes inherited. Rather, what makes Hobbes's views certainly controversial, and perhaps marginal, is their material shape, not their formal derivation.

¹¹ Cf. IV.45.353; 1016.

¹² Cf. III.42.271-73; 784-90.

4.2 Hobbes's Rules for Interpreting Scripture

The first rule of scriptural interpretation might be formulated as in the following formal directive: *Don't offer an interpretation that contradicts reason*. To this rule, Hobbes offers a second that provides concrete interpretive guidance in following an otherwise highly formal rule:

For it is not the bare Words, but the Scope of the writer that giveth the truth light, by which any writing is to bee interpreted; and they that insist upon single Texts, without considering the main Designe, can derive no thing from them cleerly; but rather by casting atomes of Scripture, as dust before mens eyes, make every thing more obscure than it is; an ordinary artifice of those that seek not the truth, but their own advantage. (III.43.331; 954)

The second rule, then: *Always read with scripture's purpose in mind*. To this claim, Hobbes adds a corollary: scripture's purpose is not to provide knowledge of the natural world. By contrast, "Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdoem of God, and to prepare their mindes to become his obedient subjects; leaving the world, and the Philosophy thereof, to the disputation of men, for the exercising of their naturall Reason" (I.8.38-39; 120). Indeed, the attempt to discover such knowledge in the scriptures is bound to go astray, since they are written in the inexact language of ordinary life. The Bible is not a scientific handbook, and any attempt to treat it as such constitutes a gross misuse.

While one might interpret Hobbes's move here as a crassly Procrustean attempt to stretch scripture to fit his scientific account of the state, he in fact has theological reasons for this, and these stand—at least formally—in continuity with the mainstream of Christian tradition. The primary reason is that scripture's chief purpose is to show humans how to be saved, and that scripture must be interpreted accordingly. To point to one obvious example of this principle at work in Christian

thought, Augustine explains that scripture must always be interpreted according to the twofold love commandment: any interpretation that fosters love of neighbor and of God, no matter how odd that interpretation might be, is in accordance with the scriptures' purpose; likewise, any interpretation that fails to foster that love is illegitimate. For instance, when trying to determine whether a locution in scripture is literal or figurative, Augustine explains that "whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith you must take to be figurative. Virtuous behavior pertains to the love of God and of one's neighbor; the truth of faith pertains to a knowledge of God and of one's neighbor."¹³

Hobbes, like Augustine, suggests that scripture's aim is to show the path to salvation. But unlike Augustine, he incorporates state sovereignty as a key element of God's salvific economy.¹⁴ Thus, to encourage Christian obedience to the state becomes a key part of scripture's aim, even when what scripture tells us concerning the state is entirely formal, namely that Christian subjects are to render absolute obedience to their proper sovereign. (III.42.300-01; 868). Scripture never speaks of the state as such, for scripture's aim is not to articulate a civil science, which is Hobbes' aim. When properly understood and applied, the dictates of scripture serve to buttress the findings of "right reason." For whatever the scriptures might say about human political life—and, as Hobbes convincingly demonstrates—it says a great deal—this will either directly support the conclusions of civil science (by means of

¹³ *On Christian Doctrine*, III.9.14.

¹⁴ For Augustine, of course, earthly empires like Assyria, Babylon, and Rome are used by God mysteriously in the providential directing of history, which is armed ultimately at salvation. But Hobbes's claim is much stronger. First, Hobbes's Christian Commonwealth entails a strict identification of church and state, such that the visible church is not just coextensive, but identical with the earthly city. And second, the state, for Hobbes, is God's viceregent on earth, and thus is the primary locus of Christ's presence during this epoch between the Ascension and the Second Coming. Combined, these two commitments yield radical and thoroughgoing differences between Hobbes and Augustine's accounts.

its extra-rational claims) or will point to the broader horizon of salvation history which forms the ultimate context of the state's work (by means of its supra-rational claims).¹⁵

4.3 Which Books are Scripture? And How Do We Know?

Having established the purpose of scripture, the scope of its authority, and the proper relationship of reason to revelation, Hobbes addresses the next methodological problem: how does one determine what counts as special divine revelation? And more specifically, why should we take Holy Scripture as authentically divine revelation? These problems, it becomes evident in the course of Hobbes's exposition, apply not only to the attempt to identify genuine revelation, but also to its proper interpretation and practical application.

One immediate problem is that anyone might conclude, at anytime, to have received supernatural revelation from God. Supra-rational directives cannot be

¹⁵ Readers often miss this point about the broader cosmic horizon against which Hobbes sketches his account of politics. One interpreter who appreciates it is Matthew Rose, a Christian theologian who—against the grain of both Hobbes scholarship and Christian theology—constructively appropriates Hobbes's political theology for his own work. Rose remarks: "To put the point baldly, when Hobbes says that Christians must inwardly confess Christ's future reign and outwardly obey the sovereign he is not talking about two utterly different activities. For Hobbes, civil obedience is itself a mark of Christian faith. Indeed, it is simply the case that for him Christian faith is embodied in the way of life that makes the Hobbesian peaceable kingdom possible. Above all, it is manifested in the practice of peacefulness, civility, and respect for authority. Hobbes's argument is at every point informed by a biblical morality that encourages the liberal virtues of reasonableness, humility and self-restraint. . . . Hobbes's theology requires readers to see political life suspended between a once and future theocracy. We live in an interregnum, a time in which God no longer speaks, prophecy and miracles have ceased, and Christians bear peaceful witness to Christ's return on earth. During this time Hobbes believes politics is good and even godly to the extent it imitates divine rule; the goal of his political science, as *Leviathan* amply attests, is to approximate as closely as possible God's own kingdom." Nevertheless, "the sovereign has a merely artificial authority. His authority is the product of human making and all parties recognize it as such. Hobbes argues that it is the sovereign's duty to inform subjects about the conventional basis of his authority and not to disguise the fact his laws are 'purely stipulative.'" Rose, "Hobbes as Political Theologian," 28- 29. Citing Jeremy Waldron, "Hobbes: Truth, Publicity and Civil Doctrine," in *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Amelie Rorty (New York: Routledge, 1998), 143.

tested either empirically or via reason, as we would test our observations of purely natural phenomena. Furthermore, we typically have no reason to trust someone who purports to speak by supernatural inspiration. “So that though God Almighty can speak to a man, by Dreams, Visions, Voice, and Inspiration; yet he obliges no man to believe he hath so done to him that pretends it; who (being a man) may erre, and (which is more) may lie” (III.32.196; 580).

Hobbes finds within scripture “two marks, by which together, not asunder, a true Prophet is to be known” (III.32.197; 582). The first is the performance of miracles. The second is the conformity of the prophet’s teaching with the doctrine “that is already established” (III.32.197-98; 580-584). As Hobbes emphasizes several times, neither mark alone is sufficient: to accept a purported prophet’s claim to speak for God requires both that she perform miracles and that she not contradict established doctrine. “So that it is manifest, that the teaching of the Religion God hath established, and the shewing of a present Miracle, joined together, were the only marks whereby the Scripture would have a true Prophet, that is to say, immediate Revelation to be acknowledged; neither of them being singly sufficient to oblige any other man to regard what he saith” (III.32;198; 584).

Consistency with previously authenticated religion and proof of prophetic authenticity via miracles: these are the two marks of true prophecy. But these two criteria are no longer relevant in precisely the same way they were in the biblical world. Each one looks different in the current epoch of salvation history, one that began with Constantine and extends to the Second Coming of Christ. First, the established religion in Bronze Age Palestine differs significantly from that established in seventeenth-century England. The former, a cult surrounding first the

tabernacle, and then the temple, is established directly by God, by means of God's direct prophetic mouthpieces. The latter is the Church of England, established by the British sovereign who, in an equally indirect manner, discerns God's supernatural word via the scriptures—those authorized containers of God's prophetic word. Thus, if the first formal mark meant, within early Israelite religion, *do not contradict the laws of Moses*, in Hobbes's context, it means *do not contradict the 39 Articles*.

The second formal mark likewise takes a different material manifestation in Hobbes's time, since God no longer equips prophets to perform miracles. On Hobbes's cessationist view, miracles were part of a particular dispensation in which God used miracles to help establish true religion where it had not yet taken root. But one of the chief marks of this particular epoch is that, ever since the Gentile kings accepted the gospel and established the church, miracles have no longer been necessary or fitting. Hobbes explains:

Seeing that Miracles now cease, we have no sign left, whereby to acknowledge the pretended Revelations, or Inspirations of any private man; nor obligation to give ear to any Doctrine, farther than it is conformable to the Holy Scriptures, which since the time of our Saviour, supply the place, and sufficiently recompense the want of all other Prophecy; and from which, by wise and learned interpretation, and carefull ratiocination, all rules and precepts necessary to the knowledge of our duty both to God and man, without Enthusiasme, or supernaturally Inspiration, may easily be deduced. (III.32.198; 584)

Thus, because miracles have ceased, prophecy has effectively ceased as well, since there is no other justificatory machinery that might authorized any purported prophecies. Thus, the full extent of God's prophetic word as it relates to Christians today is limited to whatever has been recorded in holy scripture.

This point raises the next difficult question, namely what counts as scripture, and by what virtue some passages count as scripture and not others. which Hobbes

takes up this problem in chapter 33. But before turning to that discussion, it will be helpful to consider—somewhat schematically—two competing models available to Hobbes.

One way to answer this pair of questions is to follow John Calvin, who appeals to a quality of the texts themselves, or of their effects on a reader. In discussing the problem of epistemic uncertainty in the light of radical and apparently intractable theological disagreement, Calvin explains:

If we desire to provide in the best way for our consciences—that they may not be perpetually beset by the instability of doubt or vacillation, we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit. . . . Yes, if we turn pure eyes and upright senses toward it, the majesty of God will immediately come to view, subdue our bold rejection, and compel us to obey. . . . Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit.¹⁶

Calvin's view here is that scripture may be trusted with utter certainty, but that such certainty is not secured by "human reasons, judgments, or conjectures." Rather, such certainty is grounded in a mysterious inward turn, provoked by an encounter with the external text, and effected not by the reader's own autonomous sensibilities, but by the "inward teaching" of the Spirit, who allows the properly instructed reader to see that scripture needs no authentication. Indeed, to the reader who sees it with such spiritual vision, scripture is self-authenticating.

Calvin's view entails the rejection of any account that would ground scriptural authority on any "external thing."¹⁷ For if scripture's certain authority is

¹⁶ *Institutes*, I.7.4-5.

¹⁷ The reference here is to Phillip Cary's claim about the "powerlessness of external things" in what he takes to be Calvin's faithfully Augustinian denial of sacramental power. Phillip Cary,

not secured by any *human* judgment, then neither is it secured by the judgment of the *church*.

But a most pernicious error widely prevails that Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church. As if the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended upon the decision of men! . . . Thus these sacrilegious men, wishing to impose an unbridled tyranny under the cover of the church, do not care with what absurdities they ensnare themselves and others, provided they can force this one idea upon the simple-minded: that the church has authority in all things. . . . Again, to what mockeries of the impious is our faith subjected . . . if we believe that it has a precarious authority dependent solely upon the good pleasure of men!¹⁸

Three problems, Calvin here suggests, beset any attempt to ground scripture's authority on human consent. First, it provides no solution to the disputes about authority, for the church is but one more fallible human institution among others. The person whose faith in scripture's authority is grounded in an "implicit faith" in the church is no better off than someone who simply trusts her own reason. Second, it gives an improper power to the church—or, more precisely, "an unbridled tyranny under the cover of the church." And third, it entails a host of "absurdities" that ensnare those who believe the church has such authority, and subject the Christian faith to "mockeries of the impious."

The proper account of the relationship between the church's approval of the scriptures' inherent authority is that, "while the church receives and gives its seal of approval to the Scriptures, it does not thereby render authentic what is otherwise doubtful or controversial. But because the church recognizes Scripture to be the truth of its own God, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly venerates Scripture."¹⁹

Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), passim.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.1.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.2.

In the end, Calvin suggests, the very question of where scriptural authority is to be grounded is a mark that one lacks the proper spiritual vision to see the scriptures as they ought properly to be seen.

As to their question—How can we be assured that this has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church?—it is as if someone asked: Whence will we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.²⁰

Thus, despite Calvin's insistence that the authority of scripture is warranted by objective criteria within scripture itself, which are then apprehended only by the person whom the Spirit empowers, we might nonetheless deem this an internal criterion, for ultimately his appeal is to an inward apprehension of an objective feature of the text that only some are able to see.

Another way to answer these questions—by appeal to an external criterion—is to point to some feature independent of the text that makes it authoritative. On a Roman Catholic view, for instance, it is the magisterial office of the bishops that authorizes a particular set of texts as scripture for all those churches under the purview of its authority. As *Dei Verbum* asserts, it is through sacred tradition, which the church's magisterium defines, that "the full canon of sacred books is known."²¹ Furthermore, "The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church."²² Thus, although *Dei Verbum* allows that the Christian life is governed by a threefold authority structure that includes scripture, tradition, and the

²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.2.

²¹ The Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, On Divine Revelation, *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot (New York: America Press, 1966), 2.8.

²² *Dei Verbum*, 2.10.

magisterium, the third of these is given special status, for it has the sole authority to define what texts constitute scripture and tradition in the first place.²³

Hobbes's answer differs from both Calvin's internal criterion and the external criterion articulated by *Dei Verbum*. Rather, he approaches this pair of questions—*Which books are scripture? And how do we know?*—with the same skepticism he brings to similar questions, like the definition of “good” and “evil” or “right” and “wrong.”²⁴ Thus, Hobbes provides good reason for rejecting Calvin's appeal to an internal criterion. If one Christian, for instance, reads the Book of Tobit and senses what she takes to be the internal voice of the Spirit affirming that book's self-authenticating authority, while another reads Tobit and lacks the same experience, who is to judge between each one's purported experience of the Spirit?

The view Hobbes takes is much closer to the second view, which I described as ‘Roman Catholic,’ but with an important difference rooted in his hyper-Erastian ecclesiology. There cannot be a universal magisterium, he argues, and this is for two related reasons. First, an authority that can't be enforced is, in effect, no authority at all. Since there is quite evidently no single sovereign power that extends over all Christendom, there is no universal magisterial authority either. Thus, second, insofar as anyone—most notably the bishop of Rome—should purport to exercise such universal authority across Christendom, he does so illegitimately, for he thereby undermines the proper sovereignty of the local sovereign. A transnational church is,

²³ On *Dei Verbum*, see Francis Martin, “Revelation and Its Transmission,” in *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition*, ed. by Matthew W. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁴ “There [is] nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of Good and Evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves.” for “true and false are attributes of speech not things” (I.6.24; 80-82). Likewise, good and evil “are names that . . . in different tempers, customes, and doctrines of men, are different” (I.15.79; 242).

by definition, impossible. For any church to be legitimate, it must have authority over its members' bodies. A national church, he thinks, can meet this criterion insofar as its scope is identical to that of the sovereign state. But if such a church were extended to more than one nation, this either jeopardizes the sovereignty of the other nation-states, in whose territories it stakes its claim, or, by abdicating its authority over its members bodies, leaving that to the other nation-states, then it fails to meet the criteria for an authentic church. Thus, while Hobbes approaches these questions by appealing to an external magisterial authority, his appeal is Erastian rather than Catholic. Hobbes's solution differs markedly from the view articulated by *Dei Verbum*, and is thus distinctively, even exemplarily Protestant.

Hobbes concludes by appealing to the 39 Articles of the Church of England:

By the Books of Holy SCRIPTURE are those, which ought to be the *Canon*, that is to say, the Rules of Christian life. And because all Rules of life, which men are in conscience bound to observe, are Laws; the question of the Scripture, is the question of what is Law throughout all Christendome, both Naturall, and Civill. . . . Seeing therefore I have already proved, that Sovereigns in their own Dominions are the sole Legislators; those Books only are Canonically, that is, Law, in every nation, which are established for such by the Sovereign Authority. . . . According to this obligation, I can acknowledge no other Books . . . to be Holy Scripture, but those which have been commanded to be acknowledged for such, by the Authority of the Church of *England*. What books these are, is sufficiently known, without a Catalogue of them here. (III. 33.199; 586-88)

This appeal to royal authority to settle the identity and significance of scripture for Christians in England is commensurate with Hobbes's overall scheme of salvation history. He explains that "not till Kings were Pastors, or Pastors Kings" was there—or could there even be—the notion of a publicly authorized interpretation. Prior to that, the apostles could only urge their audience—and attempt to convince them "either by Miracles . . . or by Reasoning"—to accept their gospel as divinely

authorized (III.42.280; 808).²⁵ Thus, in one sense, miracles and Christians sovereigns play a formally identical role: to authorize instances of purported divine revelation.^{26, 27}

Two further points are worth nothing about implications of Hobbes's view here. First, that abandoning his account of absolute state sovereignty is not a live option. For reasons both philosophical and scriptural, Hobbes finds the doctrine of absolute sovereignty to be both necessary and thus irreversible. Thus, when this doctrine seems to stand in tension with other views one might wish to defend, those others must yield. Second, it can't simply be claimed that Hobbes derives this view independently of other view and then builds his system on this foundation. To draw an analogy from the field of epistemology, Hobbes is not a foundationalist, but a coherentist. His physics, civil science, theology, and scriptural interpretation all relate to each other in complex, interdependent ways. Certain pieces more important than others—that all the world is body in motion, that the best governance is absolute sovereignty, that Jesus is the Christ, and that no truth of reason will contradict truths of special revelation—in the sense that removing these axioms would do relatively more damage to the whole structure than removing others. But none of these is—like the 'cogito' in Descartes's system—the one foundation on which the rest stands.

²⁵ On the nature and history of apostolic power from the Ascension until the absorption of the apostolate into the office of "Christian Sovereign," see the extended discussion in III.42.267-95; 774-850.

²⁶ See Joshua Mitchell, *Not By Reason Alone: Religion, History, and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 68-69.

²⁷ The role of the Christian sovereign is far more expansive than the role of the miracle was prior to Constantine. In addition to making miracles and apostles obsolete, the Christian sovereign also becomes the vicar of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in his territory, which is to say, his church.

4.4 Desufflating the Christian Scriptures: a Rational Interpretation of 'Spirit'

Having shown that any question about matters relating to a specifically Christian commonwealth should be answered with appeal to "Supernaturall Revelations of the Word of God" that stand alongside but never contradict the "Naturall Word of God" known by reason, and that such supernatural knowledge is found exclusively in the scriptures that have been authorized by the legitimate sovereign, Hobbes now moves to demonstrating how rationally to interpret the scriptures.²⁸ He begins with scriptural language that seems to pose special difficulty for Hobbes's materialist ontology, anthropology, and civil science: spirit, inspiration, angel, Kingdom of God, sacrament, word of God, prophets, miracles, eternal life, hell, salvation, and church.

He begins with 'spirit.' A central aim of Hobbes's investigation into the scriptural meaning of 'spirit' is to refute the scholastic doctrine of separate corporeal and incorporeal substances. His strategy is to show that 'body' and 'substance' are synonymous, so as to show that the phrase 'incorporeal substance' is self-contradictory, and thus a case of 'insignificant speech.'

His starting point for interpreting this word is the axiomatic claim that anything that exists is body. Here, Hobbes offers a definition of body consistent with the account I traced in chapter 3.

The Word *Body*, in the most generall acceptation, signifieth that which filleth, or occupyeth some certain room, or imagined place; and dependeth not on the imagination [as doth place itself], but is a reall part of that we call the *Universe*. For the *Universe*, being the Aggregate of all Bodies, there is no reall part thereof that is not also *Body*; nor

²⁸ As Arrigo Pacchi suggests, Hobbes's "biblical philology" is so important to *Leviathan* that "it may be examined as a cultural phenomenon in itself, without necessary reference to its close and basic ties with the political idea to which it plays a secondary role in the general conception of the work." Arrigo Pacchi, "Hobbes and Biblical Philology in Service of the State," in *Topoi* 7 (1998), 231.

anything properly a *Body* that is not also part of (that Aggregate of all *Bodies*) the *Universe*. (III.34; 207; 610)²⁹

Here, he makes an additional point, key to his argument, about the meaning of ‘substance.’

The same also, because *Bodies* are subject to change, that is to say, to variety of appearance to the sense of living creatures, is called *Substance*, that is to say, *Subject*, to various accidents. . . . And according to this acceptation of the word, *Substance* and *Body*, signifie the same thing; and therefore *Substance incorporeall* are words, which when they are joined together, destroy another, as if a man should say, an *Incorporeall Body*. (III.34.207; 610)

It is of the highest importance in Hobbes’s science that words be defined properly and precisely. Nonetheless, not all language is, or ought to be, scientific. There is a common, non-scientific meaning of ‘body’ that is looser than this precise, scientific definition.

In the sense of common people, not all the *Universe* is called *Body*, but only such parts thereof as they can discern by the sense of Feeling, to resist their force, or by the sense of their Eyes, to hinder them from a farther prospect. Therefore in the common language of men, *Aire*, and *aeriall substances*, use not to be taken for *Bodies*, but (as often as men are sensible of their effect) are called *Wind*, or *Breath*, or (because the same are called in the Latine *Spiritus*) *Spiits*; as when they call that aeriall substance, which in the body of any living creature, gives it life and motion, *Vitall and Animall spirits*. (III.34.207-08; 612)

Hence, though there is no properly scientific use of the term ‘spirit,’ there is nonetheless a rational way of speaking of and interpreting the word ‘spirit’ in ordinary, non-scientific speech. He concludes: “the proper signification of *Spirit* in common speech, is either a subtile, fluid, and invisible *Body*, or a *Ghost*, or other *Idol* or *Phantasme* of the *Imagination*” (III.34.208; 612).

²⁹ The bracketed phrase, not in the original English of 1651, is my own interpolated translation of a phrase Hobbes adds to the Latin version of 1666: “ut locus ipse” (III.34183; 611).

One important distinction, then, is between scientific and common ways of talking: the former has no use for ‘spirit,’ so when ‘spirit’ is used, one must be careful not to take it as a precise—that is to say, scientific—use of the word, for doing so risks positing an irrational substance dualism and a quite literally meaningless claim that there such a thing as a *Corpus Incorporeum*. But Hobbes introduces a second non-scientific use of the word ‘spirit’: “metaphoricall significationes.” Thus, sometimes ‘spirit’ “is taken for Disposition or Inclination of the mind; as when for . . . *a disposition to uncleannesse, [we say] an unclean spirit; for perversenesse, a froward spirit; for sullennesse, a dumb spirit, and for inclination to godlinesse, and Gods service, the Spirit of God: sometimes for any eminent ability, or extraordinary passion, or disease of the mind, as when great wisdome is called the spirit of wisdome; and mad men are said to be possessed with a spirit*” (III.34.208; 612).

These three modes exhaust the sense in which ‘spirit’ functions meaningfully: “Other signification of *Spirit* I find no where any; and where none of these can satisfie the sense of that word in Scripture, the place falleth not under humane Understanding; and our Faith therein consisteth not in our Opinion, but in our Submission; as in all places where God is said to be a *Spirit*; or where by the *Spirit of God* is meant God himselfe” (III.34.208; 614). Because scripture is not a scientific discourse, but one aimed at showing humans how to be saved, it can—and often does—use terms in imprecise, non-philosophical ways. But this fact does not undermine Hobbes’s attack on scholastic claims about non-bodily, spiritual substances. For what his scholastic opponents assert is not the innocent claim that scripture speaks either loosely or metaphorically about ‘spirits,’ but rather that

scriptural language about spirit provides reasons for adopting a substance dualism of matter and spirit, and a corresponding anthropological dualism of body and soul.

Having settled this point about the word 'spirit,' Hobbes's hermeneutical arsenal is complete. The implicit view that funds Hobbes's rational reinterpretation of 'spirit' in the scripture can be expressed along the following lines:

- 1) Philosophical-scientific discourse is grounded upon carefully crafted and precise definitions that should ultimately accord with the rules of "first philosophy."
- 2) Scripture need not be so precise, because its aim is not to articulate a scientific account of reality, but to show Christians how to be saved.
- 3) Because God is author of both scripture and reason, it is axiomatic that the findings of scripture will not contradict those of reason.
- 4) Thus, where scripture speaks about the structure of reality, it does so either in accordance with science, or it does so metaphorically.
- 5) Thus, where scripture might seem to suggest a dualism of body/soul or matter/spirit, one of two options are available to the faithful reader:
 - a) Either this is a misapprehension caused by extra-biblical assumptions (like Greek metaphysics) that have warped one's reading of the text; or
 - b) Scripture is not in fact, speaking of the structure of reality, but speaking imprecisely to "ordinary men."

With this set of related hermeneutical rules, Hobbes marches through well over one hundred scriptural passages that speak of 'spirit,' 'angel' or 'inspiration,' to show how properly to interpret them. Because of the proper relationship between reason and revelation, the salvific (rather than scientific) function of scripture, and the twofold sense of 'spirit,' it becomes obvious, Hobbes thinks, how rightly to interpret these passages.

For instance, when scripture tells us that “God made man of the dust of the Earth, and breathed into his nostrils (*spiraculum vitae*) the breath of life, and man was made a living soul,” this is simply a figurative way of speaking of life. Thus, it becomes obvious that we should read other scriptural phrases—such as “the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and his Anger . . . was kindled greatly,” or “Every Spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God”—not as suggesting that some incorporeal “Ghost” took possession of Saul, or that Ghosts are flitting around confessing Christ. Rather, “it is not probable” that Saul was filled by a “Ghost, but an extraordinary *Zeal* to punish the cruelty of the Ammonites.” Likewise, the “Spirit that confesseth” refers to “the Spirit of unfained Christianity, or submission to that main Article of Christian faith, that Jesus is the Christ, which cannot be interpreted of a Ghost” (III.34.209-210; 616-18). In these cases, “Spirit” refers metaphorically to some human quality.

In other cases—such as the apparition of Jesus on the Sea of Galilee, or of Peter at the gate of Mary’s house—the term “Spirit” must not refer to a “Ghost,” for it would be impious to suggest that the disciples held the superstitious belief in disembodied spirits, but rather to “a thin Substance Invisible,” which “God can form by the same power, by which he formed all things, and make use of . . . to declare his will, and execute the same when he pleaseth, in extraordinary and supernaturally manner.” But even these thin, airy substances must be bodies, and are thus

endued with dimension, and take up roome, and can be moved from place to place, which is peculiar to Bodies; and therefore are not Ghosts *incorporeall*, that is to say, Ghosts that are in *no place*; that is to say that are *no where*; that is to say, that seeming to be *somewhat*, are *nothing*. (III.24.211; 620)

Indeed, the scriptures would likely never have been misread along these lines had the church not been subjected the pernicious influence of Greek metaphysics. For, as he adds in the Latin edition of 1666, “there is absolutely no mention of incorporeal substances in the Jewish Scriptures; rather, that doctrine originated entirely with the Greek philosophers.”³⁰

As this chapter has shown, Hobbes deploys the philosophically derived reductively materialist ontology he articulated in Part I as a principle for interpreting scripture. By offering his readers a complex hermeneutical framework, Hobbes exhibits a *rational* interpretation of precisely those scriptural passages that—given traditional interpretations of them in Western Christianity—would seem not only to resist his project of rational interpretation, but to provide reasons for rejecting his project *tout court*. Thus, in demonstrating how to interpret references to ‘spirit’ in scripture, Hobbes shows by his own example how the findings of reason (including, most notably, Hobbes’s reductively materialist ontology) may be related properly to the authority of scripture. In so doing, Hobbes has desufflated Christian discourse in a few key ways: i) by articulating a scientifically sound, rational ontology and corresponding anthropology that precludes any appeal to matter/spirit or body/soul dualism; and ii) by showing that his scientific account is not inconsistent with scripture, and thus that the dualisms he rejects on scientific grounds cannot be defended scripturally.³¹

³⁰ “[N]am de Substantiis Incorporeis in Scripturis Iudaeorum mentio omnino nulla est; sed total illa Doctrina à Philosophis Graecis originem ducit” (III.24.186; 621).

³¹ In addition to purging scriptural interpretation of any hint of substance dualism by reinterpreting ‘spirit’ language, which was the emphasis of the first half of this chapter, Hobbes also articulates a notion of the prophetic kingdom of God as a historical kingdom that once existed, will exist again in the future, but which does not exist during this epoch of world history. Thus the kingdom is temporally rather than metaphysically distinct from the rule of various local sovereigns.

But the idiosyncrasy of Hobbes's solution may seem so farfetched as to undermine the claim central to my argument, namely that Hobbes seeks in his project of redescribing Christian commitments not to transform Christendom—which would mean fashioning something entirely new, as Mark Lilla, Quentin Skinner, and David Johnston each suggest in various ways—but to *transfigure* it, to evince its true meaning, which has been obscured by the patina of false tradition and superstition. Thus, I suggest, Hobbes's reform project in general, and more specifically, his deployment of scripture in support of that project, does not seek—as those scholars³² who attend to Hobbes's rhetorical aims in the second half of *Leviathan* have suggested—either to undermine his readers' belief in Christianity nor to prepare the way for Christianity's demise and its replacement by a new, enlightened form of post-Christian rationalism. Rather, Hobbes's aim is to reform Christendom. Thus, in an important sense—though one that requires careful qualification—Hobbes's reform project shares certain affinities with, and thus stands in a certain continuity with the aims and polemic of the Protestant Reformation. In the final section of this chapter, I offer an interpretation of Hobbes's reform project that points to some basic formal similarities to the mainstream tradition of the Protestant Reformation. The questions the Reformers raise about ecclesial I suggest, point to tensions within Christian ecclesiology that Hobbes seizes upon to show that his own synthesis of scientific reform and an Erastian arrangement of Christian society is the proper solution to the problems raised by the Reformers.

³² I have chiefly in mind Quentin Skinner, David Johnston, and Eric Brandon.

4.5 Hobbes and the Rhetoric of 'Sola Scriptura'

By appealing to formal principles of biblical interpretation central to the long Christian tradition, most centrally the principle that scripture's primary aim is to show its readers the way to salvation, Hobbes uses scripture not only to defend his account of the incipient modern nation-state, but also as an offensive weapon against those who would appeal to scripture to threaten state sovereignty. One rhetorical similarity is the biblicist rhetoric of *sola scriptura*, a device central to the Reformers' polemic, and carried on by seventeenth-century Christians, especially Puritans and Socinians, but also—and more idiosyncratically—by Hobbes. To show the continuity of some of Hobbes's aims with Protestant Reform, I'll briefly sketch the shape of that reform, with attention to how the concept of *sola scriptura* was sometimes deployed within the rhetoric of the Protestant Reformation and its aftermath.

John Calvin begins his *Institutes* with a treatise on knowledge, and specifically on the way scripture addresses the epistemological consequences of the human fall. Although the light of reason, "borne in upon the eyes of all men...is more than enough," Calvin explains, to show us that there is a creator who is supremely good, supremely powerful, and whom we are to worship and obey," nonetheless, given the damage that our perceptual apparatus suffered at the Fall, "it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe," who "added the light of his Word by which to become know unto salvation; and he regarded as worthy of this privilege those whom he pleased to gather more closely and intimately to himself." Thus, "Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can

scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.”³³ Without that Word, we are doomed to “stagger about in vanity and error.”³⁴

Yet, such vanity and error was widespread in the medieval Catholic Church. Its cause was its abandonment of the scriptures. In an early defense of the Genevan Reformation, Calvin asks his readers: “Do you remember what kind of time it was when our [reformers] appeared, and what kind of doctrine candidates for the ministry learned in the schools? You yourself know that it was mere sophistry, and sophistry so twisted, involved, tortuous, and puzzling, that scholastic theology might well be described as a species of secret magic. The denser the darkness in which any one shrouded a subject, the more he puzzled himself and others with preposterous riddles, the greater his fame for acumen and learning.”³⁵

If the problem is that the purported shepherds of unlearned Christians, and the purported teachers of sacred doctrine had abandoned their divinely ordained tasks, and had resorted to superstition and sophistry to bamboozle their flocks, then the solution was to return to scripture as both the primary source and the ultimate norm of Christian doctrine. This is the meaning of *sola scriptura* for Calvin, and more generally for the mainstream of the Protestant reformation. Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that, as David Steinmetz has helpfully pointed out: “*Sola scriptura* generally meant *prima scriptura*, Scripture as the final source and norm by which all

³³ Calvin, *Institutes* I.VI.1.

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* I.VI.4.

³⁵ Calvin, “Reply to Sadoletto,” in *A Reformation Debate*, ed. with an introduction, by John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000) 39.

theological sources and arguments were to be judged, not Scripture as the sole source of theological wisdom."³⁶ Thus, in contrast to some of the more extreme versions of *sola scriptura* characteristic of the Swiss Anabaptists, or even some English Puritans, for Calvin the point is not that all human speech and action must be *derived* from scripture, but that it must be rooted in, and ultimately governed by, holy scripture.

A central concern that motivated Protestant Reform might be posed in the following terms: If the purpose of Christ's coming was to demonstrate how humans are to achieve peace and felicity, both in this life, and in the life to come, then something must have gone gravely wrong, given the widespread disagreement within Christendom about questions of basic importance. The aim of Protestant Reform, then, was to return to the pure and simple teachings of scripture as a norm for both belief and conduct. Once this was achieved, Christendom would be liberated from the darkness of Roman error, and the shackles of Roman authority. Thus, Christians would not only be instructed in the biblical order of salvation, but also how to order their communal lives according to the dictates of scripture, to establish a holy society.

This Protestant tradition, then, forms one important context for Hobbes's own project: through the proper deployment of both scripture and reason, Hobbes aimed to show the way to a true reform of both church and society. The central theological claim on which Hobbes's reform project rested was simple: God's response to human sin and death introduced at the Fall is twofold: the temporal, historical solution is political sovereignty, which establishes and guarantees some

³⁶ David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 129.

degree of peace on earth, otherwise unavailable. But this is merely a temporary, or more precisely, a *temporal* solution, for it doesn't address the deeper problem of human mortality. Thus, the second aspect of God's redemptive work, besides state sovereignty, is the economy of *eternal* salvation, achieved through Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, and appropriated by individuals by faith alone, that is, by an internal assent to the proposition that Jesus is the Christ.

The purpose of scripture, then, is to show its readers how to be saved. It does not offer a scientific description of the world, and thus is not the basis for the sciences, whether that be astronomy, geometry, or political science. Its scope is twofold: to teach its readers obedience, and belief in Christ. Thus, the positive role that scripture plays in dictating how Christians organize their politics is minimal: It simply posits obedience to the civil sovereign as a condition for eternal salvation, leaving the particular arrangement of sovereignty up to the particular societies, to be assembled via the dictates of reason. In short, as the principle functions for Hobbes, *sola scriptura*—or more precisely, *prima scriptura*—means that, within its proper scope, scripture is both the first and the final authority for knowledge of salvation, whether in history (through obedience to sovereign authority), or in the life to come (through obedience, but also through belief in Christ).

A century after the first generation of Protestant Reformers, Hobbes raises their basic question: "Whence comes it, that in Christendome there has been, almost from the time of the Apostles, such justling of one another out of their places, both by forraign, and Civill war? ...if it be not Night amongst us, or at least a Mist?" (IV.44.334; 958). This "Mist," this failure of Christians to understand clearly and simply how to conduct themselves, is not accidental or fortuitous. Rather, there is

also, Hobbes explains, a “Kingdome of Darknesse” in this world, a “Confederacy of Deceivers, that to obtain dominion over men in this present world, endeavour by dark, and erroneous Doctrines, to extinguish in them the Light, both of Nature, and of the Gospell; and so to dis-prepare them for the Kingdome of God to come.”

Hobbes typically identifies the Kingdom of Darkness with the Roman Church, though at times, he includes Presbyterians and Puritans as well. The defining mark of this Kingdom is a double error: first misinterpreting scripture by imposing bad philosophy on it, and second, in misusing it to subvert the proper civil sovereign. Thus, his chief targets are those who would appeal illegitimately to scripture and theology to challenge state sovereignty, ideal-typically by claiming that state sovereignty doesn’t extend fully over its proper territory, but that some other “spiritual” authority stands in potential conflict with it. This is—as we saw in chapter 2—to introduce a distinction between temporal and spiritual in order to “make men see double, and mistake their lawful sovereign” (III.39.248; 734). In language that evokes Calvin, Hobbes adds: “The Enemy has been here in the Night of our naturall Ignorance, sowing and cultivating the weeds of superstition and darkness” (IV.44.334; 958). This twofold darkness of ignorance and deception can be dispelled only through proper interpretation and application of holy scripture. Yet the scriptures have been deliberately corrupted to prevent our seeing their full light; hence there is an urgent need for correct interpretation.

4.6 Conclusion

Thus, as I’ve suggested, Hobbes transfigures the Protestant notion of *sola scriptura* through his own account of the aim and scope of scripture. In so doing, he

turns scripture against not only Roman Catholics, but more broadly against all those in the “Kingdome of Darknesse,” including those who would claim the Reformation legacy. In Part IV, “Of the Kingdome of Darknesse,” Hobbes extends the twofold project of Part III—articulating key features of Christian thought in wholly materialistic terms, and critiquing elements of dualism in Christian thought—by specifically criticizing the “Kingdome of Darkness” as being reliant upon false metaphysical positions that result in false teachings about church and politics.

In one sense, then, Hobbes has subverted the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, insofar as he uses that principle to place ecclesial authority entirely in the hands of the civil sovereign, an arrangement that no mainstream Reformer, nor any of their 17th-century followers would be willing to affirm. In that sense, Hobbes’s use of *sola scriptura* constitutes a crafty subversion of it. But in another sense, we might see Hobbes’s civil science as extending the goals and principles of the Protestant Reformation, and especially the ideal of the Holy Community, a society in which institutions of church, state, and university, are truly and fully reformed, in accordance with scripture—finally freed not only from the shackles of the Roman magisterium, but from other deceivers in the Kingdome of Darkness—and thus fully recovered from centuries of medieval error.

Hobbes’s use of scripture—while subversive of some particular ends to which scripture had traditionally been put—in fact represents a constructive deployment of scripture in service of what he takes to be God’s overarching purposes in giving scripture to Christians in the first place: namely to show human beings how to achieve peace and felicity, both temporal and eternal. In that sense, Hobbes’s deployment of scripture is not so much subversive, as it is a fulfillment of

both the letter and the spirit of Protestant Reform. While scholars typically divide the Reformation between a magisterial Reformation, aligned with political authorities and typically more conservative in its scope, and a radical reformation that insists on a sharper break with medieval religious and political life, I suggest that Hobbes in fact represents a radical strand within the legacy of the magisterial Reformation. Hobbes's reform is magisterial in so far as it gives a central role to the incipient nation-state as an—indeed, the primary—agent of reform, and furthermore, as it identifies the national community almost directly with the ecclesial community. Yet it is radical insofar as it insists that the successors of Luther, Calvin, and Henry VIII have not gone far enough in shaking off the shackles of Rome, nor in purging its errors from its doctrine, and that a firmer commitment to state sovereignty is, in fact, what such reform demands.

As this chapter has shown, Hobbes appeals to the spirit of *sola scriptura* to show that scriptural arguments against his account of sovereignty are problematic in two basic ways: they are not based in a faithful reading of the biblical text (and thus are not biblically sound), and they contradict the findings of reason (and thus violate the other hermeneutical principle). These two hermeneutical principles allow Hobbes to develop theological positions that are not only consistent with his political views, but in fact support them.

Having explored in this chapter some theological and ecclesial implications of Hobbes's reductive materialism, we return in chapter 5 to Hobbes's anthropological 'prologemenon' to *Leviathan*. There we will consider another philosophical implication of that same materialist ontology: the meaning of mind as matter in motion.

Chapter Five

On the Limitations of the 'Natural Mind'

Chapters 3 and 4 explored two rather different, though intimately related, features of Hobbes's reductive and exhaustive materialist ontology. Chapter 3, after articulating Hobbes's view that the universe is exhaustively composed of bodies in motion, elicited two implications of that view. First, that all dualistic metaphysics—that is, any appeal to substance dualism of spirit and matter or mind and body—whether in its classical Aristotelian form in medieval scholasticism or in its modern Cartesian form, which purports to present a substance dualism consistent with the 'new science'—is not only incoherent, but dangerous. Second, that given Hobbes's innovation in consistently reducing all entities and events in the universe to collisions of bodies in motion, it becomes incumbent upon him to articulate a new account of the human mind that—in accordance with his materialist ontology—is articulable entirely in terms of matter in motion.

The second half of chapter 3 went on to sketch Hobbes's materialist theory of mind—which was based entirely in an account of perception as the complex collision of bodies in motion. Chapter 4 then explored in more detail Hobbes's view of the theological and political dangers entailed by substance dualism, looking specifically at how these questions bear on Christendom, and in particular on scriptural interpretation. For if Hobbes's paramount concern is to articulate a new theoretical framework for a truly reformed and truly rational Christian society, then he must show how that society is to relate the teachings of scripture to the findings of reason. Chapter 4 showed some—at least formal and rhetorical—continuity

between Hobbes's reform project and that of the mainstream Protestant Reformation.

Here, we return to the account of mind where we left it at the end of chapter 3. Recall that Hobbes asserts a hypothetical entity that I, following Philip Pettit, called the 'natural mind.' This comprises precisely those features that humans share with all other animals: perception, experience, memory, deliberation, and will.

If one task of Hobbes's redescription project is to show the natural limits of the human condition, then another task is to show what kind of human freedom is available within those limits. Just as any artificer must know the limits and possibilities of the materials she has to work with, of the tools at her disposal, and of her own skills, so Hobbes—whose task it is to articulate what kind of world humans can make for themselves—turns to the limits and possibilities of the human mind. As we shall see, he claims that, though the mind is entirely reducible to the very same bodily substance as everything else in the universe, the human mind has somehow imposed order on its own processes, bringing about language, reason, and even society in the process.

5.1. Cognitive Powers: Discursion and Desire

It will help to recall a few key elements of the picture Hobbes presents—in the opening chapters of Part I of *Leviathan*—of human beings in their most basic and most natural state, one even more primitive than that of the better-known “state of nature” hypothesis he goes on to offer in chapter 13. For in the “state of nature,” the humans concerned have use of language and reason, which—at least on my interpretation of Hobbes—are artificial, not natural features. On Hobbes's

materialistic account of mind, all mental entities and functions are reducible to so many arrangements of matter in motion, each caused initially by an encounter with some external body, then changed in various ways over time in the mind.¹ These mental entities take different names depending on distinctive features of their motions, or else particular aspects that Hobbes wants to emphasize: the one concept “for divers considerations hath diverse names” (I.2.5; 28). The most basic term is “sense,” also called “phantasm,” “image,” “thought,” or “fancy.” Though all these terms refer primarily to motion that continues to reverberate in the mind following the direct perception of a body and its accidents, Hobbes sometimes distinguishes amongst them. In *Leviathan*, for instance, the terms “image” and “fancy” function as terms of art. Image, or sense, “is Motion in the organs and interiour parts of mans body, caused by the action of the things we See, Heare, &c.” Likewise, “Fancy is but the Reliques of the same Motion, remaining after Sense” (I.6.23; 78). In the earlier *Elements of Law*, he distinguished even more forcefully between direct sensations and the forms they take over time. There, *sense* is the conception produced “when the action is present,” and *imagination* when “though the sense be past, the image or conception remaineth; but more obscurely.”² To reconcile the two accounts, we might say that “sense” connotes the sense object’s presence to the perceiver, while

¹ An expression like “in the mind” is quite unlike other expressions, such as “in the study” or even “in England,” both of which refer to bounded spaces whose contents are of a different kind from the space itself. It is thus more akin to the phrase “in the world,” which captures the sense that the mind is simply a concatenation of these motions, arranged in various ways, rather than a receptacle for a discrete set of objects. Cf. Charles Taylor on Locke’s account of mind in *Sources of the Self*, 166-67.

² *Elements of Law* I.2.2-I.3.1.

“imagination” describes the sense data that remains after the object is removed, and is no longer directly present.³

The important conceptual point is that, for most sensory experiences an animal undergoes, some trace remains. In Hobbes’s materialist terms, this is to say that the motions that constitute sense do not immediately cease, but continue to resonate even after the object causing it is removed. If I walk away from the field of sunflowers, or even simply close my eyes, I “still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure” than when it was directly present to my senses” (I.2.5; 26). Now, the image remains as memory, which Hobbes defines as “decaying sense,” the diminishing persistence of motions in the sensory apparatus. Thus, the direct encounter of the sensing body with an external body results in an image, or fancy. But immediately, that image begins to decay and becomes memory. As an animal collects more sense data, it gains experience, which Hobbes defines as “Much memory, or memory of many things” (I.2.5; 28). This collection of images, memories, and thoughts, “those things which have been formerly perceived by sense, either all at once, or by parts at severall times,” compose the imagination.

These images, Hobbes claims, constitute the entirety of the ideas any animal—including human beings—may have. Affirming the empiricist principle that “there is no conception in a mans mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by part, been begotten upon the organs of Sense,” he consequently denies the possibility of innate concepts or principles (I.1.3; 22). Thus, Hobbes’s position excludes not only Cartesian mind/body dualism, but also other key elements of

³ “IMAGINATION . . . is nothing but *decaying sense*; and is found in men, and many other living creatures, aswell sleeping, as waking” (I.2.4; 26).

Descartes' philosophy, such as the innateness of human ideas of God, soul, or substance.⁴

Internal motions have other names, depending on their contexts. They may be figments, dreams, or fancies. Some of them decay over time, as when I find that, after many years, I've forgotten what my father's voice sounded like. Some combine with others to create new entities.⁵ For instance, though no one had seen a centaur or mermaid before these were invented and depicted in art, someone was able—because they had seen human beings, horses, and fish—to construe, by addition and subtraction of features, an imagined creature with the torso, arms, shoulder, and head of a human, but with either the posterior and back legs of a horse, or else the tail of a fish. Likewise, though no one has ever seen more than one sun in the sky, we can easily imagine a world illuminated by several suns at once. But in all of its forms—sense, memory, or mere imagination—all cognition is rooted in the sensory organs, not in any innate sources of knowledge. It is this claim that makes Hobbes an empiricist. “For there is no conception in a mans mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense.” All other thoughts, he argues, “are derived from that originall” (I.1.3; 22)⁶

⁴ Descartes' view of the innateness of all ideas is expressed in its strongest and clearest form in his *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* (AT VIII B, 341-69; CSM I, 294-312). See especially his remarks at AT VIII B, 358; CSM, I 304.

⁵ Hobbes's account of the development of ideas from sense has close parallels to Hume's more famous account in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, §2, “Of the Origin of Ideas.” Hume, of course, is influenced here by John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, passim.

⁶ Here, given *Leviathan's* rhetorical aims, he does not produce the entire scientific argument for this point, but instead simply asserts these claims. The fuller articulation of his view, in *De corpore* II.7.1-2, EW I 91-94, is augmented by a thought experiment to show that we cannot even conceive of the mind in the absence of a material world that provides us with sensory data.

The collection of images (whether memories or otherwise) in the mind composes what Hobbes calls the “trayne of imagination” or “trayne of thoughts,” a metaphor which captures the notion that the perceiver doesn’t perceive them all at once, but must focus on them serially in the act of attention. Hobbes describes this orderly succession of conceptions, determined by attention, as “Mentall Discourse,” which he describes as the “succession of one Thought to another” (I.4.12; 50). The term “discourse” here is puzzling. Indeed, he tells us that he includes the adjective *mental* in order clearly to distinguish this solecism—which refers to pre-linguistic cognition—from the entirely different phenomenon, “Discourse in words,” that normally takes the term. Indeed, he is clear that we are not to confuse “mental discourse” with a logically distinct process that occurs when the thinker directs her attention voluntarily by reasoning with words, as in verbal discourse. Mental discourse, by contrast, “involves a passive association of ideas, even when it is instrumentally useful and rational; the rationality appears by the grace of nature, not by the dint of voluntary effort.”⁷ Hobbes is resolute on this point: not only does he insist on calling it *mental* discourse in *Leviathan*, but in the earlier *Elements of Law*, he coined a neologism: “because the word discourse is commonly taken for the coherence and consequences of words, I will (to avoid equivocation) call it DISCURSION.”⁸

⁷ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 15. These phenomena of sense, memory, and attention are the basic components of *thought*, a term that, curiously enough, Hobbes never defines. Hobbes never defines “the thinker” nor accounts for the thinker’s existence. Rather, he is content to take thought as a brute fact, and then to explain the physical and mechanical origins of both sense and thought. But he never addresses the question of this thinking subject, the one who attends to these thoughts.

⁸ *Elements of Law* I.4.1.

Two particular features of memory are worth noting. First, all memory is incorporated—though in an unthematized and unintentional way—into the mind’s mode of perception. The mind stores images of its encounters as memory, and the accrual of memory results in a collection of thoughts. So long as a thought is directly related to some particular past sensation, Hobbes thinks of it as counting properly as memory of the object that caused it. This accrued memory then plays a causal role in the way that further sense is gathered. As an animal collects memories in its mind, it begins to compare its past encounters with bodies to its new encounters. Since sense is “the judgment we make of objects and by their phantasms,” and because this judgment requires that “former and later phantasms may be compared together, and distinguished from one another,” it follows that all new sensation “hath necessarily some memory adhaering to it.”⁹ As Pettit explains, “if humans and animals are to be sensitive to perceptual similarity and difference, then again there must be some interaction between memory and sensation.”¹⁰

Second, Hobbes explains the decay of sense not, as one might expect from his mechanistic account, as the attrition or fizzling out of the motions, but instead as a distraction of the attention over time. As a human being is exposed to many other sensory data, she becomes distracted by them, and thus kept from attending to earlier data, which become correspondingly less intense.

The decay of Sense in men waking, is not the decay of the motion made in sense; but an obscuring of it . . . And any object being removed from our eyes, though the impression it made in us remain; yet other objects more present succeeding, and working on us, the Imagination of the past is obscured, and made weak; as the voyce of a

⁹ *De corpore* IV.25.5, EW I, 393. For a helpful discussion of Hobbes’s account of phantasm, see Juhana Lemetti, *Historical Dictionary of Hobbes’s Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 250-51.

¹⁰ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 14-15

man is in the noyse of the day. From whence it followeth, that the longer the time is, after the sight, or Sense of any object, the weaker is the Imagination . . . So that distance of time, and of place, hath one and the same effect in us. For as at a great distance of place, that which wee look at, appears dimme, and without distinction of the smaller parts; and as Voyces grow weak, and inarticulate: so also after a great distance of time, our imagination of the Past is weak; and wee lose . . . many particular Circumstances. (I.2.5; 28)

And so, the longer one lives, not only does one have a richer wealth of images stored up that one must keep track of, but one's oldest memories become all the more obscured by the intervening images. This phenomenon highlights the crucial role of attention in Hobbes's account of cognition, even though Hobbes says little explicitly about it. Indeed, the mind's capacity for attention is precisely what keeps this amalgam of sensory data from becoming an indiscriminate jumble: "an earnest studying of one object," he explains, "takes away the sense of all other objects for the present."¹¹

Yet even attention, so long as it functions within the natural (pre-linguistic) mind, is better described as something that the mind suffers passively than as an active, intentional decision. It is "the vehement motion made by some object in the organs of sense" that determines that the mind should attend to it.¹² Another way to describe this foisting of focus upon the natural mind is in terms of desire, which for the natural, pre-linguistic, and thus pre-rational mind, is better described as something passively suffered than as anything active. As Pettit paraphrases Hobbes: "Conceptions sometimes bubble around in the mind in an unruly succession, and some of the conceptions that do this may not be subject to current sensory prompts, as in dreaming or mere imagining. But the ordinary pattern of mental life involves

¹¹ *De corpore* IV.25.6, EW I 395.

¹² *De corpore* IV.25.6, EW I 395.

the recruitment and marshaling of conceptions in the service of one or another goal.”¹³ The chief cause of the pre-linguistic mind’s attention is some desire or goal. The point, then, is that attention provides some degree of focus to cognition, even when, as in the natural mind, that focus is passively suffered, and even though that focus is episodic and ephemeral, as is proper to the natural mind.

Mental discourse (that is, the pre-linguistic, but nonetheless attentive, cognition that he sometimes calls “discursion”) comes in two basic kinds: unregulated and regulated. The unregulated variety is “unguided, without design, and inconstant,” because “there is not Passionate Thought, to govern and direct those that follow, to it self, as the end and scope of some desire, or other passion.” Absent any cause strong enough to determine the direction or shape of the train of our thought, the attention’s movement from one item to the next is not governed by any apparent logic. Given how powerful and definitive desires are in Hobbes’s anthropology, it is unlikely—though not impossible—that a human’s mental discourse should lack such guidance.¹⁴

Hobbes offers a carefully chosen example to illustrate the fuzzy line between unguided and guided trains of the imagination:

And yet in this wild ranging of the mind, a man may oft-times perceive the way of it, and the dependence of one thought upon another. For in a discourse of our present civil war, what could seem more impertinent, than to ask (as one did) what was the value of a Roman penny? Yet the coherence to me was manifest enough. For the

¹³ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 15.

¹⁴ Indeed, some forms of prayer or meditation aim at just this. Hesychasm is the most immediate example in the Christian tradition. Its Western analogue is probably “centering prayer.” Certain forms of *śamatha* in various Buddhist traditions also aim at something like this. See Christopher D. L. Johnson, *The Globalization of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Contesting Contemplation* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), 52-55. Phra Thepyanmongkol, *Samatha Vipassana Meditation in Accordance with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to Reach Lord Buddha’s Dhammakayas and Nirvana* (Nakorn Pathom, Thailand: Wat Luang Phor Sodh, 2011), 21-24.

thought of the war, introduced the thought of the delivering up the king to his enemies; the thought of that, brought in the thought of the delivering up of Christ; and that again the thought of the 30 pence, which was the price of that treason: and thence easily followed that malicious question; and all this in a moment of time; for thought is quick. (I.3.9; 40)¹⁵

At the time Hobbes penned *Leviathan* from his exile in Paris, Parliament had outlawed any public discussion of Charles I's execution.¹⁶ In a crafty rhetorical device characteristic of *Leviathan*, Hobbes deftly toes the line of this decree by not speaking of the execution itself, but nonetheless drawing clear parallels between Charles I and Jesus Christ, and between Judas Iscariot and those Hobbes blames for handing the king over to his enemies.¹⁷

But when, as is ordinary, some particular desire emerges, that desire is said to regulate the train of thought. "From Desire, ariseth the Thought of some means we have seen produce the like of that we ayme at; and from the thought of that, the thought of means to that mean, and so continually, till we come to some beginning within our own power." Thus, while the apparently aimless train of thought that leads a thinker from the English Civil War to Roman coinage is guided by no particular desire, if I am hungry, then my desire for food will guide my train of thoughts toward means by which I might procure something to eat.

Indeed, on Hobbes's account, it is desire more than anything else that determines the shape of cognition. In a striking metaphor, Hobbes describes the relationship of thoughts to desires: "For the Thoughts, are to the Desires, as Scouts, and Spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things Desired: All Stedinesse of

¹⁵ In a judgment that must surely be revised, William James described this passage as having "been quoted so often as to be classical" William James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. I, pp. 573-74.

¹⁶ For the claim about Parliament, see A. P. Martinich, *Hobbes: A Biography*, 109.

¹⁷ Malcolm notes (I.3.9; 40c) that Hobbes likely refers here to the Scots Presbyterians.

the minds motion, and all quicknesse of the same, proceeding from thence. For as to have no Desire, is to be Dead: so to have weak Passions, is Dulnesse.” Thus, in his account of thought—both in its pre-rational and, as we shall see, in its rational forms—Hobbes anticipates Hume’s famous claim that “reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions.”¹⁸

5.2. Cognitive Powers: Pre-Linguistic Prudence

Given this view of the relation between cognition and desire, what makes a train of imagination more or less effective is the thinker’s ability accurately to anticipate the connections between causes and effects in the world, that is, to remember “what antecedents have been followed with what consequents.”¹⁹ Such effectiveness can be expressed in terms of prudence, which is, quite simply, the formation of expectation based on memory of past experience.

Another way to express this is to say that prudence is the art of interpreting signs. “A Signe, is the Event Antecedent, of the Consequent; and contrarily, the Consequent of the Antecedent, when the like Consequences have been observed, before” (I.3.10; 44). Hobbes remarks that the longer an animal is exposed to its environment, the more experience it gathers, and thus, having more data about the world from which to draw, the more effective its train of thought becomes: “And the oftner they have been observed, the lesse uncertain is the Signe. And therefore he that has most experience in any kind of business, has most Signes, whereby to guesse at the future time; and consequently is the most prudent” (I.3.10; 44). Such experience inevitably gives rise to expectation: “after a man hath been accustomed to

¹⁸ David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, II.3.3 415.

¹⁹ *Elements of Law* I.4.6.

see like antecedents followed by like consequents, whensoever he seeth the like come to pass to any thing he had seen before, he looks there should follow it the same that followed then.”²⁰

This prudential capacity to analyze one’s experience in search of connections develops by the “grace of nature,”²¹ for without any intentional effort on an agent’s part, she will form more or less reliable expectations. “By how much one man has more experience of things past, than another; by so much also he is more Prudent, and his expectations the seldomer faile him” (I.3.10; 42). Hobbes suggests that a person of ordinary intelligence and normal powers of observation will become ever more prudent as she ages. Because prudence is a matter of extracting lessons based on past experience, the person with the widest and longest past experience, and the finest skills of focusing on what matters, will be the most prudent.²² Thus, because prudence depends only upon accrued sense perception, “it is not Prudence that distinguisheth man from beast. There be beasts, that at a year old observe more, and pursue that which is for their good, more prudently than a child can do at ten” (I.3.10-11; 44). Prudence isn’t unique to humans; the beasts can also observe, remember, and consequently modify their future behaviors.

²⁰ *Elements of Law* I.4.7.

²¹ I borrow this curious phrase from Philip Pettit’s account of Hobbes’s philosophy of mind. Pettit uses it without any apparent awareness of its theological significance, but this, too, seem relevant to Hobbes. For given his emphasis on non-supernatural means by which humans make their way in a damaged, fallen world, and his consistent lack of attention to the grace-nature distinction, it is not hard to conclude that, for Hobbes, nature is always and everywhere graced. Indeed, on his account, humans respond to this grace actively and in imitation of God’s creative power, by fashioning a world where before there was none, and then sustaining it through the power of their artifice.

²² “When the thoughts of a man, that has a designe in hand, running over a multitude of things, observes how they conduce to that designe; or what designe they may conduce unto; if his observations be such as are not easie, or usuall, this wit of his is called PRUDENCE; and dependeth on much Experience, and Memory of the like things, and their consequences heretofore” (I.8.34; 108).

As we've seen, cognition—in its most primitive form, is the accumulation of sense data (memory), and the subsequent review of it (mental discourse), as the attentive subject notices patterns, imposes order on the data, and infers connections amongst events, especially concerning cause and effect. All of this she does in order to satisfy her desires, or passions. Yet, neither cognition nor prudence distinguishes humans from other animal species. Nor, Hobbes will insist, is it the will. Willing, too, is proper to the natural mind, and thus shared by humans and beasts. To see how Hobbes makes a case for this claim, we must turn to his account of the mechanics of desire.

5.3. Motive Powers: Vital and Animal Motions.²³

As we've seen, the human mind and all its functions can be reduced, on Hobbes's account, to different kinds of bodily motion, all of which originate in reactions to other bodies. But so far, we've looked only at the mind's cognitive powers. Before describing Hobbes's account of the motive powers of the human mind, it may be helpful first to list briefly and schematically the typical course of events caused by the collision of a human body with some external object:

- 1) Motion from the external object strikes some sensory organ, is transmitted through the nerves, eventually striking the brain (the seat of cognition) and heart (the seat of desire).
- 2) The brain reacts to this motion by registering sensory data. These data immediately begin to decay, and become memory; these are added to the train of imagination, or mental discourse.

²³ Hobbes's own exposition in *Leviathan* moves from perception and imagination (chapters 1-3) to language and reason (chapters 4-5) before treating desire and will (chapter 6). However, here I will treat the passions—some of which are natural—and the faculty of will—which is entirely natural—before treating language and reason, which are entirely works of human artifice.

3) The heart reacts in turn by either attraction to, or repulsion from the object (desire or aversion).

4) Sometimes, certain brute reflexes are triggered. These are determined by the agent's unconscious "vital motion."

Thus, the chief effects of an encounter of a sentient body with an external object are three kinds of motion: i) perception, which results in imagination and memory; ii) some involuntary, brute reflexes; and iii) endeavour of the heart, which results in appetite and aversion. The previous section explored i) in detail. This section will briefly describe ii) in the course of exploring iii) in greater detail.

In addition to sensory perception, Hobbes describes two kinds of mental powers that we might call *motive* rather than *cognitive*. The preceding account of the mind's cognitive powers already hinted at the mind's motive powers, specifically its desires. Indeed, the mind's cognitive and motive powers cannot easily be treated in abstraction from one another, for, if Hobbes is right, they are, both temporally and logically coincident to each other. Hence, like perception, these motive powers are proper to all animals, both human and non-human. One is called "Vital Motion," and is proper to all living things (plants and animals, though not pebbles or puddles). For humans, vital motion includes such involuntary and unconscious actions as "the course of the Bloud, the Pulse, the Breathing, the Concoction, Nutrition, Excretion, &c; to which Motions there needs no help of Imagination" (I.6.23; 78). Thus, even someone deprived of all sensory input would still be fully capable of vital motion.

While all living bodies possess vital motion, only some possess the second, which is "Animall Motion, otherwise called Voluntary Motion" (I.6.23; 78). As its first name suggests, this mode of response to the world is proper to all animals, both

humans and beasts; as its second name suggests, it is intimately associated with the will. Thus, volitional agents—most importantly, humans—share in common with non-volitional living things—such as a sunflower—a set of involuntary responses to other bodies. While a sunflower’s life would involve only vital motion, a human being’s involves both vital and animal motion. When the sun shines, the sunflower’s leaves respond by engaging in photosynthesis, and the human body responds by producing vitamin D. But the class of voluntary responses that constitutes animal motion is rooted in the fact that some creatures are capable of imagining and then enacting potential responses to their environments.

As the attentive reader will notice, this account leaves room for a middle term between vital and animal motions, one that fits neatly into neither category. We might call this involuntary reflex. Suppose I am sleeping, and a mischievous friend places a string of twelve Black Cats beneath my bed, lighting the fuse before quickly tiptoeing from my room. When these firecrackers ignite, the motions they send will undoubtedly register as sense, and eventually as memory. But my body’s more obvious reaction will be the involuntary reflex of waking from my sleep and jumping from my bed in terror, a function of what we today call the autonomic nervous system, but which eludes precise placement into either of Hobbes’s categories. It’s not properly vital motion, since it relies upon the senses; yet it’s not animal motion either, since it is entirely involuntary. However, this insufficiency of Hobbes’s taxonomy to account entirely for involuntary reflex is no great blow to Hobbes’s psychology, whose principal focus is the animal motions of desire and the will.

Hobbes's account of the will is idiosyncratic and controversial, both in his time and now, but it is carefully grounded in his more basic claims about bodies and their causes, and in particular his claims about the workings of the human mind. This warrants close attention to his account of the physiological basis of human volition, and its relation to the mind's cognitive powers, treated in the previous section.

5.4. On the Mechanics of Desire.

The most important feature of voluntary motion is desire, also called passion or appetite.²⁴ Any voluntary motion is, at its simplest, a response to some desire. The desires are, like thoughts, internal motions caused by external bodies. They differ from thoughts in that they are able to sway the perceiver's attention and make demands on her action. Deliberation is the process by which a voluntary agent sorts through these demands and chooses how to respond, which she does so in the act of will. The details of this story are more complex than this simple outline suggests, but these terms—passion, deliberation, and will—compose the basic lexicon of Hobbes's grammar of desire.

Hobbes's account of desire is strange in its particulars. His story begins with the generation of various passions, which are simply reactions of the circulatory system to the motions provoked by sensory perception. As the scheme above indicates, the internal motions initiated by perception travel through the relevant sense organs and the nerves before reaching the brain. From there, after registering

²⁴ This equivocation of desire, passion, and appetite represents a departure from traditional moral philosophy as represented, for instance, by Thomas Aquinas. See Nicholas E. Lombardo, O.P. *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 75-77.

as sense, they continue to the heart, the organ that Hobbes calls “the original of life.” Upon arrival, they affect the blood, whose vital motion, at any particular moment of its flow, has a definitive tendency in some direction. For instance, as I write this essay, the definitive tendency of my vital motion is toward the task of writing. But as I become hungry, and my sense organs encounter the smell of freshly baked bread traveling through the plenum, these foreign motions alter my blood’s flow (and thus its vital motion), either helping or hindering it. In my case, because I need the bread to go on, the motion caused by my smelling the bread augments my vital motion. As Hobbes describes it, when such motion reaches the heart, “it must necessarily make some alteration or diversion of vital motion, namely, by quickening or slackening, helping or hindering the same.” And just as the brain registers the particular qualia of the motions, storing them as sensation, so the heart determines whether they are pleasant or painful: “When it helpeth, it is pleasure; and when it hindereth, it is pain, trouble, grief, &c.”²⁵ Should I be unable to procure any of the bread whose smell has helped my vital motion, it will begin to become instead a hindrance, and the pleasure of the smell will be overcome by the pain of tantalized hunger.

This basic tendency of vital motion may be further described as the innate human impulse to seek pleasure and to avoid pain, above all the pain of death. This *élan vital* is neither learned through experience nor discerned by reason.²⁶ In Hobbes’s mechanistic terms, “each man is drawn to desire that which is Good for him, and to Avoid what is bad for him, and most of all the greatest of natural evils, which is death; this happens by a real necessity of nature as powerful as that by

²⁵ *De corpore* IV.25.12, EW I 406.

²⁶ It would, of course, be anachronistic to ascribe Bergson’s term *élan vital* to Hobbes. Nonetheless, this—as well as its precursor in Schopenhauer’s “will to live”—nicely captures Hobbes’s view of the basic human impulse.

which a stone falls downward.”²⁷ This impulsion is pre-cognitive—indeed, it provides the very basis of cognition—and determines the overall activity of the human body, in both its voluntary and involuntary movements: it determines the unconscious reaction of the sleeping body to exploding fireworks, and it provides the conditions that keep the body alive, making sensation possible in the first place. When this flow of vital motion is disturbed, it reacts in a complex array of internal, unseen motions called “endeavours.” As we have already seen, endeavours form the basis of sense perception. Here, Hobbes connects these small motions to the logic of desire. Just as any sensation initially consists of some endeavour in the form of “counter-pressure” to an external body, so the response of the heart and blood are those endeavours “commonly called the passions” (I.6.23; 78). In short, the result of perception upon a creature’s vital motion is a passion, most immediately experienced as either pain or pleasure.

Such pleasure and pain form the basis of “animal motion,” which is distinct and different in kind from the vital motions on which they depend. Vital motion exists prior to and independently of any sensory perception. Its vibrations “to and fro in sympathy with the phantasms” cause pain or pleasure.²⁸ Such motion does not yet constitute animal motion proper, which involves one further element, namely the animal’s volition, that is, its capacity to respond actively and intentionally to its environment. Typically, a creature will try to sustain and repeat the encounters that

²⁷ *De Cive*, I.7; 27.

²⁸ *De Motu*, XXX.3 As David Johnston notes, “These physiological views provide an interesting justification for Hobbes’s view that men’s appetites are insatiable, but they are almost certainly not the original source of that view. Similar notions had been expressed by earlier moralists, including Bacon,” Johnston, *Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 31-32. For a contrary assessment, see Jurgen Overhoff, *Hobbes’s Theory of the Will: Ideological Reasons and Historical Circumstances* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 27: “we must ascribe the merits of the originality of the application of Harvey’s [theory of the circulation of blood] to the processes of the mind to Hobbes alone.”

cause pleasure, and to reduce and avoid those that cause pain. This tendency is coeval with the animal's very capability for will. Hobbes describes the beginning of this second kind of motion in the womb: "And in animal motion this is the very first endeavour, and found even in the embryo; which while it is in the womb, moveth its limbs with voluntary motion, for the avoiding of whatsoever troubleth it, or for the pursuing of what pleaseth it."²⁹

Hobbes provides a robust account of the human desires that these endeavours form. The most basic taxonomic distinction he draws here is between two kinds. When some endeavour "is toward something which causes it," it is "called APPETITE, or DESIRE." On the contrary, when an endeavour is "fromward something, it is generally called AVERSION" (1.6.23; 78).³⁰ The less scientific terms "love" and "hate" are interchangeable with "appetite" and "aversion," respectively. If my impulse is toward an object, I can be said to love it; if my impulse is away from it, I likewise hate it.³¹ Such endeavours of pursuit and avoidance, love and hate, are the fundamental building blocks of human desire.

The entire complex of human desire, Hobbes insists, is ultimately founded upon these basic endeavours. While avoidance of pain and seeking of pleasure are the most basic forms desire takes, Hobbes offers a detailed redescription of the vocabulary of human desire all in terms of subtle differences of endeavour, thus

²⁹ *De corpore* IV.25.12, EW I 407.

³⁰ Cf. *De corpore*: "endeavour, when it tends towards such things as are known by experience to be pleasant, is called *appetite*, that is, an approaching; and when it shuns what is troublesome, *aversion*, or flying from it" (IV.25.12, EW I 407).

³¹ Hobbes also refers to a third kind of endeavour, "contempt," which he defines as "being nothing else but an immobility, or contumacy [obstinacy] of the heart, in resisting the action of certain things" (1.6.24; 80). But contempt plays a miniscule role in Hobbes's anthropology. It is also unclear how to account for such immobility given his axiom that "Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Feare, no more than without Sense" (1.6.29-30; 96).

accounting for all kinds of desire within a consistently materialist physiological scheme.³² In short, the basis of animal motion is desire, and the most basic form of desire is the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure, both of which impulses might generally be described as the enhancement of vital motion. But this is still not yet to speak properly of volition, since none of this has yet involved voluntary responses to the passions suffered.

5.5. Deliberation and Will.

The process of deliberation, which culminates in will, is inextricably tied to the mind's cognitive powers of imagination and prudence. Imagination forms the conceptual bridge between perception and deliberation, for it not only furnishes the willing agent with candidates for possible action, but also—via prudence—facilitates the process of choice. That is to say, I conceive of a desire to eat the square of dark chocolate laid before me only because that chocolate—and its accidents—most obviously its rich, pungently bitter scent—have entered my train of imagination. And I begin to deliberate about whether to eat it now or to wait an hour only because I've accrued memories of previous encounters with similar pieces of chocolate, and my prudence informs me that eating it will—among other things—satisfy in some way the passion that its appearance has provoked in me.

Furthermore, imagination accounts for what it means for the will to be inclined toward some particular object rather than another by informing the agent in

³² Indeed, the majority of *Leviathan's* chapter 6 might be called a "paraphrase project" of concepts such as "love" and "hate," "shame" and "glorying" into properly materialist descriptions of "endeavour toward" or "endeavour fromward" various objects. For the concept of a paraphrase project, see Peter Van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

knowing how to choose. Thus, my inclination is for this dull piece of chocolate, rather than for the bag of brightly colored gummy bears sitting on my shelf, purchased for my nieces, although the gummy bears are more attractive to gaze at, and their artificial scent arguably more pleasant to the nose. My prudence, that is, the memory I've accrued of past experience, gives me cause to choose the chocolate over the gummy bears. Thus, the grammar of volition entails both some process of choice (deliberation) and some set of options from which to choose.

This intrinsic connection between imagination and the capacity for deliberation explains why, on Hobbes's account, the set of sentient bodies is coextensive with the set of volitional agents. Again, comparison with a sunflower is instructive here: While all living bodies (both sentient ones like humans, and nonsentient ones like sunflowers) possess vital motion, animal motion requires imagination and thus sense. A sunflower enhances its vital motion exclusively by means of vital motion: photosynthesis, respiration, transpiration. But creatures possessing imagination and will are able to enhance their lives more actively and intentionally.

Thus, when a volitional agent begins to deliberate, there are two broad questions she must address: *What do I want? What must I do to obtain it?* And this is where volition and cognition begin to cooperate. Such cooperation starts with the imagination, or "trayne of thoughts," from which the willing agent is able to identify the likely cause of some appetite, and then to assess the relevant factors surrounding it. Thus, not only is imagination the basis for attention, such that an animal might identify and focus upon the source of her pain or pleasure, it also enables the animal to imagine what voluntary movement of its own body would be necessary to move

closer to or further from the external body. As Hobbes puts the point, imagination is a necessary precondition for a volitional agent “to go, to speak, to move any of [her] limbes, in such manner as is first fancied in [her mind]” (I.6.23; 78). This is, he explains, “because going, speaking, and the like voluntary motions, depend alwayes upon a precedent thought of whither, which way, and what; it is evident, that the Imagination is the first internall beginning of all voluntary motion” (I.6.23; 78). Thus, the imagination’s prelude to any voluntary motion occurs in two related movements: first, we imagine what it would be like to satisfy the desire; then, we imagine what sort of intentional action would be sufficient to satisfy it.

The relationship between desiring and imagining goes both ways: Just as imagination facilitates desires, so do the desires give shape to the imagination. Recall that Hobbes distinguishes between two kinds of pre-linguistic mental discourse: in its unregulated form, the attention is guided by no apparent cause, but flits around without any discernible focus. But when some strong passion or desire emerges, it imposes order on the mind’s attention: “From Desire, ariseth the Thought of some means we have seen produce the like of that which we ayme at; and from the thought of that, the thought of means to that mean; and so continually, till we come to some beginning within our own power” (I.3.9; 40). Thus, in addition to his general claim that the flow of mental discourse is determined by the passions, two particular features of regulated imagination are especially worth noting. First, that what we search for are modes of *causation*. Second, that *prudence* is the faculty by which we identify, analyze, and search for causes.

On the reduction of all governed mental discourse to the search for causes, Hobbes writes: “the Discourse of the mind, when it is governed by designe, is

nothing but Seeking, or the . . . hunting out of the causes, of some effect, present or past; or of the effects, of some present or past cause" (I.3.9; 40). Typically, the aim of such discourse is to identify the causes of some effect we've already imagined and have come to desire. For instance, I want to eat honey, and—by means of prudence—I imagine that drawing from the jar labeled HONEY in the cupboard is an effective means of producing the end I seek, namely to eat honey. This first kind of behavior is common to both humans and beasts. A bear that wants to eat honey is also guided by her desire to imagine that climbing a tree with a bee's nest in its bough is, for her, the most effective means of producing the end she seeks.

However, a second mode of regulated mental discourse is, Hobbes insists, proper only to human animals, and not to beasts. This is the mode of curiosity: "when imagining anything whatsoever, wee seek all the possible effects, that can by it be produced; that is to say, we imagine what we can do with it, when wee have it." Curiosity about the ways that honey might produce useful, or even just interesting, effects has driven human beings to imagine other uses besides the mere sating of hunger: to heal burns, to trap flies, to ferment and drink. But such curiosity is peculiar to human beings. Hobbes remarks: "this is a curiosity hardly incident to the nature of any living creature that has no other Passion but sensuall, such as are hunger, thirst, lust, and anger." Yet, though the object of curiosity is different in kind from those of all other modes of desire, its way of governing a human's mental discourse is no different from the way that any conscious desire governs the train of thought. In both cases, desire is what gives shape to cognition, what imposes order on the imagination. An important implication of this account is that there is no such thing as disinterested thought. Even knowledge is never sought for its own sake,

nor—as for many Christian thinkers—in order to reach closer intimacy with the creator. Rather, curiosity is, ever and always, a means of increasing one’s power, the ability to manipulate one’s environment. Thus, whether the train of imagination is moving from cause to likely effects, or from effect to likely causes, desire furnishes the agent with a goal, and cognition directs the agent to the means by which to achieve that goal. As Pettit puts it, “desire provides the motor engine . . . and belief the steering device.”³³

Once an agent has a goal and a plan for how to pursue that goal, all the elements of volition are present, for volition is quite simply the capacity to choose amongst several competing options for how to move some part or parts of one’s body. A willed action is one that the agent deliberated about, and chose to engage in. This distinguishes willed action from involuntary action, which is of two sorts: i) sheer reflex, like a sneeze; and ii) movement against, or without, one’s will, such as being dragged away by one’s enemies. But before exploring the peculiarities of Hobbes’s doctrine of the will, we should look more closely at his account of deliberation, of which the will is merely the final stage.

The way that the willing agent sorts through her various options for voluntary action is called deliberation. Hobbes writes:

When in the mind of man, Appetite and Aversion, Hopes and Feares, concerning one and the same thing, arise alternately; and divers good and evil consequences of the doing, or omitting the thing propounded, come successively into our thoughts; so that sometimes we have an appetite to do it; sometimes an aversion from it; sometimes Hope to be able to do it; sometimes Despaire, or Feare to attempt it; the whole summe of Desires, Aversions, Hopes and Fears, continued till the thing be either done, or thought impossible, is that we call DELIBERATION. (I.6.28; 90)

³³ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 17.

Typically, an agent will find itself confronted with many different, and often conflicting, candidates for which desires to act on, and which beliefs to assent to. In the simplest scenario, I am confronted by an object, which either attracts me or repels me. If this attraction or repulsion is strong enough to provoke action, then I deliberate about how to get closer to or further from it, as the case may be.

Hobbes draws a parallel between the competition amongst desires in which the process of deliberation consists, and the competition amongst potential beliefs in what he (rather strangely) calls the process of “doubt.” If deliberation and will concern modes of moving one’s limbs, doubt and belief concern modes of assenting to propositions, or claims about states of affairs. In both cases, the willing agent is presented with a plethora of options, and is able to choose regarding two broad questions: i) what to believe; and ii) how to act. Just as the process by which appetites and aversions compete with one another until one desire wins out, is deliberation, so the process by which rival thoughts or opinions alternate until one becomes fixed, is “doubt.” The desire that emerges victorious in deliberation is the agent’s will; the victorious opinion after a bout of doubt is call “judgment.”³⁴ The fact that these processes have different names is rooted essentially in the fact that one issues in voluntary motion, and the other in propositional assent. But the process that leads—in one case to action, in the other to assent—is essentially the same.

Thus, until an agent makes a deliberate, intentional decision about whether or not to pursue some considered course of action, she remains in the act of deliberation. So long as she deliberates, she remains uncommitted to either course of

³⁴ “And as the last Appetite, in Deliberation, is called the *Will*; so the last Opinion in search for the truth of Past, and Future, is called the JUDGEMENT” (I.7.30; 98).

action, and thus free to pursue either. To emphasize further this point of the freedom proper to deliberation, Hobbes posits a farfetched (and inaccurate) etymology of the word as derived from *libertas*: “it is called *Deliberation*; because it is a putting an end to the *Liberty* we had of doing, or omitting, according to our own Appetite, or Aversion” (I.6.28; 92).³⁵

What culminates from a process of deliberation is an act of will. This much is clear from Hobbes’s famous, controversial, and radically reductive definition of the will: “In *Deliberation*, the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhaering to the action, or to the omission thereof” (I.6.28; 92). Hobbes thus denies that the will is a faculty, insisting instead that it is merely “an Act.” Furthermore, since will is but the act of pursuing one course of behavior rather than others, “Beasts that have *Deliberation*, must also necessarily also have *Will*” (I.6.28; 92). Not only does Hobbes insist that beasts have volition just as much as human beings, he also rejects the entire Augustinian tradition of speaking of conflicts within the will.

Hobbes allows that we speak, commonly and imprecisely, of someone’s having “had a Will once to do a thing, that neverthelesse he forbore to do” (I.6.28; 92). We might, for instance, say that I willed to attend a morning prayer service, but at the last minute, in a moment of *akrasia*, my will faltered, and instead I remained huddled under the warm blankets another hour. But, Hobbes insists, what we improperly refer to as a “will” in that situation is “properly but an Inclination, which makes no Action Voluntary; because the action depends not of it, but of the last Inclination, or Appetite” (I.6.28; 92).

³⁵ In reality, the word is derived—via Old French—from *deliberare*, which Hobbes, as a first-rate classicist, must have known. But even within the Latin, the word is derived from *librare*, which means ‘to balance, or weigh,’ rather than from *liberare*, ‘to make free.’ See OED, ‘deliber,’ v.

So much, then, for the mechanics of the will itself, which—on Hobbes’s account—is exceedingly simple. Voluntary motion, in short, is an animal’s multi-stage response to the effects of perception on its vital motion. From the womb, a human being is driven by a basic desire to preserve and enhance her life. Her involuntary response to disturbances of the vital motion by external bodies is to suffer some passion; her voluntary response is then to choose whether and how to act on that passion, by moving either closer to or further from the body causing that disturbance. But the picture Hobbes draws of the passions themselves is far more complex than that of the act of will. To this we turn, before concluding the chapter by examining the limits of the natural mind.

5.6. The Complex of Human Desire

The picture Hobbes has sketched of how internal motions affect the heart, thus evoking animal motion, is—given its hypothetical character—necessarily abstract. Yet one unintended effect of this abstraction is that it “may suggest that the normal state of the natural creature is one of rest, and that animal motion is only an occasional disturbance.”³⁶ But this could hardly be further from Hobbes’s actual view. Although the reverberations of sense besetting the vital motion may indeed be described as *disturbances*, what they disturb is always only a provisional and punctual kind of stasis. The natural state of the human creature—or any animal, for that matter—is not rest, but constant motion. Each time a creature exercises her motive powers, she reaches a new provisional stasis, which becomes the basis for the next disturbance, but each stage lasts only a moment, until the next wave of sensory

³⁶ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 17.

data disturbs it, beginning the process once more. Such constant generation and alteration of the passions is the natural state of human existence: “life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire” (I.6.29; 96). And while the most basic form of appetite and aversion consists in an immediate reaction of the heart to some object, the story only gets more complicated from there.

Indeed, Hobbes’s axiom that life consists of perpetual motion has as its corollary the denial that human beings have either a final end or a highest good.³⁷ “There is no such thing in the world, nor way to it, more than to Utopia: for while we live, we have desires.”³⁸ Neither notion—a final end or a highest good—is consistent with the principle that desire is ceaseless. To posit some ultimate human end would entail that, were a human to attain to it, she would thus cease to desire. On Hobbes’s account, this would mean an end to endeavour, and thus an end to her life itself.

Human desire has no end, not only in the sense of lacking some object whose attainment would bring such desiring to rest, but also in the sense of lacking any telos that orders it. In *De Homine* 11.6, he suggests that the only universal human desire is the desire for self-preservation. Human desire has no goal but the production and attainment of more desires. The closest Hobbes comes to positing a highest good or definitive end to the human being is in his purely formal definition of happiness as the attainment of whatever occurrent desires an agent happens to have: “Continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering, is that men call felicity” (I.6.29; 96).

³⁷ “There is no such *Finis ultimus* . . . nor *Summum bonum* . . . as is spoken of in the books of the old Morall Philosophers” (I.11.47; 150).

³⁸ *Elements of Law* I.7.6

Another aspect of desire's insatiability is that each person desires not just the temporary, but also the long-term satisfaction of her desires. Hobbes explains:

Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is, that the object of man's desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instance of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions, and inclinations of all men, tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contended life; and differ only in the way. (I.11.47; 150)

Thus, not only will an agent always be striving to satisfy her current set of desires, she will also at the same time be concerned with arranging for the satisfaction of all conceivable future desires by seeking the means to satisfy any future desire. We want not only to eat, drink, and be merry today, but for all the days of our lives. Hobbes, who lived to be ninety-one at a time when the average life expectancy was one-third of that, must have had an especially keen sense of such future desires.

The only kind of *telos* Hobbes's anthropology allows to human beings is precisely the formally identical and universal—but materially undetermined—desire to enjoy the object of whatever desire one might happen to have. Yet such desire, Hobbes tells us, is almost literally limitless. It is so plastic that anything I might invent can become for me an object of real desire. The only constraints upon human desire, then, are the limits of human imagination, for we can desire only what we can first imagine. This is one reason why transformations in the human condition—whether through the invention of words, reason, society, or through Hobbes's envisioned scientific reform project—begin first with imagination.

Not only is human desire plastic, in that people can want most anything, it is also necessarily in flux, given the human constitution. "Because the construction of a man's body is in continual mutation; it is impossible that all the same things should

always cause in him the same appetites and aversions." Thus, any particular creature is likely to desire different—even opposite—things during her lifetime. Given such variability within each individual human, it is hardly imaginable that "all men consent, in the desire of almost any one and the same object" (I.6.24; 80).

Desire is at once complex and simple. It is complex because human desire is so variable. The appetites differ radically not only diachronically, through the life histories of individual persons, but also synchronically, across the human species. This variability, Hobbes adds, comes "not only from the difference of men's complexions; but also from their difference of customs, and education" (I.8.14; 48). Some desires are innate or congenital, others "proceed from Experience, and triall of their effects upon themselves, or other men." But even the innate differences vary across the species. These differences in passions result in other kinds of differences. Since humans "love and dislike, some one thing, some another," therefore, "some mens thoughts run one way, some another; and are held to, and observe differently the things that passe through their imagination." And these differences in cognition, in turn, lead to even more complex differences in the passions. Indeed, every conception that we have is somehow, given "different constitutions of body, and prejudices of opinion," colored by "a tincture of our different passions" (I.4.17; 62).

Although desire is a complex phenomenon, it is in another sense quite simple, since its mechanism is straightforward, and because its operation is the same in all (human) creatures, even when the objects of desire differ. As Hobbes claims, though desires vary across different people, their material conditions remain the same in all cases. Hobbes puts the point this way:

the similitude of *Passions* . . . are the same in all men, *desire, feare, hope,*
&c; not the similitude of the *objects* of the *Passions*, which are the

things *desired, feared, hoped, &c*; for these the constitution individuall, and particular education do so vary, and they are so easie to be kept from our knowledge, that the character of mans heart, blotted and confounded as they are . . . are legible onely to him that searcheth hearts. (Introduction; 18)

In short, the passions are the same in all men, though the objects are not, for the objects vary according to individual constitution and education—or, in materialist terms, according to the different history of collisions with other bodies.

This is why—even once evaluative words like “good” or “bad” have been invented—these words refer not to any features of the things they’re applied to, but rather to the shape of the speaker’s desires. For apart from any clearly defined and authorized standards of good and bad, these words can mean nothing beyond what a person either is attracted to (what for her is “good”) or repelled by (what for her is “bad”). Hobbes explains: “Whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth Good: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, Evill.” Thus, “these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves” (I.6.24; 81). Even once humans have invented the words “good” and “bad”—along with a whole array of evaluative terms to express different shades of goodness and badness—such language is fundamentally emotive; these words refer to a speaker’s feelings, not to any objective standard of evaluation.

Further complicating desire is the fact that not only will a creature like different things over the course of her lifetime, but her desires at any given time are also likely to conflict. Some desires conflict because it is impossible—given the sort

of goods each is—for the same agent to obtain both: I might desire the life of a holy virgin; I might also desire to have sexual relations with a different partner each month. But to cultivate the sexual prowess of Wilt Chamberlain makes it impossible to be a holy virgin. Thus, though I may desire both concurrently, I cannot obtain both. Other desires conflict not because one logically precludes the other, as losing one's virginity precludes being consecrated a holy virgin, but rather because obtaining one would require decisions that would make the other highly unlikely, if not literally impossible. For instance, I might wish to become a prodigious polyglot, and master a dozen languages, such that I can read and write not just proficiently, but magnificently in each of them. But I might also wish to break Michael Phelps's record for most Olympic medals, which would require a degree of daily discipline that would almost certainly preclude being able to master a dozen languages. This, of course, is a farfetched example, and one that pits two long-term goals against each other. But the same is true of more immediate desires. I might wish both to eat my fill of pork BBQ and ice cream this afternoon, but also to run 5k in under eighteen minutes. But if I indulge myself in feasting, my body will not be capable of the performance necessary to sustain that pace. I must choose to pursue one desire or the other, for I cannot choose both. Thus, the development of prudence, while assisting the agent in both deliberation and execution of the willed action, also complicates desire. Furthermore, unless she is exceptionally self-aware, she will often be opaque to the logic of her desires. They will simply appear to her as demands on her attention and will.

In many cases, our desires impinges directly upon others: I might desire you to serve as my slave, my entertainer, or the object of my sexual fantasies. In other

cases, my desire impinges indirectly on those of another. I might desire the same land that you desire, in which case only one of us can logically be satisfied. Or we might both desire to attain a more abstract desire, such as being owner of the largest ranch in Texas. Though in this case we might not compete for the very same tract of land, only one of us can lay claim to that particular distinction at any given time. Indeed, as Hobbes shows in his “state of nature hypothesis” in chapter 13, the competition provoked by mutually exclusive human desires is one of the chief causes of the “state of war” that obtains outside state sovereignty.

In sum, human nature is characterized by two drives: the drive for self-preservation, and the drive to attain whatever desires an individual holds to be her own personal good. While we all share the definitively animalistic desire to go on living, beyond that, anything is fair game. The result of this dynamic is Hobbes’s claim that what all people have in common is a seeking after power. “Power” refers to the ability of an agent to procure what she desires. “The power of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good” (I.10.41; 132). Indeed, all the goods a human seeks can be accurately described as species of power: “For Riches, Knowledge, and Honour are but severall sorts of Power” (I.8.35; 110).³⁹ “So that in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death. And the cause of this, is not alwayes that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more” (I.11.47; 150).

³⁹ See I.10.41-47 on different forms that power takes.

Thus, we constantly seek new means of exercising power not necessarily because we think such power will bring more enjoyment than we already have, nor because we're unable to be content with what we already have, though both of these are the case for plenty of people. Rather, Hobbes suggests, every flourishing human being is constantly seeking new ways to extend her power—at the very least—in order to protect what she currently has. Stasis is not an option. If we cease to accrue more power, we will forfeit whatever goods we currently have, because only new forms of power, or augmented forms of the powers we already exercise, will allow us to keep and protect the goods we currently hold.

Note that there is a formal parallel here between human desires and human power: Just as a human being must constantly desire new goods, or else she will forfeit her life, so also must she constantly obtain new forms of power, or else she will lose what she currently has, and will forfeit her security. As an example of this phenomenon, Hobbes points to the inability of sovereigns to rest, even once they've secured peace in their territories: "hence . . . Kings, whose power is greatest, turn their endeavours to the assuring [of their power] at home by Lawes, or abroad by Wars; and when that is done, there succeedeth a new desire; in some, of Fame from new Conquest; in others, of ease and sensuall pleasure; in others, of admiration, or being flattered for excellence in some art, or other ability of the mind" (I.11.47; 150-52).

As Jürgen Overhoff suggests, almost none of the particulars of Hobbes's account of the mind is peculiar to him, with one major exception: "no writer before

Hobbes dared to describe the processes of the mind in exclusively materialist terms."⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Overhoff points out,

his teachings on the will did not mark a total break from the theological and philosophical concepts of his contemporaries. In fact, every one of the characteristic features of Hobbes's theory of volition was inspired by—if not directly borrowed from—the works of his predecessors. A thoroughgoing determinism had been taught a century before Hobbes not only by Calvin but also by Luther. . . . The new principles of a scientific theory of matter in motion had been put forward by Galileo some decades before Hobbes. Already in the 1620s William Harvey had come as close as one could get to a materialist vision of the processes of the mind when he equated the workings of men's spirits with the physiological mechanism of the circulation of the blood.⁴¹

Rather, Hobbes's distinctive contribution is to synthesize these various features of early modern Christian thought within a radically materialist framework: "Hobbes's doctrine . . . still merits being called a unique and highly original vision of the processes of the human mind, since he combined the doctrines of his predecessors with extraordinary skill into a theory so coherent and unified that it acquired a distinct quality of its own."⁴²

The upshot of this tour of Hobbes's description of the 'natural mind' and its functions—perception, discursion, prudence, and will—is a picture complex in its detail, but simple in its mechanics. The mind is based in the internal motions of the brain, caused initially by external bodies, motions that constitute sense data, memory, and imagination. These motions are organized at any given time by the object of the agent's attention, and they succeed one another over time in either an irregular, daydreaming fashion or in a regular manner that serves the pursuit of

⁴⁰ Overhoff, *Hobbes's Theory of the Will*, 232.

⁴¹ Overhoff, *Hobbes's Theory of the Will*, 233.

⁴² Overhoff, *Hobbes's Theory of the Will*, 233.

goals. The accrual of many of these motions is the development of prudence, the formation of expectation based on induction. The final section of this chapter will explore Hobbes's conception of prudence, which, he makes clear, is a natural faculty, and is profoundly limited. It is precisely the limitations of prudence, he suggests, that provoke first the artifice of active thought, and then its culmination in reason.

5.7. The Limitations of the 'Natural Mind'

The human mind, like the mind of any animal, is replete with intentional objects, discrete entities of matter in motion, on which the mind may focus its attention.⁴³ Within the natural (pre-linguistic) mind, such focus is passively suffered—determined by some strong passion or other—and ephemeral: it focuses on an object only until some other, stronger passion demands its attention. Insofar as one of these passions is strong enough to demand the mind's sustained attention—the passion of hunger in a starving animal, for instance—the mind will summon its powers of prudence to determine how to satisfy that mind. Of course, given the pre-linguistic condition of the natural mind, its deliberation (in this case, about whether its hunger is sufficiently intense to be worth addressing) is entirely unthematized and non-rational. The animal has no words with which to say to itself: "I'm hungry.

⁴³ The term "intentional object" is a term of art within analytic philosophy of mind, referring to something to which the mind attends. Since it was recovered by Franz Brentano from a medieval concept, it has become ubiquitous in the Anglo-American philosophical lexicon: "Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call . . . reference to a content, direction towards an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired, and so on." Brentano (1995), 88. Hobbes, of course, would sharply disagree with Brentano's attempt to divorce psychology from the purely physical sciences. On intentionality, see Tim Crane, "Intentionality," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/intentionality/v-1/the-history-of-the-concept-of-intentionality>. The concept of intentionality in philosophy of mind should not be confused with the concept of *intention* in moral philosophy.

I need food. Where can I find some?" Likewise, its exercise of prudence will lack the thematization of language, and will consist simply in sub-linguistic intuitions and memories of prior events that suggest patterns of cause and effect.

Having described, in the opening chapters of *Leviathan*, the basic motions of the natural mind, motions common to all animals, human or otherwise—first sense perception, and then the cognitive and motive powers rooted in such perception—Hobbes announces: "There is no other act of mans mind . . . naturally planted in him, so, as to need no other thing, to the exercise of it, but to be born a man, and live with the use of his five Senses" (I.3.11; 44). Hobbes has painted a picture of the basic human condition, prior to the emergence of language, in which each person is bombarded by sensory data, which provoke in her desires of various intensities. But, since humans—like most other animals—are volitional agents, they don't simply react to these stimuli by mere reflex. Rather, they deliberate amongst several possible actions before choosing one, in the act of will. And they do so by means of prudence, which is the critical comparison of those memories of previous experiences that seem relevantly similar to the present situation. But prudence is simply a faculty that the volitional agent can use to decide how best to obtain the objects of her desire. It does little—if anything—to shape those desires. So, at this point in Hobbes's account of human psychology, desire is brute; it is not susceptible to further analysis, but simply a given.

Three features of the natural mind, Hobbes, thinks, make it unsuited for the sort of progress he thinks science can provide: (a) its cognition is highly particularist; (b) it is passive; and (c) it is relatively ineffective.

Since our mental discourse, when guided, is guided only by the knowledge of consequences of a particular event, and since experience can give us no certain knowledge of such consequences, it “can only take the form of prudential conjecture.”⁴⁴ Within the limitations of the natural mind, “People will see and remember, represent and desire only concrete things and situations. They will have no capacity to hold by general claims about how things are, or by general policies or principles for the direction of action. They will be prisoners of the imagined particular.”⁴⁵

Furthermore, the succession of conceptions in which mental life consists is passive and happenstance. As Pettit suggests, pre-linguistic mental discourse “is a form of vital motion, not of animal or voluntary motion.” After all, as Hobbes describes mental discourse, “one conception followeth not another, according to our election, and the need we have of them, but as it chanceth us to hear or see such things as shall bring them to our mind.”⁴⁶ Thus, even when some desire regulates our mental discourse, it does so rather ineffectively.

For these reasons, it is—from the retrospective view of rationality—highly ineffective at achieving its desires. Again, Pettit:

The process does not evolve under the prompting or guidance of the agent’s desire to have those conceptions assume a certain pattern—say, constitute correct and consistent representations—but only as a by-product of a desire to act in one or another concrete fashion. If the subject is well constructed, then the succession of conceptions will lead rationally to action; the action will satisfy the subject’s desires according to evidentially sensitive representations. But no matter how rational the process or result, this succession of conceptions will not be prompted or guided by the agent’s desires in the manner of an active,

⁴⁴ Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance*, 162.

⁴⁵ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 24.

⁴⁶ *Elements of Law* I.5.1.

intentional performance. The natural agent, animal or human, may be rational, instantiating a certain model of *homo rationalis*. Yet no one in this natural state will exemplify *homo ratiocinans*. No one will display the sort of active reflection that we naturally ascribe to Auguste Rodin's sculpture of the thinker, bent over in concentrated thought.

In saying that pre-linguistic humans will have conceptions that "lead rationally to action," Pettit deploys the term in a different, less precise way than Hobbes will use it. For Hobbes, as we shall see in the following chapter, reason refers to a particular art—it is not a faculty, but a learned skill, he insists. But nonetheless, Pettit's description helpfully captures Hobbes's fuzzy account of how active thought emerges from the passive train of inchoate thoughts and desires is fuzzy.

Indeed, Hobbes adds to his claim about the extent of our natural faculties the following remark: "those other faculties of which I shall speak by and by, and which seem proper to man onely, are acquired, and encreased by study and industry; and of most men learned by instruction and discipline; and proceed all from the invention of Words, and Speech. For besides Sense, and Thoughts, and the Trayne of Thoughts, the mind of man has no other motion; though by the help of Speech, and Method, the same facultyes may be improved to such a height, as to distinguish men from all other living creatures" (I.3.11; 44).

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has served four aims. First, building on the conclusions of chapter 3—which sketched Hobbes's distinctively modern view of the universe, one evacuated of spirit and final causes, and exhaustively accounted for in terms of matter in motion—it showed how Hobbes explained the human mind's access to this world through the mechanics of sensory perception. Given his reductive materialism

about the mind, and his denial of any ideas innate to it, Hobbes's account of human thought, so I claimed, may be described as radically empiricist. Hobbes holds that all the mind's contents—its thoughts, ideas, desires, memories, etc.—are in fact instances of matter in motion, caused initially by external bodies, then altered in certain ways as they inhabit the mind. While we may intuit things never directly presented to our senses, such intuition is always based in the images of bodies and their accidents, which are caused by interactions with the external world. Such empiricism is foundational to Hobbes's view of knowledge and of meaning, as the following chapter will show.

Second, it traced Hobbes's account of the serious limitations of the natural human mind. Given only their natural capacities, and thus prior to their invention of language, humans are ill-equipped for satisfying the desires that make incessant and ineluctable demands on them. From the worded perspective of humans as they are now, such sub-bestial existence seems utterly intolerable.⁴⁷

Third, it showed that, for Hobbes, whatever faculties are innate to human beings—and, he suggests, a faculty's innateness entails its being natural—are those we share in common with the beasts, namely sensory perception and animal motion. Hence, those faculties that ultimately distinguish us from the beasts are precisely those that we must cultivate, that is, the artificial faculties of language, reason, and ultimately, politics.

Fourth and finally, this chapter extended my claim that Hobbes's mechanistic materialism and radical empiricism are two key elements of his project of

⁴⁷ Sub-bestial is a fitting term for Hobbes's description of pre-linguistic, and thus pre-social human existence. Humans lack the *natural* capacity for communication and society that other species (such as bees or ants) have. Thus, before language enables humans to invent modes of communication and to forge societies, they are worse off than most animals.

articulating a novel and truly rational theoretical framework for the Christian way of seeing the world, one that would replace the Aristotelian philosophy that had dominated Christendom for centuries in the form of scholasticism. This regnant scholasticism, Hobbes laments, not only offers an outdated and unhelpful account of the natural world (as, for instance, in its view of the mechanics of sensory perception), but ultimately serves the “Kindgome of Darknesse,” that “conspiracy of deceivers who want to get dominion over men,” and so “try by dark and erroneous doctrines to extinguish in them the light of nature.” Thus, the anthropology he sketches in the opening chapters of *Leviathan*—of which I have described various features in the chapters of this second part—serves to ground not only his scientific claims, but also his polemical aims.

The following chapter turns to Hobbes’s account of the invention of language, and examines his view of what new capacities language offers to human beings, capacities that, in turn, make possible new modes of artifice. Hobbes’s view of language is the linchpin of his system, for it connects the given world of mechanistic materialism to the world that humans make for themselves. Unlike God, who creates *ex nihilo*, humans are constrained in their making by the confines of the given. And what constrains them are the limits posed by the world of matter in motion just described. In the following chapter, I trace Hobbes’s view of language and its fruits. I do so by treating his account of how language emerges from and imposes order upon human cognition, how it functions, and what sorts of new possibilities it offers human beings.

Chapter Six

Mind Over Matter: The Invention of 'Active Thought' and Language

Hobbes's sweeping reform program begins with the observation that many of the discourses of seventeenth-century Christendom are in reprehensible disarray. We have already seen, in various ways, how Hobbes diagnoses some of what he takes to be crucial failures of late-medieval philosophy and the habits of speech it had inculcated: a consistent appeal to unnecessarily complicated metaphysical categories to account for physical phenomena, a programmatic dualistic distinction between spiritual and material substances, and a widespread use of "insignificant speech" whose effect was the self-deception of its users and the maintenance of traditional intellectual and social structures that—Hobbes thought—must be razed if genuine and lasting social progress were to ensue. His aim is to reform such discourse: in matters susceptible to scientific study (the natural realm), to replace scholastic pseudo-science with a more rational, effective, and useful science of motion; and in supernatural matters, to replace the scholastic attempt at philosophizing about God with a more modest, judicious, and ultimately more pious theology, one rooted in state-sanctioned doctrine and holy scripture.

This chapter traces Hobbes's thoroughly materialist account of the emergence of language within a human mind composed exclusively of matter in motion. As chapter 5 showed, pre-linguistic thought, on Hobbes's view, is inarticulate, particularistic, and passive. It is, Hobbes thinks, what the human mind shares in common with the minds of all other animals. This mind comprises an involuntary succession of images or conceptions, sometimes entirely without discernible order,

other times governed by some powerful desire.¹ Whether it takes shape haphazardly, or is provoked by passion, all pre-linguistic thought is an instance of *vital motion* (like the heartbeat or digestion) rather than one of *animal*, or *voluntary motion*. Apart from the effect of words, our conceptions are produced, then give way to others, in an inexorable “trayne of imagination” just as passive and involuntary as the beating of the heart, the digestion of food, or the growth of the hair. Yet, as we shall see in what follows, Hobbes thinks that language provides a means beyond such passive, involuntary thought. It enables humans to think actively and voluntarily, equipping them to identify and analyze their desires, to conceive of goals in service of their desires, and to contrive a trajectory for achieving these goals through the voluntary motions of their bodies. Language improves the human condition not only by augmenting natural human faculties such as prudence, cognition, deliberation, etc., but also by making possible new faculties, most obviously the faculty of reason, which permits its users to arrive at certain conclusions about cause and effect.

This chapter will draw four conclusions from Hobbes’s account: i) language, for Hobbes, is the human feature that most clearly distinguishes humans from the beasts, yet it is not a natural capacity, but something humans have created themselves; it is thus the first, and most basic, in a series of human artifices that Hobbes describes as crucial to human well being; ii) because both mind and language are rooted entirely in perception, and perception is always of bodies and their motions, humans are incapable of any conception (whether mental or verbal) of something that is not material, i.e., either a body or the accidents of a body; thus, any

¹ Recall that Hobbes uses the terms *image*, *thought*, *conception*, and *idea* interchangeably, showing no obvious preference for any one of them.

concepts that cannot be reduced to a body and its accidents (magnitude and motion) are ultimately meaningless, including any predication of an incorporeal soul, a spiritual realm, or an immaterial deity; iii) language, as the original human artifice, forms the basis of all other human arts: reason, science, politics, and civil society; in particular, it makes possible the crucial endeavors of covenanting and commanding, which together make possible the Common-wealth, and ratiocination, which grounds all science; hence, iv) Hobbes takes the scientific precision which he seeks to impose upon language to be crucial for improving all other attempts at remaking the world through human artifice. His work as philosopher consists, above all, in showing how language functions and how words ought to be defined and used to make such artifice as effective as possible.

6.1. The Significance of Language²

In order to emphasize its artificial character, Hobbes begins his treatment of language in *Leviathan* chapter 4 by comparing it to the much-lauded invention of printing, an innovation that would have been recent enough for his contemporaries to marvel at it in a way that we would find difficult today.³ “The invention of

² Hobbes addresses language schematically in the following passages: *Elements of Law* I.5-6; *Leviathan* I.4-5; *De Corpore* I.2-3; and *De homine* X. My treatment in this chapter is guided by the account Hobbes offers in *Leviathan*, but refers to these other accounts as needed.

³ In the essay “In Praise of Knowledge,” Francis Bacon famously cites printing, artillery, and the needle as prime examples of the accomplishments of modern technology, and as obvious proof that modern science has vastly improved upon the ancients, and continues to do so. Francis Bacon, “Mr. Bacon in Praise of Knowledge,” in *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, 7 volumes (London: Longman et al., 1861-74), vol. 1, p. 125.

Montaigne, however, offers a more sober view: *Nous nous escriions du miracle de l'invention de nostre artillerie, de nostre impression; d'autres hommes, un autre bout du monde à la Chine, en jouyssoit mille ans auparavent.* (“We marvel at the miracle of the invention of our artillery and of our printing, yet others on the other side of the world, in China, enjoyed these a thousand years earlier.”) Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Pierre Villey and Verdun L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 908. As one historian explains, “It was common in

printing," Hobbes contends, "though ingenious, compared with the invention of letters, is no great matter." Indeed, writing is a more remarkable technology than printing not only because it makes printing possible, but also because the step from mere oral language to written language is so much greater than that from handwriting to printing. The work of Gutenberg and others was made relatively light by their almost entirely-forgotten predecessors who had already carried out the painstaking work of observing and cataloging all the phonemes of a spoken language (in this case, Latin), and representing those often subtle differences in visual form. Of course, in the case of most natural languages, including both Latin and English, their written forms evolved along with their spoken forms. But history has recorded a few cases of known agents accomplishing the task Hobbes here describes over the course of just a few years. Two particularly memorable examples will suffice: the invention of Hangul by agents of the Korean monarch Sejong the Great in the 1440s, and the invention of the Cherokee Syllabary by Sequoyah in the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ Such written language, Hobbes declares, is "a profitable invention for continuing the memory of time past, and the conjunction of mankind, dispersed into so many, and distant regions of the earth; and withal difficult, as proceeding from a watchful observation of the divers motions of the tongue, palate, lips, and other organs of speech; whereby to make as many

the sixteenth century to point to three marvelous inventions that seemed unique to modernity and thus marked a break with the past. These inventions were the printing press, gunpowder, and the nautical compass." Timothy Hampton, "The Subject of America: History and Alterity in Montaigne's 'Des Coches,'" in *The Project of Prose in Early Modern Europe and the New World*, ed. Elizabeth Fowler and Roland Greene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 80.

⁴ For a helpful historical overview of both, see Richard Kern, *Language, Literacy, and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 121-30.

differences of characters, to remember them.”⁵ Yet even the remarkable work of Sejong and Sequoyah withers in comparison to the invention of language itself, the technology undergirding both printing and letters.

Hobbes concludes his paean: “the most noble and profitable invention of all other, was that of SPEECH, consisting of *Names* or *Appellations*, and their Connexion; whereby men register their Thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them one to another for mutuall utility and conversation; without which, there had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons, Bears, and Wolves.”⁶ This passage highlights some of the key features of Hobbes’s account of speech, or language, for he uses the terms interchangeably and without discrimination. First, since language is an invention, and not a natural feature, there was likely some time at which all humans lacked language, and there may yet be cases now or in the future when some of them lack it. Second, language consists principally of names and their relations to one another. And third, language enables humans to improve upon and expand the functions of their natural minds, to communicate with one another, and to invent further conveniences, such as science and the commonwealth, thereby arranging through artifice for society, and the peace society brings, thus distinguishing themselves from lions, bears, and wolves—all of them brute and unsociable beasts.

Hobbes’s claim that language must be a human invention is not obviously true. Indeed, most of his contemporaries would have seen language as natural to

⁵ *Leviathan* I.4.12; 48. The Latin of 1666 has *quibus distinguerentur*, “to distinguish them” in place of “to remember them.”

⁶ *Leviathan* I.4.12; 48.

humans, not as something devised “from scratch.”⁷ And despite the importance of this claim for his anthropology, Hobbes never offers an explicit argument for it. But the implicit argument seems to be as follows: (1) only those able to speak have the capacity for classificatory thought; (2) without classificatory thought, the mind’s train of imagination will necessarily be particularist; (3) some ability to generalize is necessary for mind to actively guide its train of imagination, rather than simply to suffer it passively; therefore, (4) speech is necessary for active, classificatory thought; yet (5) the faculty of speech is not a function of the natural mind, for the natural mind is shared by humans and beasts alike, and beasts do not have language; thus (6), given the correlation between speech and active, classificatory thought, speech must be deemed an invention of the natural mind.⁸ This is not a strong argument by any means, and not only begs the question of whether language distinguishes humans from animals, but also of whether language is connatural to humans. Yet it must be kept in mind that Hobbes never presents this as a scientific argument, but as a historical hypothesis. Nonetheless, this hypothesis, even if not grounded in scientific certainty, thoroughly defines the picture he offers his reader of the human being’s place in the world. Thus, it will be worth attending to his account of the conditions of language’s origin before looking more schematically at his account of its logic.

⁷ See Avi Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment: The Berlin Debates of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), passim; and Cordula Neis, “Origin of Language Debate” in *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2nd edition, ed. Keith Brown (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd., 2006), vol. 9, 98-102.

⁸ Pettit offers a similar reconstruction of Hobbes’s implicit argument. Oddly, even though Pettit’s attempt is even less convincing than mine, Pettit is far more sanguine about its plausibility than I am, and doesn’t even address its circularity. I take the contrastive pairs passive/active and particularist/classificatory from him. See Pettit, *Made With Words*, 26.

6.2. The Origins of Language

Hobbes offers no historical account, speculative or otherwise, of the invention of language. He tells no just-so story about how humans came to use words, as Lucretius had seventeen hundred years before him, and as Rousseau, Mandeville, and William Warburton all would in the century following him.⁹ By contrast, Hobbes is unwilling to speculate about the emergence of human language from some pre-linguistic mist, and begins instead with language as we encounter it. In order to show how it works, he then takes it apart, thus highlighting the conditions that make such language meaningful. Like a watchmaker who dismantles a watch not of her own making to examine its construction, a philosopher can better understand the workings of language, not by literally taking it apart like a watch, but by *analytically* dividing it into its various parts, to see what makes the whole thing tick.¹⁰ In short, he deduces from the logic of the language we have certain formal claims about what is likely or unlikely to have been the case about its origins. In this sense, his account of the pre-linguistic mind is formally similar to his most famous thought experiment, in which he evokes the imaginary “naturall condition of mankind” (I.13). The ‘state of nature’ hypothesis supposes that apart from state governance, human life is intolerably miserable; it seeks to demonstrate this by abstracting human beings from all trappings of society made possible by the state.

⁹ See Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*, 22-27.

¹⁰ In his preface to the English translation of *De cive*, Hobbes himself uses the watchmaker metaphor to describe not language, but the commonwealth: “for every thing is best understood by its constitutive causes; for as in a watch, or some such small engine, the matter, figure, and motion of the wheelles, cannot be well known, except it be taken in sunder, and viewed in parts; so to make a more curious search into the rights of States, and duties of Subjects, it is necessary . . . that they be so considered, as if they were dissolved” (EW I iv). Yet the same mode of analysis—what he calls in *De corpore* the resolute or analytic method—is at play in his account of language, too. See *De corpore* I.6.1-19, where Hobbes details his two modes of philosophical demonstration, analytic-resolute and synthetic-compositive.

Similarly, this hypothesis about pre-linguistic cognition supposes that language is a necessary condition for, and a causal factor of all active and classificatory thought within the human mind, and of all public signification across human minds; it seeks to demonstrate this by imagining the human mind prior to its access to words. Indeed, as with that one, Hobbes never explicitly tells his readers that he's engaging in a hypothesis. But this hypothesis is even more ad hoc, even less schematic, and appears scattered across several passages, rather than confined to one discrete treatment.

Though he makes no positive claims about how language first came to be, there is some indication that Hobbes thinks curiosity, the only desire that he deems a property exclusive to humans, and to no other animals, is what provokes human language, thus further distinguishing their minds from those of the beasts.¹¹ While Hobbes speaks minimally of curiosity in *Leviathan*, he had addressed the topic in some detail over a decade earlier in *Elements of Law* (1640).

As in the discerning faculties, man leaveth all community with beasts at the faculty of imposing names; so also doth he surmount their nature at this passion of curiosity. For when a beast seeth anything new or strange to him, he considereth it so far only as to discern whether it be likely to serve his turn, or hurt him, and accordingly approacheth nearer it, or flieth from it.¹²

¹¹ In a fascinating paper, Kathryn Tabb argues that curiosity is, on Hobbes's account, "the fundamental cause of humanity's uniqueness, generating other importance difference-makers such as language, science and politics . . . Language is, for Hobbes, a technology adopted on account of curiosity. Further, curiosity is necessary not only for linguistic but also for scientific activity. Only after what he calls original knowledge has been gathered are names employed to generate the conditional propositions that constitute science." But curiosity has a dark side: "insofar as humans have an implacable hunger for knowledge of the future, we are unable to rest content with present gains and must always aspire to secure the best possible outcome for ourselves" (13). Kathryn Tabb, "The Fate of Nebuchadnezzar: Curiosity and Human Nature in Hobbes," *Hobbes Studies* 27 (2014), 13-34.

¹² *Elements of Law* I.9.18.

A non-human animal's concern with unfamiliar phenomena, so Hobbes here suggests, is limited to the simple and immediate consideration of how to move closer to an apparently helpful object, or to move further from one that seems harmful. By contrast, the human being,

who in most events remembreth in what manner they were caused and begun, looketh for the cause and beginning of everything that ariseth new unto him. And from this passion of admiration and curiosity, have arisen not only the invention of names, but also the supposition of such causes of all things as they thought might produce them. And from this beginning is derived all philosophy.¹³

Thus, in this early account of the characteristic modes of engaging with the world proper to humans and beasts, Hobbes suggests a causal connection between the distinctively human passion of curiosity and two other distinctively human features: language (“the invention of names”) and philosophy (“the supposition...of causes”). This causal claim about curiosity, however, is left undeveloped. Though it's more than a mere hint, Hobbes neglects to explain how curiosity is supposed to give rise to the invention of names, or to philosophy. Nor does he ever identify any particular feature of curiosity that would seem logically to bring about naming. One might demur that Hobbes here conflates cause with effect, in speculating that this characteristic tendency to remember the manner in which events begin is a causal factor in the human development of language rather than an effect of it.¹⁴ However,

¹³ *Elements of Law* I.9.18.

¹⁴ Indeed, the manifold ambiguities that plague Hobbes's speculative remarks about pre-linguistic cognition make it difficult to determine with much certainty his position on the causal effect that words had on human cognition. This problem is manifest in a recent debate between Philip Pettit and Kathryn Tabb over this matter. Their dispute hinges on two issues: whether curiosity or language is the chief causal factor in distinguishing humans from the beasts and making science possible; and how properly to characterize pre-linguistic cognition, namely to what extent causal knowledge is available to the pre-linguistic mind. Both Pettit's and Tabb's arguments have clear merits, and their respective theses, though for the most part congruent, are clearly incompatible in the end. This is to say that there is real disagreement between them, and that only one of them can be right. Nonetheless, I think that Hobbes's position provides

since the claim as Hobbes presents it here is so sketchy, it is difficult to formulate a precise objection to it. Hobbes simply says too little.

In any case, these remarks were part of Hobbes's first published work on natural philosophy, and were never intended as anything more than an initial sketch of his systematic thought, in hopes of inviting comment from his contemporaries.¹⁵ In his mature accounts of language, in both *Leviathan* (1651) and *De corpore* (1655), he will draw an even starker and more explicit contrast between the capacities of the natural (pre-linguistic) mind, and those that language makes possible, namely active, intentional, and classificatory thought. And yet, even in these later accounts, Hobbes stops short of drawing any explicit causal connection between curiosity and the invention of language.¹⁶

When Hobbes addresses the difference between pre-linguistic and linguistic thought in *Leviathan*, he does so in terms of understanding, and by means of a contrast between bestial and human capacities for understanding words:

insufficient evidence for deeming either thesis conclusive. On the first issue, I follow Tabb in affording curiosity a greater causal role than Pettit allows in Hobbes's view of the emergence of language and active reasoning. On the second, however, I find the textual evidence even less conclusive. Hence, while I find Tabb's skepticism about certain elements of Pettit's account to be salutary, I nonetheless think his claim that, for Hobbes, "active and classificatory thought" is made possible by language to be defensible in at least a weak form, namely that (whether or not Hobbes truly ascribes some degree of active thought to the natural, pre-linguistic mind) language enables humans to take more active control of their trains of thought, and to analyze and manipulate their conceptions, than would have been possible prior to language. I thus remain agnostic about the stronger form of Pettit's claim, namely that Hobbes thinks human thought prior to language is—because utterly passive and particularistic—categorically different from that available to the worded mind, but still employ his helpful category "active thought" to describe one of the features that humans gain via language.

¹⁵ On the background to *Elements of Law*, see Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 27-30.

¹⁶ *Leviathan* mentions curiosity only six times: once in claiming that humans are the only species who desire to know all the possible effects of any body they conceive (I.3.9; 40-42); again, in the claim that this "Lust of the mind" exceeds "the vehemence of any carnall pleasure" (I.6.26; 86); three times in connection with the cause of natural religion (I.8.38; 118) (I.11.51; 160) (I.12.52; 164); and once in describing the necessary conditions—along with sufficient leisure and proper method—for developing civil science (II.20.107; 322).

The imagination that is raised in man (or any other creature endued with the faculty of imagining) by words, or other voluntary signes, is that we generally call *Understanding*; and is common to Man and Beast. For a dogge by custom will understand the call, or the rating of his Master; and so will many other Beasts. That understanding which is peculiar to man, is the Understanding not onely his will; but his conceptions and thoughts, by the sequell and contexture of the names of things into Affirmations, Negations, and other forms of Speech.¹⁷

Here, Hobbes distinguishes between two kinds of understanding, one common to beasts and humans, the other “peculiar to man.” Though he does not explicitly connect this discussion to the faculty of prudence, the connection should be obvious. Recall that prudence—in its simplest, pre-linguistic form—is an automatic, unstudied, and unthematized intuition of apparent causal patterns observed in the world. A sled dog hears the commands “Gee” and “Haw,” and has learned—through careful training by its stern master—to turn left or right according to the command. Perhaps, upon hearing such audible signs, its train of imagination is led to recollect instances of compliance that led to treats—a bite of raw steak, or an approving caress from its master—and instances of noncompliance that led to punishment—a swift and severe beating, or perhaps just a harsh tug in the proper direction. Likewise, humans—prior to language—are able to respond to verbal cues prudentially, just like the dog.¹⁸ But this is not yet to use *language*, something more complex than simply intuiting the meaning of a verbal sign, that is, responding in a fitting manner to a word or set of words. Thus, the difference appears to correspond to the distinction between mere prudence and reason: the dog acts on its prudential understanding of the master’s call or scolding. The human, however, goes beyond

¹⁷ *Leviathan* I.2.8; 36. The Latin refers not to the understanding of the speaker’s will and conceptions, but that of other speakers’: *conceptum & cogitationum aliorum hominum*.

¹⁸ Cf. Wittgenstein’s remark, “Animals come when their names are called. Just like human beings.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 67.

mere prudence in her understanding of more complex meanings signaled by speech. I can understand, in a way utterly impossible for a dog, what it means when someone tells me that the reform programs of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois were not as disparate as historians typically suggest.

Elsewhere, Hobbes makes a point about human cognition via a contrast with parrots. A parrot has a very different relationship to human language from that of a dog. Unlike a dog, a parrot can mimic human words by saying “Come in,” or “Go to hell!” but—on Hobbes’s account—it has no understanding of these words because it lacks the corresponding conceptions (of inviting someone in, or of cursing someone) correlated with these phrases. On the contrary, a dog, unlike a parrot, can respond to signs in a way that indicates its understanding of those signs’ meanings, namely by interpreting them to mean that the master expects it to come, or to turn left or right. But the dog cannot *deploy* these signs. A dog, on Hobbes’s account, is able to understand the association between a sound and a set of actions typically associated with it. Yet while dogs and other animals are able to understand words that signify the will of the master, as well as their own names, they can understand neither affirmations nor negations. Human understanding, by contrast, extends beyond this bestial capacity in at least two ways: A human can interpret signs (in a way that a dog can, but a parrot cannot), but can also actively deploy signs (in a way that neither dog nor parrot can do).¹⁹ The point is that producing the words isn’t itself sufficient for properly deeming the parrot a language-user. Nonetheless, a human’s ability to produce sentences that are sensitive to context—something that neither

¹⁹ On the difference between human speech and animal communication, see *De homine* X.1. On what it means to understand an assertion, see *Leviathan* I.4.17; 62; *De motu* 30.21; *Elements of Law* I.5.14; and *De corpore* I.2.5, EW I 11.

parrot nor dog can do—marks the human understanding of words as far more complex than that of any dog.

Hobbes offers no further account in *Leviathan* of where language comes from, or how humans first gained the capacity to use words to affirm, negate, etc. He briefly posits, in several places, the possibility of a supernatural origin to language, namely that God taught Adam the first words.²⁰ But this is not only to venture to an even higher and more precarious limb of the tree of speculation, but also to appeal to supernatural causes whose existence we can posit only by faith. As we shall see, the supernatural is not susceptible to scientific study, for what makes some supposed event *supernatural* is precisely that it is not a matter of the efficient causes of bodies in motion, the only phenomena science can study. Furthermore, Hobbes explains, even if we take the Genesis account as historically accurate, our words today cannot be the same ones that God taught Adam anyway, given the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel.²¹

So much, then, for *Leviathan's* brief remarks on the origin of language. When Hobbes takes up this problem in more detail a few years later in *De homine* (1658), his hypothesis is somewhat firmer. Having definitively claimed that words are not natural phenomena but human artifacts, he considers what he takes to be the strongest objection to his view: “Because . . . I would say that names have arisen

²⁰ *De homine* X.2; *Leviathan* I.4.12; 50; *De corpore* I.2.4, EW I 10.

²¹ On the concept of Adamic language—words that not only are given by God (and thus not invented) but are also perfectly congruous with a thing's essence (and thus not arbitrary), see Philo's account of Adamic names in the *Legum Allegoriae* II.5.14-6.18. In one commentator's gloss: “Philo appears to imagine that when Adam perceived the first dog, he received a presentation of the very essence of dog, and cried out (presumably in Hebrew) in a moment of perfect insight and apt naming: ‘Dog!’” David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, 85.

from human invention, someone might possibly ask how a human invention could avail so much as to confer on mankind the benefit speech appears to us to have."²²

Hobbes does not address this objection straightforwardly. Instead, he admits that one version of this proposal is indeed incredible, but that his version is different in one key way:

For it is incredible that men once came together to take counsel to constitute by decree what all words and all connexion of words would signify. It is more credible, however, that at first there were few names and only of those things that were most familiar. Thus, the first man by his own will imposed names . . . as one or another species of things offered itself to his senses; these names, having been accepted, were handed down from fathers to their sons, who also devised others.²³

In these remarks, Hobbes offers some negative rules that, by showing what must *not* have been the case, sketch the bounds of any fitting hypothesis about language's origins. Any suggestion that the first human language was invented in one fell swoop, at some discrete and intentional gathering is implausible, Hobbes suggests, for at least two reasons. First, the complexity of such an endeavor seems impossible for people not already possessed of the use of language to organize it in the first place. Second, even were such a meeting held, the idea that all words should have been invented in one committee meeting—no matter how efficiently run, or how faithful to each tittle and jot of *Robert's Rules of Order*—is implausible, given how vast the number of human words, and how diverse human language is across both time and place: within each natural language, he says elsewhere, "new names are

²² *De homine* X.2; translated in Gert, *Man and Citizen*, 38. A contemporary, post-Darwinian objection might instead ask: Why would we consider these prelinguistic mammals Hobbes describes as being human at all? But an evolution of species seems not to have occurred to him.

²³ *De homine* X.2; translated in Gert, *Man and Citizen*, 38.

daily made, and old ones laid aside,” and besides that, “diverse nations use different names.”²⁴

What Hobbes *is* willing to affirm positively about language’s invention is that “speech could not have had a natural origin except by the will of man himself.”²⁵ Hobbes’s point here is that the imposition of names on things was and is an act of intentional human artifice, like fashioning tools for hunting, rather than a natural phenomenon, like seeking food when hungry. It must also be an *arbitrary* act of will: “What others say, however—that names have been imposed on single things according to the nature of those things—is childish. For who could have it so when the nature of things is everywhere the same while languages are diverse? And what relationship hath a *call* (that is, a sound) with an *animal* (that is, a body)?”²⁶ This is for two reasons. First, the diversity of language.²⁷ Second, the patent absurdity of suggesting that there are natural connections between phonemes and concepts. The French *eau* is quite phonemically different from the English *water* or the German *Wasser*. Taken together, these considerations suggest that a) language wasn’t given to humanity premade; and b) language isn’t simply a natural system existing in the world, then discovered through an act of intuition.²⁸

²⁴ *De corpore* I.2.4, EW I 16.

²⁵ *De homine* X.2; translated in Gert, *Man and Citizen*, 39.

²⁶ *De homine* X.2; translated in Gert, *Man and Citizen*, 39.

²⁷ This, of course, was Hermogenes’s main point in his argument against Cratylus, who denied both the conventional and arbitrary nature of human words. See Plato, *Cratylus* 383e-385e.

²⁸ Cf. *De corpore* I.2.4, where Hobbes judges the assumption that names are assigned arbitrarily to things “a thing that may be assumed as unquestionable. For considering . . . that diverse nations use different names, and how impossible it is either to observe similitude, or to make any comparison betwixt a name and a thing, how can any man imagine that the names of things were imposed from their natures?” (EW I 16).

What position is left to Hobbes after these considerations? Pettit speculates: “His idea may be that words appeared initially on the basis of accident or fortuity, and that the fact that they could facilitate causal knowledge, and thereby satisfy the natural curiosity of human beings, ensured their tenure and increase. Perhaps his view is that they were generated by a process of cultural evolution in which the satisfaction of curiosity played a crucial, selection role.”²⁹ Along similar lines—though in service of a thesis that opposes Pettit’s—Tabb argues that Hobbes, while unable to account for either the means by which humans invented words or the circumstances under which they did so, is quite clear about the causal role of curiosity in the invention of language: “curiosity reaches beyond self-interested knowledge. In so doing, it changes the way in which the connection of ideas functions, replacing a teleological structure with a more open-ended process in which the goal is neither synthesis (the tracing of steps from a cause to a known effect) nor analysis (the tracing of steps from a known effect back to its causes) but a pre-scientific discovery of new causal relations.”³⁰ Hobbes thinks, she suggests, that because of its relatively disinterested nature,³¹ curiosity enabled humans to gain some distance from the immediate demands of knowing how to bring about specific effects under specific circumstances (such as how to get *this* honey from *that* tree, and to do so as soon as possible). This distance then offered them sufficient perspective to think abstractly about the world. Both Pettit and Tabb here provide

²⁹ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 27.

³⁰ Tabb, “The Fate of Nebuchadnezzar,” 24.

³¹ I carefully qualify the descriptor “disinterested” with “relatively.” Recall that, on Hobbes’s account, no human desire is disinterested. Even curiosity, though simply a “delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of knowledge,” that is, a desire simply “to know why, and how,” is nonetheless ultimately one more manifestation of the basic human desire to increase one’s power in some way. For the one desire to which all particular human desires can be reduced is the “perpetual and restless desire of power after power” (*Leviathan* I.11.47; 150).

promising, but ultimately inconclusive attempts at determining just what Hobbes thinks causes the emergence of language from a world of matter in motion. In the end, however, Hobbes is simply not precise enough in his speculation to warrant any certain conclusions about his positive account.

Hobbes's speculations about language's origins, moreover, are *historical* and not *scientific*. For Hobbes, what counts for good reasons in a historical account differs considerably from the standards proper to science. On a scientific account, while there's nothing *absurd* about suggesting that some animals were naturally disposed for language, just as sensate bodies were disposed to perception, and developed this capacity in certain ways, such speculation is not the proper task of science. For science operates only in the register of hypotheses where it issues conclusions of hypothetical certainty: If X, then certainly Y. A historical speculation, by contrast, deals not with hypotheses, but with facts. For any fact (including the facts of how humans came to possess language) either it's the case or it's not. We cannot reason hypothetically to determine facts, but can only observe them or be taught them by others, in which we take these facts on trust. Thus, if Hobbes's speculative account of how sensation works (presented in chapter 3 above) represents Hobbesian *a posteriori* science at work, his speculative account of how humans obtained language represents Hobbesian history (a non-scientific enterprise) at work. And both these forms of knowledge are distinct from the *a priori* mode of science, in which we gain knowledge *more geometrico*. In any case, it seems wisest to conclude that, for Hobbes, the emergence of language from the pre-linguistic mind is just as mysterious as the emergence of mind from matter. Science cannot account for its origins, but can only describe how it operates and trace its conditions of possibility. Again, Hobbes's

programmatic materialism here places him in conflict with Descartes, for whom language is the only external proof that its user is not just an automaton, “but contains a soul with thoughts.”³²

Why is it worth stressing this point that, on Hobbes’s account, language is not a natural but an artificial technology? Since he is not explicit about it, but merely suggestive, and since his implicit argument for it is circular, why not minimize the place of this idea in Hobbes’s thought, and instead focus more on those points that he himself explicitly emphasizes? The reason is that this thesis—that humans invented language the way they have invented the electric drum machine or bicameral legislatures, rather than being born with it, as they are born with the technology of chewing and swallowing their food—plays a far more significant role in Hobbes’s thought than he lets on.

Hobbes thinks that human artifacts are susceptible of an entirely different kind of knowing from natural phenomena. The former can be known comprehensively, in what Hobbes—and Vico after him—will call a *maker’s knowledge*. Things that humans have made can also, given the right method, be perfectly and entirely manipulated and controlled by their makers. This stands in sharp contrast to our knowledge and control of natural phenomena, which were made by God, and which we—having no certain knowledge of their causes—can only speculate about, and even should our speculations turn out to be correct, we can only know them partly, for God’s mode of working is utterly incomprehensible to us, and thus unpredictable by us.

³² Letter to the Duchess of Newcastle (1646).

Hence, though he never makes this point explicit, it is a crucial assumption of Hobbes's account of language, and especially of scientific language, that we humans have invented it from the rough materials of our natural minds, in an arbitrary and voluntary act of artifice.

6.3. Varieties of Knowledge

From the beginning it should be stated that Hobbes distinguishes axiomatically between two kinds of knowledge, and thus between two corresponding kinds of discourse. One is knowledge rooted in experience (sense and memory), and the other is the more certain knowledge rooted in reason, a knowledge Hobbes calls science. Experiential knowledge and its discourse exist prior to language (as odd as it sounds to speak of discourse without words, recall that Hobbes posits a pre-linguistic "discourse of the mind" or "discursion"), but is vastly improved by language. Science, by contrast, requires language.

The background against which Hobbes's account of language must be sketched is his story of the "natural," or pre-linguistic mind. According to that story, which I traced in chapter 5, the only *natural* mental capacities that humans have prior to language are those they share with the beasts: i) sensation that develops into various forms of cognition; ii) deliberation that issues in will; and iii) the prudence necessary to guide the operation of both cognition and will.

Recall that the knowledge gained by the pre-linguistic human mind (and here the human/beast distinction makes no difference) is a prudential knowledge of intuited patterns of causes and effects in the personal history of a minded agent's engagement with her environment. Prudence, rooted in the mind's attentive review

of its memories, is an entirely natural and mostly automatic capacity. Its only necessary features are the capacity for sensation and thus imagination, and an accrual of such imagination through experience.

What drives the operation of prudence in both humans and beasts is a passion for original, or causal knowledge. And the reason we desire such knowledge is in order to secure things in the future, both for our survival, and for the satisfaction of our various desires.

Conception of the future is but a supposition of the same, proceeding from remembrance of what is past; and we so far conceive that anything will be hereafter, as we know there is something at the present that hath power to produce it. And that anything hath power now to produce another thing hereafter, we cannot conceive, but by remembrance that it hath produced the like heretofore. Wherefore all conception of future, is conception of power able to produce something; whosoever therefore expecteth pleasure to come, must conceive withal some power in himself by which the same may be attained.³³

This passion drives them (thus transforming their unguided trains of thought into guided ones) to draw possible causal connections amongst their pre-linguistic conceptions. While these connections formulated in memory are far weaker than those formulated in propositions, they are nonetheless strong enough to suit the needs of bestial life. Using prudence is like making a well-informed guess. And “the best guesser [is] he that is most versed and studied in the matters he guesses at; for he hath the most *Signes* to guess by” (I.3.10; 44). Indeed, such attention to patterns not only counts as a genuine form of knowledge for Hobbes, but might even be deemed a primitive form of “reckoning.” Hobbes explains that a human “reckons without the use of words, which may be done in particular things, (as when upon

³³ *Elements of Law* I.8.3.

the sight of any one thing, we conjecture what was likely to have preceded, or is likely to follow upon it" (I.5.19; 68).

In short, pre-linguistic cognition counts, for Hobbes, as a primitive form of reckoning that issues in genuine knowledge, even though this knowledge is not propositional and though it lacks the certainty of science. For instance, I genuinely *know* that when I go to the blackberry bush down the road, I will find its berries ripe for the picking, even though I lack *certain* knowledge of this, even if I cannot explain *why* I know this, and even if I lack language with which to express this knowledge. Thus, while Hobbes does not reduce thought to the *propositional* formulation of ideas, but allows that thinking is possible even prior to language, he does insist that language is necessary to secure complex chains of conceptions, namely those that will last in the memory and can be intentionally studied, analyzed, and manipulated. For instance, he counts "discursion" as a form of thought, even though it consists in the appropriation of the basically passive attention by a series of sense data from the flux of prelinguistic consciousness

Thus, Hobbes strikes a mediating position between the view, represented by Augustine, that language encodes or mirrors an *internum verbum*, or inner word, in a corresponding external word, and the later eighteenth-century German view, represented by Herder, that even our simplest act of perceiving the world requires some linguistic act.³⁴ Most notably, language permits complex forms of *conditional* knowledge of patterns of cause and effect. Indeed, these natural motions—prudence, deliberation, and doubt—can "by the help of Speech, and Method . . . be improved

³⁴ On Augustine, see Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 74-79. On the 18th-century Germans, see Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*, 1-9.

to such a height, as to distinguish men from all other living creatures." And so, in addition to the passion of curiosity, which is the *natural* feature that distinguishes humans from beasts, Hobbes describes the faculties of speech and method as means of further and *artificially* distinguishing them.³⁵

Science, by contrast, requires active, intentional thought, and thus goes beyond merely natural human capacities in two ways: it both depends on language and requires careful attention to method, both of which are invented by humans to augment their natural capacities. Yet to suggest that only science issues in genuine knowledge is to misrepresent Hobbes's position. Given the contrast Hobbes repeatedly draws between prudence and science, it is tempting, but nonetheless a mistake, to conclude from this that he thinks language is necessary for any causal

³⁵ In both *Elements of Law* (1640) and *De corpore* (drafted from 1642 until its publication in 1655), Hobbes treats a phenomenon he calls pre-linguistic reasoning, a notion he strictly denies in *Leviathan* (1651). In *De corpore* I.1.3, he claims that ratiocination, a form of reckoning via computation, is possible even "in our silent thoughts, without the use of words." He explains his rationale by adducing an example: "If . . . a man see something afar off and obscurely, although no appellation had yet been given to anything, he will, notwithstanding, have the same idea of that thing for which now, by imposing a name on it, we call it *body*." As this observer gets closer to the body, he observes more details: it's animated and rational. Having combined these features into one composite idea, he conceives of the body as "compounded of his former ideas, which are put together in the mind in the same order in which these three single names, body animated, rational, are in speech compounded into this one name, body-animated-rational, or *man*." On this earlier view, Hobbes seems to think language augments, rather than changing the kind of operation available to the human mind, by helping it recall its thoughts more efficiently: "Whatsoever a man has put together by ratiocination without such helps [as names of measures, patterns, and numbers], will presently slip from him, and not be revocable but by beginning his ratiocination anew." *De corpore* I.2.1, EW I 13.

But by the time he writes *Leviathan*, Hobbes has clearly modified his view, abandoning the claim that ratiocination is possible apart from language. It's not clear on what grounds exactly Hobbes would challenge his earlier claim. Perhaps he'd simply deny this term "ratiocination" to the process he's just described, or else deny that such a process would even be possible for the pre-linguistic mind. Interestingly, neither Pettit nor Tabb treats this passage, though it's crucial to their debate. One might assume that, on Pettit's interpretation, Hobbes would deny that the pre-linguistic thinker is capable of such active, complex, and classificatory thought as to deploy proto-universal categories like "animate," "rational," or "human," while Tabb would take Hobbes's change of mind between the drafting of *De corpore* chapter 1, and the writing of *Leviathan* in 1650-51, to have been a difference of mere *terminology*. Complicating this entire problem is the question of the composition history of *De corpore*, and how consistently the published version of 1655 in fact reflects developments in his thought during the decade preceding its publication.

knowledge at all.³⁶ In a characteristic treatment of the sapience/prudence distinction, Hobbes explains: “Of these two kinds of knowledge, whereof the former is experience of fact, and the latter evidence of truth: as the former is called prudence, so the latter, if it be much, hath usually been called . . . SAPIENCE or wisdom: and of this latter, man only is capable; of the former, brute beasts also participate.”³⁷ Both prudence and sapience count here as forms of knowledge, but only the latter is deemed *true*. To understand how it is that experiential knowledge can be genuinely causal knowledge, and yet not true, one must attend to Hobbes’s idiosyncratic account of truth, in which truth is a property of speech, and not of states of affairs themselves. Thus, not all knowledge—and likewise, not all belief—is susceptible to the truth/falsehood distinction.

6.4. The Logic of Language: From Thought to Speech

At its simplest, speech “consist[s] of Names . . . and their Connexion,” and it permits three kinds of cognitive operations hitherto impossible. By means of such speech, “men register their thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them to one another for mutuall utility and conversation.” As we shall see, Hobbes will further gloss the meaning of this vague phrase, “mutuall utility and conversation” when he goes on to discriminate amongst these various uses of language by elaborating in more detail the different purposes to which language may be put. But the features he names here—registering thoughts, remembering them later, and expressing them to others—are the most basic.

³⁶ Tabb makes a similar point: “Because Hobbes contrasts prudence with science, the generation of true propositions, it is easy to assume that language is required for causal knowledge” (24).

³⁷ *Elements of Law* I.6.4.

The way that speech enables this registering and recalling of thoughts is by transferring “our Mentall Discourse, into Verbal; or the Trayne of our Thoughts into a Trayne of Words.” And this transfer, Hobbes explains, provides us with “two commodities.” The first is “the Registering of the Consequences of our Thoughts which being apt to slip out of our memory, and put us to a new labour, may again be recalled, by such words as they were marked by.” This, Hobbes explains, is to use words “as Markes, or Notes of remembrance.” And the second is “when many use the same words, to signifie (by their connexion and order,) one to another, what they conceive, or think of each matter; and also what they desire, feare or have any other passion for.” The first of these basic and primitive functions of language is internal and private, the other external and public. These are i) to serve as marks, or representations of our thoughts to facilitate our cognition; and ii) to serve as externally projectable signs of our thoughts so we can convey them to others.³⁸ Both the inner and outer uses of language follow the same underlying logic. It will thus be worth attending to this logic before examining the more specific functions language takes.

The essential stages in the logic of language are the following: i) assigning words to thoughts; ii) positing classes of words, or universals; and iii) making predications of words across these classes. Some primitive uses of words, as we shall see, involve only the first, or only the first two. And depending on what particular purpose some use of language is supposed to serve, further stages may come into play. But these three stages form the basic logic of almost all forms of language that Hobbes describes, and in particular of all scientific forms of language.

³⁸ This mark/sign distinction is primarily formal. See the discussion in section 6.9 “The Varieties of Language’s Use” below for a more detailed material distinction amongst the uses of speech.

6.5. The Invention of Words

The first stage is the invention of words, which consists quite simply in the assigning of names to thoughts.³⁹ The pre-linguistic train of imagination, as we have seen, is already full of intentional objects—all sorts of thoughts caused by my perception of external bodies. To invent words, I simply stipulate—in an act willful artifice—a particular sound to correspond to a mental image, whether that name be “cup,” or “arm,” or “sunflower.” It is important to keep in mind that, on Hobbes’s view of language, names don’t represent external objects themselves, but rather represent the images conceived of them within the mind. It seems to the user of language, especially when using it naively, that her words do in fact refer to external bodies.⁴⁰ When a name is used in this simplest way, Hobbes calls it a “mark.” As “*Markes, or Notes* or remembrance,” such names serve for “registering of the consequences of our thoughts; which being apt to slip out of our memory, and put us to a new labour, may again be recalled, by such words as they were marked by”

³⁹ Hobbes recognizes a point that Wittgenstein would famously insist upon three centuries later, namely that not all words are names. Contrary to what is sometimes suggested (e.g. Peter Geach, *Reference and Generality: An Examination of Some Medieval and Modern Theories*, third edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 60), Hobbes doesn’t think that all words are names. Nor does he think that a proposition is a mere list of names. “Is,” for instance, is a sign of judgment, and does not serve to name anything (*De corpore* I.3.2; *Elements of Law*, I.V.9). But names are especially important to Hobbes’s account, because names are the foundation of reason and thus of science. See below for more on words that aren’t names.

⁴⁰ Thus, in my exposition of Hobbes’s view, I will avoid the tedium of spelling out the fact that language is a second-order, and sometimes a third-order representation of the world.

Further complicating this is Cees Leijenhorst’s thesis in *The Mechanisation of Aristotelianism* that Hobbes’s account entails something that Hobbes himself seems not to recognize, namely that images are not representations of the external objects they refer to, but rather are causally determined by them in a non-representational mode. “Apparently, the only way concepts are linked to the world is by their being motion in our bodies, and not by their being representations. The causality between world and ideas saves these from being mere illusions” (88-89). Hence, “despite his own words, [Hobbes’] guiding thought . . . is not that our ideas *represent external bodies*. The guiding idea is that our ideas *causally depend on external bodies*” (55).

(I.4.13; 50)⁴¹ Thus, when the language-user wants to think about that object, she can use the name as shorthand for it and subsume under that name her memory of properties she's previously noticed about it. The name then helps her recall something about her earlier conceptions of the object. In this way, names help her recall those features by which it captured her attention. Apart from such marks, we are far less likely to remember things at all.⁴²

With the benefit of names that correspond to the various objects I regularly encounter, I can summon up my conceptions of them more readily. By helping me to recall my previous encounters with some particular thing in the world, names allow me more effectively and efficiently to exercise cognition, prudence, and will, all of which depend on my conjuring up past sensations and comparing them to new ones. By the use of linguistic marks, "our past thoughts may be not only reduced, but also registered every one in its own order."⁴³ For the infant, the monotonous series of old women doting on him remains an indistinguishable blur of faces and laps, at least until he's able to impose particular names on particular faces—this is "Grandma," that is "Great Aunt Mabel," next to her, "Great Aunt Opal," and that is "Grandpa," who turns out not to be a woman at all, but only to have aged rather funnily. Such naming introduces a level of abstraction from the images themselves: a

⁴¹ Cf. *De corpore* I.2.1: "I call MARKS . . . sensible things taken at pleasure, that, by the sense of them, such thoughts may be recalled to our mind as are like those thoughts for which we took them" (EW I 14).

⁴² Cf. *De corpore* I.2.1: "How unconstant and fading men's thoughts are, and how much the recovery of them depends upon chance, there is none but knows by infallible experience in himself. For no man is able to remember quantities without sensible and present measures, nor colours without sensible and present patterns, nor number without the names of numbers disposed in order and learned by heart" (EW I 13).

⁴³ *De corpore* I.2.1, EW I 13-14.

name is not an image, but a symbolic representation of an image.⁴⁴ This first stage in the logic of language, then, takes place at a second level of the mind's abstraction of external bodies from its direct encounter with them: the first level consists in the representation of some body and its accidents in the imagination, and the second in the further representation of the image (itself representing a body) as a name.

This simplest use of words as names helps us better organize and remember our conceptions, and in so doing, language mediates the world to us in a new way. To refer again to Pettit's claim about 'active thought,' we may say that language helps make our trains of thought active rather than passive. In this sense, the effect of language on thought is similar to the effect of numerals on counting. Hobbes explains:

The use of words in registering our thoughts, is in nothing so evident as in Numbring. A naturall foole that could never learn by heart the order of numeral words, as *one, two, and three*, may observe every stroak of the Clock, and nod to it, or say *one, one, one*; but can never know what houre it strikes.... Much lesse will he be able to adde, and subtract, and performe all other operations of Arithmetique. So that without words, there is no possibility of reckoning of Numbers; much lesse of Magnitudes, of Swiftnesse, or Force, and other things, the reckonings whereof are necessary to the being, or well-being of mankind.⁴⁵

The relationship of such active thought to speech is like that between counting and numerals. In both cases, the latter make the former possible by offering themselves as the representation of the data to be interpreted. More precisely, the relationship of numerals to counting illustrates in an exemplary way how words enable active and classificatory thought. Words enable us to take active control of our train of thought.

⁴⁴ And, to be more precise, the name represents not just one image, but the series of images that together compose a conception. After all, I don't encounter the pot of basil on my windowsill under the same aspect each time, but I nevertheless refer all my encounters with it to the same conception. Thus, while names first apply to bodies, they may apply also to more abstract ideas.

⁴⁵ *Leviathan* I.4.14; 54.

As we hear the clock strike eleven, rather than those sounds' blending together into a dense fog of noise, we're able instead to assign a number to each tone, and thus to recognize, once the tones have ceased, that the clock chimed exactly eleven times, and therefore that—assuming the clock is accurate—it is eleven o'clock. And all of this because I have a mode of symbolically representing these noises, thus discriminating amongst them, and attributing meaning to each tone, a meaning that they would lack apart from the numbers I'm able to assign to them.⁴⁶ Thus, by enabling active and classificatory thought, words make prudence more effective.

Here, we must forestall a potential misunderstanding rooted in Pettit's claim that language transforms the human mind. Hobbes never suggests that the mere ability to understand names is a capacity available only because of human artifice. Indeed, what Hobbes says about the form of understanding proper to prudence, and thus available to beasts as well as humans, seems to be a matter of naming. The sled dog, after all, is able to understand—in a real if limited sense—the words "Gee and "Haw" as representing the conceptions of turning right or turning left. A dog cannot invent names at will, but can possibly come to learn certain words established by the will of its human master. Thus, what distinguishes the first stage of the logic of language from pre-linguistic cognition is the willful and volitional imposition of marks upon conceptions, rather than the passive reception of a mark assigned by another.

⁴⁶ The Piraha (an isolated culture in Amazonia) present a fascinating contemporary case of the effects of numerals on cognition, for they have only three counting words: "one," "two," and "many." See Susan Carey, *Origin of Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 302-04; Peter Gordon, "Numerical Cognition Without Words: Evidence from Amazonia," in *Science* vol. 306, no. 5695 (October 2004): 496-99.

6.6. The Invention of Universals

A further level of abstraction is introduced in the next stage of language's logic, namely the stipulation of classes, or universals. Among names, Hobbes posits two types: proper names ("as Peter, John, This man, this Tree"), and universals ("as Man, Horse, Tree") (I.4.13; 52). Hobbes explains: "One Universall name is imposed on many things, for their similitude in some quality, or other accident: And wheras a Proper Name bringeth to mind one thing onely; Universals recall any one of those many" (I.4.13; 52). Proper names—he suggests—are logically prior to universal names, because it takes multiple proper names to compose a universal name. When I discern some similarity amongst several of these objects, I might impose a general name upon them. For instance, noticing some similar features amongst a set of bodies—Peter, James, and John—I might decide to call them all "humans." It is important to note that such classification is just as arbitrary and conventional as the imposition of personal names. It is nothing more than a voluntary connection that I stipulate between phoneme and object.

Thus, in the stipulation of universals, the act of representation proper to naming is taken one further step up the ladder of abstraction. When I assign the word "sunflower" to the body I have just perceived, I am able to pick it out in my mental discourse as a discrete object. The named object, the sunflower, is now two steps removed from what Hobbes calls "Fact."⁴⁷ The first step of removal is that from fact to memory, and the second step is from memory (sense data) to name (an

⁴⁷ "Whereas Sense and Memory are but knowledge of Fact, which is a thing past, and irrevocable; Science is the knowledge of Consequences, and dependance of one fact upon another: by which, out of that we can presently do, we know how to do something else when we will, or the like, another time: Because when we see how any thing comes about, upon what causes, and by what manner; when the like causes come into our power, wee see how to make it produce the like effects" (I.5.21; 72).

abstract sign that represents that lump of data). But when I impose a universal name that comprises that particular, I thereby introduce a third step of abstraction: I may now use “sunflower” equivocally, as referring not merely to this particular sunflower, present to me in this field, or in memory, but also to its being one member of a wider class of bodies, all of which are called “sunflower” by virtue of “their similitude in some quality, of other accident.” Just as proper names enable us more effectively to keep track of the features of bodies we encounter, so universal names allow us to generalize and thus to keep track of features we’ve noticed that are true of all things proper to a class. Thus, while proper names allowed the child to distinguish amongst the elderly relatives sitting in her family’s living room, common names—or universals—allow her to classify her grandmother and great aunts as women, and her grandfather as a man. Given her particularly toddler-like passions, this classification helps her to know that the former—but not the latter—will be likely to carry purses containing treats that she might beg for. Thus, not only do names allow me to keep better track of particular bodies, but now I can better apply what I’ve learned from other situations and apply them here.

Furthermore, given the doubly abstract nature of universal names, I’m not limited to imposing just one per body. An aptly chosen *proper* name will pick out its bearer from other objects, and thus must be sufficiently specific to distinguish its bearer from those that might be confused for it. Thus, while ‘Charles’ might work as a proper name in certain contexts (say your name is Charles, and you are the only boy so named in the house), other situations demand further specificity (you are not just ‘King Charles’ but ‘King Charles II,’ to distinguish you from your headless father; or, in other contexts, you are ‘Charles Stuart II,’ to distinguish you from your

unfortunate contemporary Charles II, the final Hapsburg king of Spain). But *universal* names work in the other direction: rather than distinguishing their bearers from other entities, they classify them along with others. Thus, I may impose other sorts of universal names on the same particular. The sunflower, I may describe as flower, plant, living thing, body: “of Names Universall, some are of more, and some of lesse extent; the larger comprehending the lesse large: and some again of equall extent, comprehending each other reciprocally. As for example, the Name *Body* is of larger signification than the word *Man*, and comprehendeth it; and the names *Man* and *Rationall*, are of equall extent, comprehending mutually one another” (I.4.13; 52). Thus, I’m able to use these universal names to keep track of different similarities that a body shares with different sets of other bodies. We are able “to think not only of the thing, but also by turns to remember the divers names, which for divers considerations thereof are applied to the same.”⁴⁸ Thus, learning definitions further enables the language-user to impose order on her train of thought.

Such abstraction, Hobbes suggests, radically improves human cognition. I can now conceive of something not just in its particularity, but in the different aspects under which it appears to me, each signified by a different name. This body that appears to me is not just “flying thing,” but “bumblebee,” and thus also “living,” “animal,” “potentially stinging,” and “maker of honey.” My pre-linguistic conception of the bumblebee is necessarily particularist, but my access to universal names of various sorts enables me to see it as part of a thickly constructed world composed of different collections of things—or sets. Pettit remarks: “The articulate

⁴⁸ *De corpore* I.4.8, EW I 50.

or worded mind...does not merely see, it sees as. It does not merely register things, it also classifies them."⁴⁹

Once we have the use of various universals, we're no longer limited to stipulating marks to our conceptions, but can define them in terms of their properties. A suitable definition will be one that is broad enough to include all members of a class, but also narrow enough to distinguish these from those bodies that don't belong to the class. On the "conception of man," Hobbes writes:

First, he is conceived to be something that has extension, which is marked by the word *body*. *Body*, therefore, is a *simple name*, being put for that first single conception; afterwards, upon the sight of such and such motion, another conception arises, for which he is called an *animated body*; and this I here call a *compounded name*, as I do also the name *animal*, which is equivalent to an *animated body*. And in the same manner, an *animated rational body*, as also a *man*, which is equivalent to it, is a more compounded name. And by this we see how the composition of conceptions in the mind is answerable to the composition of names; for, as in the mind one idea or phantasm succeeds to another, and to this a third; so to one name is added another and another successively, and of them all is made one *compounded name*.⁵⁰

But here Hobbes warns against thinking that the logic that applies to our own process of naming should apply indiscriminately to the objects in the world to which these names apply. He adds:

Nevertheless we must not think bodies which are without the mind, are compounded in the same manner, namely, that there is in nature a *body*, or any other imaginable thing existent, which at first has no magnitude, and then, by the addition of magnitude, comes to have quantity, and by more or less quantity to have density or rarity; and again, by the addition of figure, to be figurate, and after this, by the injection of light or colour to become lucid or coloured; *though such has been the philosophy of many*.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 32.

⁵⁰ *De corpore* I.2.14, EW I 24.

⁵¹ *De corpore* I.2.14, EW I 24; emphasis mine.

Indeed, whereas pre-linguistic conceptions are directly caused by the external bodies that they represent, our *linguistic* conceptions are constructed mentally from the various images at our disposal. Here, the act of naming creates some theoretical distance from the things themselves, a distance which permits our analysis of them.

Note that this is a profoundly nominalist account of language, if by nominalism—a much overused and ill-defined term in contemporary theology—is meant the denial of the real ontological existence of universals. For Hobbes, a universal category like “human being” or “goodness” refers not to some real, prelinguistic entity that reason discovers and names. Rather, all that really exists prior to the arbitrary imposition of conventional names is an aggregate of individual bodies. In a passage worth quoting at length, Hobbes explains:

a common name, being the name of many things severally taken, but not collectively of all together (as man is not the name of mankind, but of every one, as of Peter, John, and the rest severally) is therefore called an *universal name*; and therefore this word *universal* is never the name of anything existent in nature, *nor of any idea or phantasm formed in the mind*, but always the name of some word or name; so that when a living creature, a stone, a spirit, or any other thing, is said to be universal, it is not to be understood, that any man, stone, etc. ever was or can be universal, but only that these words, living creature, stone, etc. are universal names, that is names common to many things; *and the conceptions answering them in our mind, are the images and phantasms of several living creatures, or other things. And therefore, for the understanding of the extent of an universal name, we need no other faculty but that of our imagination, by which we remember that such names bring sometimes one thing, sometimes another, into our mind.* (EW I 19-20)

Furthermore, he suggests here, names, when ordered in speech, are not signs of things, but of our conceptions of them.

This claim that words signify our ideas, and not the things themselves, provides his answer to the scholastic problem (which Hobbes dismisses as a mere pseudo-problem) of whether a name refers properly to matter, to form, or to some

compound of matter and form, “and other like subtleties of the *metaphysics* . . . kept up by erring men, and such as understand not the words they dispute about.”⁵² Indeed, Hobbes adds, our dream images are just as worthy as names as any image of an external thing. Although dream images “be not things, but only fictions and phantasms of things,” nonetheless “we can remember these; and therefore it is no less necessary that they have names to mark and signify them, than the things themselves.” Their names are just as significant as the name of any object in the external world. Why this is so should be clear from his account of cognition and perception.

But Hobbes’s nominalism extends even one step further. As Brandt remarks, “Hobbes is decidedly a nominalist, and strange to say, he is not only a nominalist in the old sense of the schoolmen in that he denies the objective existence of the universal, but he is so, too, in the modern, or we might say, the Berkeleyan sense in that he denies the psychological existence of the universal.”⁵³ (230). In glossing his claim that Hobbes denies the “psychological existence” of universals, he cites *De corpore* I.5.8, where Hobbes argues: “they err, that say, the *idea of anything is universal*; as if there could be in the mind an image of a man, which were not the image of some one man, but a man simply, which is impossible; for every idea is one, and of one thing” (EW I 60).

This universality of one name to many things, hath been the cause that men think that the things themselves are universal. And do seriously contend, that besides Peter and John, and all the rest of the men that are, have been, or shall be in the world, there is yet somewhat else that

⁵² This attack on hylemorphism constitutes a flank attack in Hobbes’s continued assault on the scholastic doctrine of formal causes in which hylemorphism is rooted. On the problem Hobbes describes here of the proper object of names, see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, 1710, ff.

⁵³ Brandt, *Hobbes’s Mechanical Conception of Nature*, 230.

we call man, viz. man in general, deceiving themselves by taking the universal, or general appellation, for the thing it signifieth. For if one should desire the painter to make him the picture of a man, which is as much to say, of a man in general; he meaneth no more, but that the painter shall choose what man he pleaseth to draw, which must needs be some of them that are, have been, or may be, none of which are universal. . . . It is plain therefore, that there is nothing universal but names; which are therefore also called indefinite; because we limit them not ourselves, but leave them to be applied by the hearer.⁵⁴

Hobbes is abundantly clear: neither in the internal nor in the external world is there anything universal. Ideas are always concrete conceptions of particular bodies.⁵⁵

But particular bodies, this entails, always have particular accidents that mark them as distinct from others that belong to the same universal class. As in Hobbes's example, if I ask you to imagine a human being, you will necessarily imagine a woman, a man, or a hermaphrodite. You cannot, on Hobbes's account, summon up the image of a generic human being. How, then, do we conceive the generic concept of human being, or of any universal at all? The answer is in Hobbes's psychological account of names. What happens psychologically when we conceive of something universal: a succession of concrete ideas emerges. When, for instance, we think of "living being," the ideas of several living beings appears. This is what he means by

⁵⁴ *Elements of Law* I.5.6.

⁵⁵ It is less clear what sort of positive account Hobbes offers instead. For a judicious account of the range of scholarly positions on this question, see Arash Abizadeh, "The Absence of Reference in Hobbes' Philosophy of Language," in *Philosopher's Imprint* 15.22 (August 2015), 1-17. Abizadeh concludes that, given Hobbes's "apparent equivocation" about whether words represent mental conceptions of things, or simply signify some state of affairs, "Hobbes' writings easily lend themselves to reasonable disagreement over the correct interpretation of his account . . . such that this account does not provide solid ground for motivating a reading of his philosophy against the grain of his explicit account of the two-fold function of names [as marks and as signs]" (15). Abizadeh's thesis, rather, is that names refer to nothing, for "Hobbes took it for granted that the primary function of intersubjective language-use is to communicate our thoughts and passions to others, and not, as Frege urged, to talk about the world. Hobbes's concern was to ensure that the results of our ratiocinations—by which we come to know something about the world—and the content of our threats, promises, and commands—by which we coordinate our social relations—could be made known to others" (15).

saying that the “conceptions answering them” (i.e. the universal concepts or names) “in our mind, are the images and phantasms of several living creatures etc.”⁵⁶

The most immediate effect of the classificatory language is its augmentation of the natural faculty of prudence, the largely automatic ability to notice patterns, and thus more or less reliably predict the causal connections between events, an ability that improves—also automatically—over time. The artificial ability, made possible by universal names, to group memories of events and of the bodies involved into distinctive classes will precipitate the gradual improvement of prudence over time by putting a heretofore unknown technology at its disposal. This technology is applied in two stages: first, names allow us to remember bodies more readily; second, universals allow us to classify them. Both are cognitive shortcuts, but in different ways. Thus, in addition to helping us remember conceptions, and to organize our mental discourse, language introduces two capacities entirely unavailable to the natural mind, and different in kind from any merely natural cognition: i) it allows us to classify our thoughts—to “gain distance on” what we register—and thus to escape the “prison of particularity”; and ii) to allow us to think actively and voluntarily.⁵⁷

6.7. Consequences of Propositions: The Foundation of Ratiocination

The classification made possible by universal names makes possible, in turn, the third stage in the logic of language, namely the joining together of two or more names into “a Consequence, or Affirmation.” “A PROPOSITION is a speech consisting

⁵⁶ He’s even more direct in the Latin: et respondents ipsis in animo conceptus sunt singularium animalium vel aliarum rerum imagines et phantasmata (OL I 18).

⁵⁷ Pettit, 37.

of two names copulated, by which he that speaketh signifies he conceives the latter name to be the name of the same thing whereof the former is the name; or (which is all one) that the former name is comprehended by the latter."⁵⁸ An utterance is true insofar as it connects names that refer to the same thing. Propositions make possible the categories of truth and falsehood: "Truth or verity is not any affection of the thing, but of the propositions concerning it." Pre-linguistic cognition may lead to error, but never to falsity. This claim mirrors Hobbes's claim about the distinction between mere expectations and propositional claims: we can *err* in our pre- or non-linguistic expectations, but we cannot be *false* unless we put something in a propositional form.

These three stages, then, form the basis of human language. Language not only augments the natural mind's powers of cognition, will, and prudence by "registering of the Consequences of our Thoughts; which being apt to slip out of our memory, and put us to a new labour, may again be recalled, by such words as they were marked by." It also allows us—by the mental manipulation of well-defined terms, via careful method—to gain scientific knowledge whose consequences are certain.

Furthermore, with the complex use of words in the form of propositions, I'm able not only to impose classification upon the phenomena I experience, I can also augment my inner train of thought by "talking to myself," that is, posing myself questions, pondering the answers, and challenging myself critically about the sufficiency of such answers. In so doing, I take active, voluntary control over my cognitive processes. Such active volition, on Hobbes's account, was impossible prior

⁵⁸ *De corpore* I.3.2, EW I 30.

to language.⁵⁹ So far, everything said has concerned the effects of language on particular thinkers. But what of communication with others?

6.8. On signification

Recall Hobbes's programmatic statement about the two basic uses of names.⁶⁰ The first is "marks" (which may take the form of either a singular or a universal), for keeping track of our own thoughts and intuitions; the second is "signs" for communicating to others what we "conceive, or think of each matter, and also what [we] desire, feare, or have any other passion for." Words take on the function of a "sign" when they are used not just to stand for some object (as when I mutter "bear" when I see a black bear in the blueberry barrens, and thus summon up my memory of the time it chased me away), but also to signify some state of affairs.

This chapter's account has thus far focused on the use of names as marks by which we remember our own thoughts (and these marks can be either singulars or universals). But these names and their complex arrangement in the form of singulars, particulars, and propositions, function also as signs by which we make

⁵⁹ "Hobbes never addresses the question as to whether animals might be able to reason, if they had access to language. It is worth noting, however, that his adherence to this computational model would enable him to deny that language alone could induce other animals to reason; for all that he says, they may lack the required computational ability. Although prelinguistic human beings have a mental life like that of other animals, they may be the only species to have the potential to be transformed by language. Reason may be a developing skill, not an innate faculty that comes on stream at a certain age or under certain prompts. But it may still presuppose an innate faculty or capacity of the kind postulated in the computational model; it may not be capable of appearing and developing in the absence of such a faculty." Pettit, *Made With Words*, 46.

⁶⁰ "[T]he first . . . is to serve for *Markes*, or *Notes* of remembrance. Another is, when many use the same words, to signifie . . . one to another, what they conceive, or think of each matter; and also what they desire, feare, or have any other passion for. And for this use they are called *Signes*." To this passage, we might add the following remark from *De corpore*: A name is "a word taken at pleasure to serve for a mark, which may raise in our mind a thought like to some thought we had before," but also, "being pronounced to others, may be to them a sign of what thought the speaker had, or had not before in his mind" (I.2.4, EW I 16).

our thoughts known to others. One way a word may be used as a sign is to signify to others some conception in my own mind. When a mark is “pronounced to others,” it “may be to them a sign of what thought a speaker had, or had not before his mind.”⁶¹ I can let others know what I want and what I’ve learned, and vice versa, they can inform me of the same. Thus, signs convey externally—to other thinkers—what I have already conceived within my own mind. Unlike a mark, which signifies simply by being spoken (silently or aloud), a sign has meaning only in the context of a publicly-constituted syntax. Names “standing singly by themselves” can function as marks, since marking requires simply “recal[ling] our own thoughts to mind.” But they can’t function as *signs* until they’re “disposed and ordered in speech as parts of the same.”⁶² That is to say, words require public, communal agreement as to their meaning, if they are to function as more than mere private marks.

The first rule of signification, then, is that there be some set of words commonly agreed upon that will serve as marks in the same way for each language-user. This doesn’t make private marks impossible, just highly inefficient. Lacking the broader connection to other words provided by syntax, words cannot signify. For names, “though standing singly by themselves, are marks, because they serve to recall our own thoughts to mind; but they cannot be signs, otherwise than by being disposed and ordered in speech as parts of the same.”⁶³ In other words, names as marks *mean* nothing more than the conception they raise in the mind of the one who

⁶¹ *De corpore* I.2.4, EW I 16; see also *Leviathan* I.4; *Elements of Law* I.5.2.

⁶² *Elements of Law* I.2.3.

⁶³ *De corpore* I.2.3; EW I 15.

stipulates and deploys the mark. Thus the conceptions to which marks refer “are particular motions happening in particular brains at particular times.”⁶⁴

For signs to be effective, they must have shared, public meanings. With mutual access to a meaningful lexicon, speakers “can use the same words to signify (by their connection and order) one to another, what they conceive or think of each matter, and also what they desire, fear, or have any other passion for.” Apart from publicly shared meanings, a speaker’s words lack the ability to signify anything to other speakers. If I utter the words “tick, grizzle” to you, I might intend it to mean that the patch of mushrooms that we’re standing around were the very ones that made me sick last week. But unless we share a language in which we both know what “tick, grizzle” means, then these sounds are just an instance of my talking aloud to myself, and your hearing them is not a reception of meaningful communication, but rather an overhearing of my private mental marks. As a mere mental mark, this phrase may help me engage more prudently with my environment (by not, for instance, eating the same poison mushrooms twice), but it will not count as an instance of communication, unless it first employs a publicly available lexicon, words whose meanings any user of the language may be expected to know, or if not, to add to her quiver of words, and second, deploys those words according to proper syntax. Thus, in twenty-first-century North American English, I would need to say: “Those mushrooms made me sick.”

Some forms of signification are pre-linguistic. For instance, Hobbes describes the prudential intuition of connections between events as signification: “When a man hath so often observed like antecedents to be followed by like consequents that

⁶⁴ RM, “Language,” in *Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes*, 98.

whensoever he seeth the antecedent, he looketh again for the consequent; or when he seeth the consequent, he maketh account there hath been the like antecedent; then he calleth both the antecedent and the consequent, signs of one another, as clouds are a sign of rain to come, and rain of clouds past.”⁶⁵ Here, the logic of signification governs the relationship between the mark I apply to the event I conceive as a cause (placing my tongue on a sea anemone) of some event (a slight stinging sensation on my tongue, followed by numbness) that I conceive as being effects of that cause. Signs, on Hobbes’s definition, are “antecedents of their consequents, and the consequents of their antecedents, so often as we observe them to go before or follow after in the same manner.”⁶⁶ Yet a mere correlation between two events is insufficient to make them signs of one another. The correlation must be observed by an agent, who must then apply this observation to her own expectations and presumptions.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Elements of Law* I.4.9; cf. *De corpore* II.2; *Leviathan* I.3; *De motu* 30.13, folio 343v.

⁶⁶ *De corpore* I.2.2, EW I 14.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hume’s natural definition of a cause: “The necessary connexion betwixt causes and effects is the foundation of our inference from one to another. The foundation of our inference is the transition arising from the accustomed union.” Thus, “a cause is “an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea, of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form another more lively idea of the other” (*Treatise on Human Nature*, I.3.14). Despite this similarity, it is important to recognize that what Hume defines as *causation*, Hobbes simply calls the association of antecedents with consequents. Hobbes differs in denying to this the name of causation. This is because of his axiomatic distinction between two kinds of knowledge: empirical knowledge based on sense and memory, and scientific knowledge, based on ratiocination. The uncertain knowledge we have of antecedents and consequents is grounded in memory (and specifically the memory we have of associations), and does not count as genuine knowledge of causation. To understand the cause of a thing, by contrast, is to understand the premises from which the necessity of the effect is demonstrated, which is markedly different from noting antecedents and consequents. Thus, Hobbes limits properly scientific knowledge to demonstrable knowledge of causal relations, delimiting it from the uncertain knowledge based in mere perception and experience. As Brandt points out, “It is misleading to think that under the characterisation of empirical knowledge in the *Elements* [Hobbes] himself thought that he was dealing with the concept of causation, though it seems natural to assume this from the later, empiricist point of view.” Brandt, *Hobbes’s Mechanical Conception of Nature*, 278.

While marks are proper to language, and have no existence prior to the willful act of stipulating them, signs already exist in the natural world, such as the relationship of dark clouds to rain. Others signs are “arbitrary, namely, those we make choice of at our own pleasure, as a bush hung up, signifies that wine is to be sold there; a stone set in ground signifies the bound of a field; and words so and so connected, signify the cogitations and motions of our mind.”⁶⁸ He makes this distinction more clearly in *De cive* 15.16: “there are two kinds of signs: *Natural* signs, and *Conventional* signs, which are signs based upon explicit or tacit agreement [*constitutio*]. Now because in every language the use of *Names* or *Appelations* arises from decision, it will also be able to be altered by decision. For what depends upon and derives its force from men’s will, can be altered or abolished by their will if they consent.” The context of this remark is Hobbes’s claim that the attributes of God that we deploy to honor God “have come to prevail . . . by human decision” and “can also go out of use if men so decide.”⁶⁹

Thus, linguistic signs—which are a variety of arbitrary signs—function just like natural signs, but differ in two important ways: they are arbitrary, in the sense that they have no meaning prior to an act of human stipulation; and they depend upon the co-ordination of several speakers’ wills. By contrast, a natural sign isn’t stipulated, but recognized. Furthermore, linguistic signs—because they are public—

⁶⁸ *De corpore* II.2.2, EW I 14-15. Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*: “A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses. Thus if we see a track, we think of the animal that made the track; if we see smoke, we know that there is a fire which causes it.” Those signs “are natural which, without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, like smoke which signifies fire. It does this without any will to signify, for even when smoke appears alone, observation and memory of experience with things brings recognition of an underlying fire.” On the other hand, “conventional signs” are what “living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood” (II.1.1-II.3.4).

⁶⁹ *De cive* XV.14.

depend on shared human volition. We *will* that the word “water” refer to the substance that physics tells us is H₂O. And, somewhat more complexly, we arbitrarily will that the word “thunderstorm” refer to the arbitrary concept that we’ve created that comprises those weather events characterized by cumulonimbus clouds, lightning, thunder, usually rain, and often hail.

In linguistic signification, a speaker deploys words to posit connections between bodies or between a body and its accidents. This is where meaning emerges from language. The connection of words to other words makes each one a sign, i.e., something that signifies the way that language—but not the world—is structured. Signs differ from mere marks, because signs depend on there being some public structure of meaning that is constituted by language.⁷⁰

Marks do not have to be public. Hobbes remarks that Adam could have been a solitary scientist, observing natural phenomena, and applying marks to his conceptions of things and the causal relations he observed amongst them. However, “though some one man, of how excellent a wit soever, should spend all his time partly in reasoning, and partly in inventing marks for the help of his memory, and advancing himself in learning; who sees not that the benefit he reaps to himself will not be much, and to others none at all? For unless he communicate his notes with others, his science will perish with him.”

Thus, although solitary science is possible in principle, Hobbes’s general rule is that science is far too difficult and taxing a labor to be worth doing by oneself, and for the mere sake of knowledge. If science is to have real benefits, it must be a public

⁷⁰ Indeed, while all marks are names, not all signs are names. On signs that aren’t names: “all,” “some,” and “is” are *signs*, but are *not names*. See *De corpore* I.3.2; cf. *Elements of Law* 5. Some names don’t signify the conception of any body at all, but rather the conceptions we have of words themselves, or of the relations amongst bodies. He cites, for instance, the words “future,” “impossible,” and “nothing.” See *De corpore* 1.26.

endeavour. In short, while we can indeed posit private, internal signs of causes we observe, the more important kind of signification is external.

6.9. The Varieties of Language's Uses

Just as Hobbes's emphasis on the benefits of science relative to prudence can mislead the reader into thinking that only science can yield causal knowledge, so his emphasis on science as the culmination of language's improvement to human cognition can yield the false impression that he thinks all language strives—or ought to strive—to be scientific in form. The lion's share of this attention does indeed go to exploring scientific uses of language, but it's crucial to recognize that language's benefits are more diverse than those yielded by science alone, and that non-scientific uses of language are a necessary part of a well-formed linguistic community. Thus, before looking in more detail at his account of the mechanics of reasoning, it will be worth looking briefly at his view of the various uses of language.

All language, Hobbes explains, comes from “the connection or contexture of names.”⁷¹ Though not all words are names, those that are not (such as “is,” “is not,” or “sometimes”) have as their function the establishment of connections amongst names. As the previous sections have traced the logic that governs Hobbes's account of naming, it will be worth setting out, somewhat schematically, the different uses that names serve. In each of the accounts of language scattered throughout his philosophical corpus, Hobbes offers a list of the purposes to which language may be put.⁷² Rather than analyzing each of these passages in turn, I shall first cite Hobbes's

⁷¹ De Corpore I.3.1, EW I 29.

⁷² See *Elements of Law* I.5.4; I.13.2; I.13.6-7; *De motu* I.2; folio 6; p. 25 in the Jones edition; *De corpore* I.3.1, EW I 29-30; *De homine* X.3

brief description in *Leviathan*, and then draw out the general features of language that emerge from these various accounts.

In chapter 4 of *Leviathan*, after identifying the one “general use” of speech, namely “to transfer our mental discourse into verbal,” and “two commodities” that this serves (as “marks” or “notes” of memory, and as “signs”) Hobbes then provides a list of four “special uses of speech”:

First, to Register, what by cogitation, wee find to be the cause of any thing; present or past; and what we find things present or past may produce, or effect: which in summe, is acquiring of Arts. Secondly to shew to others that knowledge which we have attained; which is, to Counsell, and Teach one another. Thirdly, to make known to others our wills, and purposes, that we may have the mutuall help of one another. Fourthly, to please and delight our selves, and others, by playing with our words, for pleasure or ornament, innocently.⁷³

The first use of speech, then, is one we’ve already explored at length, namely to keep a register of our thoughts. As we’ve seen, Hobbes thinks it one of the hallmark accomplishments of language that any language user can use words inwardly to take active, voluntary control of her cognition. This involves, among other things, “repeating orally, or mentally, the words.”⁷⁴

As Hobbes suggests in this passage from *Leviathan*, the most significant kind of registry, though by no means the only one, is the registration of causes, which he calls, “acquiring of arts.” This particular kind of record serves (at its most basic) to augment the natural faculty of prudence. To reckon “without the use of words” may be done only “in particular things (as when upon the sight of any one thing, we conjecture what was likely to have preceded, or is likely to follow upon it)” (I.5.19; 68). When we have names to serve as internal marks, we are able to improve our

⁷³ *Leviathan* I.4.13; 50. The list provided in *De motu* is also fourfold, but its content differs: teaching, narration, persuasion, and glorifying deeds in poetry.

⁷⁴ *Elements of Law* I.5.4.

memory that undergirds our prudence. And prudence, of course, is all about speculating about causes. In reasoning proper, as we shall see, such reckoning about causes not only improves upon prudence, but transcends it, issuing in certain conclusions that prudence cannot deliver.

Both the second and third “Speciall uses of Speech” Hobbes catalogs here are means of signifying things to other language-users: The second special use is “to shew others that knowledge which we have obtained; which is, to Counsell, and Teach one another.” The third is “to make known to others our wills, and purposes, that we may have the mutuall help of one another.” When we teach, we point out connections we’ve deduced, features of bodies and their accidents we’ve observed, and the relations amongst bodies we think obtain. In short, we “Counsell, and Teach” others by showing them “that knowledge which we have attained.” This, of course, is a bilateral relationship, for this second use of language comprises both teaching and learning. In the other, we point out connections of our own minds we’ve observed through introspection. If the former serves to signify external states of affairs (facts and deductions), the latter serves to signify internal states of affairs (our desires and will). Such communication enables—at the simplest level—a cooperation with others. And this cooperation depends first on confirming that our desires are commensurate with those of others. Ultimately, and at a higher level of sophistication, such communication permits a sovereign to command his subjects.

In sum, Hobbes’s first three general uses of language are: as marks of thought, as signs of our knowledge, and as signs of our passions. To these he adds a fourth “Speciall use,” which includes all those remaining functions of language that neither register connections, nor communicate to others things we’ve learned or

passions we suffer. This is to play with words “innocently,” for no other end than delight.⁷⁵

When we compare this catalog of the uses of language with other passages in which Hobbes does the same, six basic uses of language emerge. Here, I present them schematically:

- 1) *Naming*, or applying marks to our conceptions of bodies and their accidents. This includes counting and numbering, though not more complex arithmetic operations.
- 2) *Ratiocination*, or deductive reasoning, that is, the scientific study of causes and effects, which, of course, are limited to patterns of efficient causation amongst bodies. Such reasoning is rooted in clear definitions that accord with the rules of first philosophy, and proceeds according to a strict method;
- 3) *Emoting*, that is, the expression of our appetites and will. This includes commanding, requesting, interrogating, complaining, prayer, petition, promising, threatening, praising, and glorifying;
- 4) *Narrating* events, that is, describing facts, or states of affairs; and
- 5) *Playing with words*, to please or delight ourselves and others.

To this list should be added one other that Hobbes mentions in some passages as a discrete use of language, but which comprises all the diverse ways that we inform others of names, causes, and events (thus 1,2, and 4 above), but does not include emoting, because emoting is not an indicative, but a *subjunctive* mode of speech.⁷⁶

This is:

- 6) *Teaching*, that is, instructing others in what we’ve learned: either the names of marks, the results of our scientific endeavors, or the narrating of facts we’ve learned; this includes warning or advising, but not commanding or pleading.

⁷⁵ He adds the qualifier “innocently” here because he immediately follows the list of language’s uses with a list of language’s abuses.

⁷⁶ See Anat Biletzki, *Talking Wolves: Thomas Hobbes on the Language of Politics*, 60-63.

Teaching is a special case, since its hallmark has nothing to do with the type of language used, but rather with the fact that it's the external communication of something already conceived internally.

A case might be made for calling either the second or the third use of language the most important in Hobbes's system. The third use—command—is important because command is at the heart of governance, which is the most important human activity in this life. But there is also a strong case for deeming the second use—the naming of bodies for the sake of understanding causation—most important, since it is the basis for science, including civil science, which perfects the art of governance grounded in command. Indeed, most central to Hobbes's reform project is this second use of language, which enables his civil science.

6.10. Dangers of Language in General

Although Hobbes deems language “the most noble and profitable invention of all other,” he insists that language is not an unambiguous good: it has drawbacks as well as benefits. For as many advantages as it offers, it also brings a set of dangers that exists only because of language. Indeed, a constant theme in *Leviathan* is the misuse to which the scholastic philosophers and other agents of the “Kingdome of Darknesse” put their words. Here, I will first treat Hobbes's general account of the abuses of language before exploring in more detail his treatment of how reasoning in particular can go wrong and how to prevent such error.

Hobbes schematically lists four misuses of language in *Leviathan* chapter 4, immediately following his list of the “Speciall Uses of Speech.” The first misuse of language is “when men register their thoughts wrong, by the inconstancy of the

signification of their words; by which they register for their conceptions, that which they never conceived; and so deceive themselves" (I.4.15; 56). This is a general error of self-deception via language, and Hobbes suggests two ways this might happen: the mistaken use of words to mean what they don't really mean, or the sloppy use of words in an inconstant manner. For instance, I might conflate the definition of a parallelogram (a quadrilateral polygon whose opposite sides are parallel to each other) with that of a rectangle (a quadrilateral polygon whose angles are all right angles), and thus arrive at a false conclusion about one of the internal angles of the parallelogram I am reasoning about. (I've mistakenly spoken of the non-rectangular parallelogram as having four right angles.) Or, of particular interest to Hobbes, I might think that I am acting justly in resisting the civil sovereign and urging the faithful "to remove from honor and authority that monster," because I think she is promulgating false doctrine.⁷⁷ Here, I have diverged from the proper meaning of the word "just," which is correctly defined as "Hee that in his actions observeth the Lawes of his Country." Or, I could use the term "mauve" inconsistently, sometimes applying it (as is standard) to the pale violet flower of the mallow, but at other times to something better described as vermillion or scarlet. In all these diverse cases, the form of the error is the same: I deceive myself into thinking that my words signify something that they do not, and I proceed as though my words are correct, leading me into false conceptions.

The second kind of error is similar to the first: "when they use words metaphorically; that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for; and thereby deceive others." Here, Hobbes's point is less obvious. After all, if I am told that a

⁷⁷ John Knox, *Works* 4: 415-16.

colleague is exceptionally bright, and—like Amelia Bedelia—I take this remark to mean that she is luminescent, have I not simply fooled myself, and thus committed an error classifiable under the first category? Attention to Hobbes’s acerbic asides, scattered throughout *Leviathan*, in which he attacks the traditional scholastic concepts and definitions suggests why Hobbes would emphasize metaphor in particular, by placing it in its own category.⁷⁸ For one of the chief marks of scholastic error is the inability to recognize metaphor—such as scripture’s metaphorical use of ‘spirit’-language, as we saw in chapter 4 above.

Such error may be either intentional or unintentional, for Hobbes allows that while many Schoolmen aim to deceive others in order to shore up their own power, others do so because they are uncritical of received teachings, and thus are self-deceived themselves. Both the third and fourth categories of error, by contrast, refer to intentional abuse of words, and cannot, by definition, be cases of self-deceived employment of words. The third is “when by words they declare that to be their will, which is not,” thus deceiving others. This is especially pernicious because one’s will is something uniquely available via introspection, and cannot readily be discerned by others, except by placing trust in the speaker’s claims about herself, or else by careful study of her behavior and inference about what she seems to desire.⁷⁹ The fourth is a misuse grounded in simple malice: “when they use [words] to grieve one another: for seeing nature hath armed living creatures, some with teeth, some with horns, and some with hands, to grieve an enemy; it is but an abuse of Speech, to grieve him with the tongue.”

⁷⁸ See Karen Feldman, “Hobbes’s *Leviathan*: Conscience and the Concealments of Metaphor” in *Binding Words*.

⁷⁹ To avoid being so deceived, Hobbes recommends paying close attention to the facial expressions of the person claiming to have any particular passion (Introduction; 19-20).

Hobbes does not directly and explicitly suggest solutions for these four misuses of speech, but they can be discerned from his scattered remarks throughout the treatise. Ultimately, the surest solution to all these misuses is a combination of rigorous attention to the meanings of words and their proper contexts (so that those of good will and sound mind can avoid these errors), and a powerful sovereign state (to secure its citizens against the harms that their malevolent or simply incompetent neighbors might do to them with their words). But before looking at how he thinks these solutions are to be applied, we must first examine Hobbes' account of science, and of proper scientific method. Indeed, just as Hobbes pays more attention to the logic of reason than to any other uses of language, so he treats the errors particular to reason, and their solutions, which are primarily rooted in proper scientific method, in greater detail than the errors attendant to these other modes of language, and suggests that the findings of science can provide solutions to the problems even of non-scientific language.

6.11. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Hobbes thinks language not a natural, but an artificial feature of the world, one that must be devised and implemented by human beings in an arbitrary and willful act. By means of this language, humans are able to exceed some of their natural limitations through augmenting some of their natural capacities. In particular, we've seen how language makes human thought proactive, and more supple to the thinker's intentions. Human cognition—thanks to language—becomes capable of intentional, willed direction by the thinker. It allows us to keep track of our thoughts via proper names, and to organize our perception of

the world via universals, or classificatory names. Language allows us to escape not only limits of particularist thought, but also to escape solipsism, by permitting us to communicate discursively with others. It also allows us to deliberate internally, critically testing our conceptions by talking to ourselves about them. While Hobbes doesn't think any of this counts properly as *reasoning*, which—as we shall see in the following chapter—he defines idiosyncratically as a particular form of *deductive* reasoning, or ratiocination, it does augment our natural faculty of prudence, enabling us more effectively and more accurately to intuit causal patterns in the world.

While language in general enables humans to transcend in some ways their natural limitations, such language—to remain meaningful and to effect results in the world—must operate within the limits defined by perception, and thus according to the materialist ontology sketched in chapter 3. And while language changes human thought in radical ways, *reason* presents a use of language categorically different from all others. The knowledge yielded by such reasoning—which Hobbes calls science, and to which he opposes prudence—is categorically different from all other kinds of knowledge.

What I aim to have shown in this chapter is that Hobbes articulates an account of language that is consistent with his materialist ontology and empiricist account of mind. Furthermore, that it's important to Hobbes's overall reform project that language be a human invention. This has three key implications for Hobbes's reforms: a) if we are to get real results from our use of language in the form of science, the language we use to ratiocinate must have a precision that comes only from what we ourselves have invented; b) likewise, if our language about God—

even though it's either entirely emotive (in expressing our will to honor God), or descriptive of scriptural claims about salvation history—is to be stable, we must know precisely the range of these words' meanings; c) language is the most basic of the artifices that humans must devise for themselves to have a decent life: after language comes science, and then the nation-state, which properly orders both ecclesial and civic communities, in an ideally reformed version of Christendom. All of these, then, are tasks that depend entirely upon technologies of our own devising, and which we are thus free (within whatever bounds this world of matter in motion imposes) to make in whatever ways we humans wish.

Conclusion

“What is Going On?”: Returning to Niebuhr’s Question

After the extensive engagement in these last few chapters with Hobbes’s attempt at theoretically refiguring Christian thought in accordance with his programmatic materialist ontology—what I called a ‘thick description’ of some important features of Hobbes’s new conceptual machinery—it will be helpful to recall the overall context of this essay before offering a few conclusions.

This essay has had two movements. In the first, I described one aspect of the contemporary field of political theology, and offered an intervention into the use to which Thomas Hobbes is typically put in that conversation. Closer attention to his work as a theorist *of* Christendom, rather than *against* Christendom, will yield conclusions not only more interesting and more accurate with respect to Hobbes, but more useful in the attempt of Western Christians to trace the complex aftershocks of early modernity: the Protestant Reformation, the so-called ‘wars of religion’ waged over the formation of the incipient European nation-states, and the ‘new science’ that would forever change Christian thought.

In the second, I looked specifically at an often-overlooked aspect of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, namely its complex attempt at recommending a new way of seeing the world, of speaking about it, and of inhabiting it. Hobbes’s aim in *Leviathan*, I urged, is not (contra Lilla) to abolish Christendom, nor (contra Johnston and Brandon) to transform it into something only tenuously related to the long tradition of Western Christian social thought. Rather, Hobbes’s aim is to *transfigure* Christendom, to articulate new theoretical foundations for its thought and institutions.

Throughout this second part, I emphasized two features of Hobbes's 'redescription' project. First, it goes "all the way down," encompassing—notably, but not only—a new ontology, anthropology, ecclesiology, scriptural hermeneutic, and philosophy of language. To reform Christendom *truly*, on Hobbes's account, means to do so thoroughly. It means to replace the background picture of medieval scholasticism with a new one that—Hobbes insists—is at once more rational, insofar as it is commensurate with the 'new science,' and at the same time more faithful to scripture. Second, the world Hobbes describes is marked by a tension between the constraining conditions of the given, or natural world, and the freedom of human agents to shape a new one through *poiesis* or artifice. Just as prehistorical (indeed, prelinguistic) humans invented language, rationality, and society 'from scratch,' so can humans in Hobbes's day—by virtue of science—improve upon these sorts of artifice in order to augment their condition even further: to put even more distance between themselves and their "naturall condition" of civil war.

Where, then, does this assessment leave us? It is hard to say just how much Hobbes actually succeeded in this project. This is in part because of the difficulty of making strong claims about historical causation, but also because so much of the scholarly attention to Hobbes has begun with assumptions that as I argued in part one of this essay, are unhelpful and inaccurate. In some ways, Hobbes's vision seems to have won the day—if not in its particulars, then at least in its overall attempt at reshaping the Christian imagination. Granted, Hobbes's rationalist materialism has not been widely adopted by Christian thought, and most moderns are comfortable with neither the particular rendition of absolute state sovereignty that Hobbes offers, nor his vision of an established church. But his dream has been realized in a deeper

sense, namely that Christians in the contemporary West tend not only to accept the nation-state as natural, but see its project as fitting agreeably and consistently with their broader assumptions about the world and their place in it as Christians. In short, the absolute nation-state has been comfortably inserted into the background picture of Christians in the West.

The upshot of this essay in political theology, then, is to urge closer attention to the work of figures like Hobbes who—in the strange space between the Protestant Reformation and the full flowering of the Enlightenment—sought to make sense of a liminal world that was at once modern and medieval. For theorists like Hobbes are the ones who first sought to articulate what a modern institution like the nation-state meant for Christian social existence. More ‘thick description’ of their attempted solutions to the problem of Christianity and the state, and of the broader theoretical context for such attempts, I argue, is an invaluable part of answering H. Richard Niebuhr’s first question of ethical deliberation: “What is going on?”

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Biography¹

The writers of the lives of the ancient philosophers used, in the first place, to speak of their lineage; & they tell us that in process of time several great families accounted it their glory to be branched from such or such a *Sapiens*. Why now should that method be omitted in this *Historiologia* of our *Theologus*? Who though of plebeian descent, his renown will no doubt give brightness to his name & family, which hereafter may justly take it an honour to be kin to this worthy man, so famous, for his learning, both at home & abroad.

Our author, Ben Dillon, *Enidensis, theologus*, was born May 4, 1982 at St. Mary's Hospital in Enid, OK, first son of Mr. Matthew Dillon, who though unstudied beyond the tenth grade, and much maligned as a drunkard & knave, was much learned in *Holy Writ* & most skilled in the use of *Strong's Concordance* until his untimely passing in 2003. His beloved mother, Belinda, née Morrison, was his schoolmarm until the eighth grade, when he matriculated at the *Oklahoma Bible Academy*. Along with the high school diploma, he was justly lauded with three awards: named valedictorian of his class, the *Enid News & Eagle* Rising Star in Science, & recipient of the Solomon Award for Wisdom. At eighteen years old he went to university at *Dartmouth College* in Hanover, NH, where he received in June 2004 the *Artis Bachelor*. At Dartmouth Mr. B.D. used, in summer-time especially, to rise very early in the morning, & would stroll the grounds of the College. He did not much care for logic, yet he learned it, & thought himself a good disputant.

More recently, our author received the *Magister Artium in Religionem* from *Yale University* in New Haven, CT, in May 2006. Since then, he has published no books; he has received no awards; he belongs to no societies, save the one *veritas societas*, the *civitas Dei* into which he was baptized, & to which he hopes to arrive unsullied on the *Day of the Lord Jesus Christ*, in whose *precious blood* alone he places his trust.

¹ Dedicated to Mr. John Aubrey, Hobbes's dear friend and biographer.