

## NEITHER *BEHEMOTH* NOR *LEVIATHAN*: EXPLAINING HOBBS'S ILLIBERAL POLITICS

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### *I. Introduction*

Scholars have often found Hobbes's *Behemoth* somewhat puzzling and less worthy of close attention than his more philosophical works. After all, he describes the book as a history relating "the actions" of English politics between 1640 and 1660 to "their causes, pretensions, justice, order, artifice, and event."<sup>1</sup> The problem stems from his general view that history was neither epistemologically nor morally sound when compared with philosophical deductions. After publishing his translation of Thucydides in 1629, he had rejected the humanist ideal of relying on using history to guide current behavior, and by 1640 was arguing that "Experience concludeth nothing universally" and that knowledge of prior events cannot tell us whether "anything is to be called just or unjust, true or false." These doubts about history's utility are repeated in his later works, including even *Behemoth*, where he argues that historical records provide mere "examples of fact" and that it is impossible "to derive from them any argument of right."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Hobbes also suggests that his history might keep alive the "memory" of the frightening events of the Civil War and Interregnum in a way that would be most "instructive towards loyalty and justice." He intends *Behemoth* to be an anti-Leviathan, and his history serves as a realistic analogue of the hypothetical state of nature and the dangers entailed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 33-34, and Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 76; see also Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 261.

absence of clear authority.<sup>3</sup> His story of the Civil War is meant to provide a vivid and rhetorically powerful illustration of his earlier philosophical critiques of private judgment, divided or limited sovereignty, and legal limits on public authority. Thus we might ask if the “memory” provided by the *Behemoth* is still useful in our very different world, and if we take Hobbes to be focusing on the power and authority of sovereign states, there is a prima facie case for thinking that his history must still be instructive. After all, it is widely argued that the nation-state is threatened both from above and below. Globalization and supra-national alignments threaten the ability of nations to manage their own economies and preserve their distinctive cultures, while simultaneously and more importantly from a Hobbesian perspective, sub-state tribalism and “identity” politics lead to secessionist movements or calls for “difference”-based exemptions from various laws.

Hobbes’s philosophy and the history he narrates in *Behemoth* do provide good reasons for resisting the anarchic potential of the latter claims.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, his prescriptions for overcoming anarchy seem insufficient to our needs. Simply put, while neither a Tory nor a communitarian anti-liberal, he is still insufficiently liberal, the consequences of which include too much room for generally applicable laws and too few constraints on public authority. Hobbes’s relationship to liberalism is, of course, an old and complicated question: conservative and radical critics of liberalism treat him as a classic example of all that is wrong with that tradition and liberals respond that it is foolish to treat a prototypical absolutist as a liberal.<sup>5</sup> Others offer a more qualified view in which his focus on state authority is countered by philosophical commitments that emphasize the goodness of individual desire satisfaction so that, “without being himself a liberal, he had in

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<sup>3</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, “Epistle Dedicatory.” See Stephen Holmes, “Introduction” to Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. ix, with n. 5, on the role of the Biblical Behemoth as a symbol of the “rebellion and civil war” that could only be corrected by the creation of a Leviathan.

<sup>4</sup> Recent critics of limiting public authority in the name of difference and private judgment include Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) and Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). Neither, of course, endorses Hobbes’s suggested solutions.

<sup>5</sup> Classic attempts to associate Hobbes with liberalism include Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) and C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Contemporary liberals reflect Thomas Nagel’s view, cited in Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 199, n. 3, that describing Hobbes as a liberal indicates “a very poor grasp of the fundamentals of political theory.”

him more of the philosophy of liberalism than most of its professed defenders."<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, and as I want to emphasize, those philosophical commitments are Janus-faced and ultimately entail slamming the door on more liberal prescriptions. Specifically, I argue that his metaethical voluntarism, his deterministic and materialistic denials of free will and an incorporeal soul, and his conception of citizens as pure subjects all lead him to reject core tenets of liberalism. Without hoping for a necessary and sufficient definition of liberalism, we can stipulate a few ideals that are widely shared in that protean tradition. As Holmes argues, while Hobbes's "psychological presuppositions" – namely that we are "compulsive and impulsive" creatures in need of the taming prescriptions of rational self-interest – do foreshadow liberalism, he cannot be a liberal because he lacks "an appreciation of human dignity, individual and cultural diversity, and political democracy..." Moreover, he rejects the typical liberal demand that public decisions should be "transparent" so that citizens can evaluate "the reasons for the basic distribution of wealth, power, authority, and freedom."<sup>7</sup> Thus, Hobbes's *Behemoth* and the philosophical prescriptions it reflects are insufficient because they allow for opaque public rules. They also deny that such rules should accept, if not celebrate in Madisonian or Millian fashion, ethical and religious diversity, should protect the dignity of the individual, and should rely on democratic practices for achieving those ideals.

## II. Voluntarism, Opacity, and the Fear of Diversity

Hobbes's metaphysics and his metaethical voluntarism undermine the ideals of public transparency and the acceptance of diversity. He begins from the premise that the individual's opinions and beliefs are naturally diverse and opaque. Since there are no innate ideas, mental life is just the sensory experience of external matter that itself lacks any intelligible essence, and these sensory experiences will be quite various. Thus, while that which is perceived may be "the same; yet the diversity of our reception of it, in respect of

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), p. 283; see also Richard Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality and Chastened Politics* (Newbury Park, Ca: Sage Publications, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 3-4, and on the liberal ideal of "transparency," see Jeremy Waldron, *Liberal Rights: Collected Papers 1981-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 58.

different constitutions of body, and prejudices of opinion, gives everything a tincture of our different passions." Emphasizing the dangers posed by this diversity and assuming that actions stem from "Opinions; and in the well governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of mens Actions," he concludes that a proper sovereign must have arbitrary control over "what Opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what conducing to Peace."<sup>8</sup>

Prior theorists had relied on the capacity for reason and speech to point us beyond such opaqueness, but for Hobbes, the promise of *logos* had been dramatically oversold. Reason allows us to add and subtract names into causal propositions, which with proper definitions and deductions can yield some certainties, but it cannot completely transcend the arbitrary nature of its matter. The problem is especially acute when we consider the use of typical ethical concepts. In considering actions or policies that "please and displease us," hopes for transparency vanish in the face of "*inconstant* signification" following from the "nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker." Famously then, Hobbes roots the "Vertues, and Vices," and the use of terms like "Good, Evill, and Contemptible" in the desires and will of individuals. Given this voluntarism, "such names can never be true grounds of any ratiocination" because they are always relative "to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill" in the nature of sensed objects.<sup>9</sup>

In thus undermining ideals of an objective and teleological "*Summum Bonum*" that had justified pre-liberal perfectionisms,<sup>10</sup> Hobbes creates an opening to more modest views of the purpose of politics and the acceptance of pluralistic conceptions of the good. However, the radical nature of his skepticism bars him from following through on this liberal move. Since nature is a normative void and reason is merely instrumental, moral argument cannot be a search for transparency regarding things that are independent of the will. Instead, if "Haeresie" is just an opinion thought to be obnoxious

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<sup>8</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 233, 109; see also Thomas Hobbes, *De Homine*, trans. Charles Wood, T.S.K. Scott-Craig, and Bernard Gert in *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1972), p. 63. Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes*, p. 5, emphasizes Hobbes's portrait of the "abyss of self- and mutual unintelligibility."

<sup>9</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 109-10, 120; see also, Hobbes, *De Homine*, p. 47, and Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 160. For efforts to root Hobbes's skepticism in the contexts of, respectively, medieval nominalism and voluntarism, the "rhetorical culture of Renaissance humanism," and sixteenth century skepticism, see Oakeshott, *Rationalism In Politics*, esp. pp. 237-38, Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3, and Richard Tuck, "Introduction" to Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

and “Tyranny” is simply monarchy “misliked,” then such prescriptive language is really aimed at manipulating others to accept and act on our evaluations. Tracking the truth of such evaluations is baseless, and “PERSUASION” is typically less about helping those being criticized than an effort “at getting opinion from passion” in order to further the speaker’s purposes.<sup>11</sup>

If widely understood, these facts might yield the conclusion that religious and ethical disputes are not real disagreements: if I truly report that X is good according to my desires and you truly report that you regard X as bad, then there is no real conflict or inconsistency. For Hobbes, however, most people cling to the mistaken belief that ethical terms do refer to an external world, allowing them to rationalize manipulations as efforts to uncover the truth. As Tuck argues, Hobbes thinks language “takes on a false realism” because it reports the illusion that the “wholly subjective experience” of “vision” is of an independent reality.<sup>12</sup> Combining this illusion with the general inclination to pursue power, including especially the “Honour” that Hobbes defines as “to agree with in opinion,”<sup>13</sup> ethical and religious differences must inevitably turn into interminable and desperate battles. While some might naturally be “at ease within modest bounds” and simply agree to disagree, the empirical incidence of such persons is low, and even they must act to coerce and manipulate out of “Anticipation” with regard to their material and normative interests.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while Milton might “rejoyce at” diversity and hope that “generous prudence, a little forbearance of one another, and som grain of charity” would allow “brotherly” relations among disagreeing parties,<sup>15</sup> Hobbes sees no possibility of simply living with religious and ethical diversity.

Claims for liberty of “conscience” and “actions” regarding “transcendent interests” in religion, justice, and legitimacy must founder because individuals will not stop there. Instead, they inevitably seek to impose their judgments, inevitably want not just liberty of action, but also “a farther liberty of persuading others to their opinions; nor that only for every man desireth, that the sovereign authority should admit no other opinions to be main-

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<sup>11</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 165, 240, and Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, p. 76. See Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes*, p. 68, n. 16, celebrating Hobbes’s opposition to moralizing “shame” cultures.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Tuck, “Hobbes’s Moral Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

<sup>15</sup> John Milton, *Areopagitica and Other Political Writings of John Milton* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), p. 41.

tained but such as he himself holdeth.”<sup>16</sup> In *Behemoth*, he argues that such desires were a central cause of the civil war and casts blame widely. However, whether Catholics, Independents, or those who hated monarchy, they all abandoned their interest in self-preservation and peaceful coexistence in the name of getting others to believe as they did. In this, they mirrored Hobbes’s problem with Presbyterians: “To believe in Christ is nothing with them, unless you believe as they bid you. Charity is nothing with them, unless it be charity and liberality to them, and partaking with them in faction.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus Hobbes’s extreme voluntarism and his emphasis on the prideful character of moral argument lead him to conclude that a sound politics must annul normative diversity and its ruinous consequences. The solution requires giving an artificial sovereign the authority to settle prescriptive meanings. Since there must be “a common measure,” and since “right reason is not existent, the reason of some man, or men, must supply the place thereof...”<sup>18</sup> In rejecting the ethical realism of Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes rejects the idea that normative conflict can be resolved by discoveries regarding an external world, but he mirrors their belief that practical reason and the correct means of calculation can yield monistic unity.<sup>19</sup> His own “science” of ethics, understood as the study of man as a body in “NATURAL PHILOSOPHY,” seeks to *explain* opinions of right and wrong as deductions from external and internal motion. From this starting point, the synthetic method explains just why there is irresolvable normative diversity, just why in taking “men insofar as they are men,” there will naturally be “Many men, many different rules for vice and virtue.” However, since we can act creatively on nature, there are also artificial bodies such as the state, the study of which is “POLITIQUE, and CIVILL PHILOSOPHY.” With this, even those without metaphysical knowledge can work backwards by analyzing their experience with normative diversity to conclude with the need for a sovereign. Either way, ethical and political “science” demonstrates that natural diversity can and ought to be transcended, that what is true of natural persons is not true of “citizens” who are “obliged” to follow a sovereign’s “common standard for virtues and vices.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, p. 154; on the role of “transcendent interests” in Hobbes’s political philosophy, see S. A. Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes’s “Leviathan”: The Power of Mind Over Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 40, 44, 271.

<sup>17</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 16, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, pp. 180-81.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd, *Ideals As Interests*, pp. 278-9; see also David Johnston, “Plato, Hobbes, and the Science of Practical Reasoning,” and Sheldon Wolin, “Hobbes and the Culture of Despotism,” both in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary Dietz (Lawrence, Ks.: University Press of Kansas, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 149, and Hobbes, *De Homine*, pp. 68-69.

Acting on this knowledge requires acknowledging the inherent dangers of pride and diversity and recognizing the non-relativistic goodness of the desire to stay alive. For Hobbes, every man “shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death.”<sup>21</sup> As Holmes emphasizes, Hobbes is well aware that various beliefs have led men to ignore this in the name of religious martyrdom, the risks of dueling, and other imprudent behavior. However, even the imprudent recognize that others’ desires to stay alive are blameless. Since “necessity of nature” leads men to avoid death, “it is not against reason that a man does all he can to preserve his own body and limbs...And that which is not against reason, men call RIGHT, or *jus*.” This natural right to preserve oneself entails a correlative right to the means to that end and, thus, it is also right “for a man, to... do whatsoever action is necessary for the preservation of his body.”<sup>22</sup>

Since humans are free and equal, no one can legitimately claim any natural moral or political authority. Thus in “meer Nature” self preservation hangs on individual judgments and “*every private man is Judge of Good and Evil actions.*”<sup>23</sup> When desire-based judgments come into conflict, men can neither ignore them nor assume that there is some rational truth of the matter. Resolving such conflicts by violence and coercion is not by nature morally wrong, but fighting it out is risky. Thus, in both hypothetical states of nature and countries marred by excessive private judgment, the solution is to understand that peace and order are impossible unless this right is abandoned. When “no one mans Reason, nor the Reason of any one number of men” can provide certainty and agreement, “the parties must by their own accord, set up for right Reason the Reason of some Arbitrator, or Judge, to whose sentence they will both stand.” The problems of normative diversity can be solved, then, only if individuals prescind from such conflicts, a move which liberals have typically suggested requires public neutrality in order to let individuals resolve such questions for themselves. Hobbes, however, requires subjects to abandon totally the right of private judgment and act as if they had said with others, I “*give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men,*” so a sovereign can “reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will.”<sup>24</sup>

Diversity can then only be overcome by annulling it and filling ethical

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, in *Man and Citizen*, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, pp. 78-79. Holmes, *Passions and Constraint*, ch. 3, emphasizes the extent to which Hobbes treats self-interest as a prescriptive fix for human irrationality rather than an empirical generalization regarding human motivation.

<sup>23</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 365.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 227.

space with “one Will,” that is, the sovereign’s commands. While subjects covenant away their right of private judgment, the sovereign retains this natural right to judge and use all available powers to preserve its authority and subjects’ lives. Sovereign power must be “no less absolute...than before commonwealth every man was absolute in himself to do, or not to do, what he thought good.” Famously then, Hobbes’s sovereign is given authority that is irrevocable, indivisible, and (nearly) absolute regarding questions of “*Propriety*,” “*Lawes of Honour*,” and “what Opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what conducing to Peace,” including the power to prescribe what can be expressed or published. This power extends to questions of faith: since “both State, and Church are the same men,” the sovereign’s judgment must cover “all causes, as well Ecclesiasticall, as Civill.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, since average citizens get their political opinions from “their immediate leaders,” his sovereign also has the power to reform university curriculum so that “lasting peace” may emerge as commoners are taught “a love of obedience by preachers and gentlemen that imbibe good principles in their youth at the Universities.”<sup>26</sup>

In suggesting that we can overcome normative diversity by the creation of, and the creations of, an absolute and unitary will, Hobbes relies on a number of dubious mid-level arguments. There is slippery slope pessimism: “diversity of opinion” must yield “disputation, breach of charity, disobedience, and at last rebellion,” and any efforts at limiting or dividing sovereign power must also end in war.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, there are absurdly optimistic claims about the coincidence of interests between sovereigns and subjects and about the coincidence of truth and peace, in which “Doctrine repugnant to Peace, can no more be True, than Peace and Concord can be against the Law of Nature.”<sup>28</sup> The latter view may be a rhetorical gambit since he acknowledges elsewhere that there are truths that are not “fit to be preached,”<sup>29</sup> but his most general truth is that peace and its requisite uniformity of belief are overriding goods.

Hobbes qualifies his absolutism in ways that others have emphasized in order to liberalize his doctrine. To begin with, no man can covenant away the right of self-defense or the right not to incriminate himself. Moreover, one’s right of private judgment covers only issues touching “the preservation of his

<sup>25</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, p. 114, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 233-35, 575-76.

<sup>26</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 39, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 52, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 367-68.

<sup>28</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 388, 233; see also Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 24; see also Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 703, on the sovereign’s authority to punish even those who teach “true Philosophy.”



own Nature," which may allow diversity on less fundamental questions.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a prudent Hobbesian sovereign will require obedience only in limited areas, leaving subjects free in "those things, which...the Sovereign hath praetermitted," and the sovereign's laws can be evaluated in terms of whether they are "Needfull, for the Good of the People, and withall Perspicuous."<sup>31</sup> Finally, he appears to qualify his absolutism by arguing that faith and beliefs are independent of "Compulsion, or Commandement" so sovereigns may regulate external actions but "cannot oblige men to beleieve." This linkage of inner conviction and faith allows him at least once to suggest that religious toleration might be the best policy. In *Leviathan*, he argues that Englishmen in 1650 had been "reduced to the Independency of the Primitive Christians." If "without contention," this independence is "perhaps the best" because there should be "no Power over the Consciences of men, but of the Word itselfe..."<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, Hobbes dropped the praise of independence from the Latin translation of *Leviathan*, and its earlier inclusion may have had to do more with intra-royalist disputes than any principled opposition to public control of religion.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, except for the right to resist overt attempts on one's life, none of his other qualifications yields more than contingent room for diversity. Natural men may give up the right to judge only matters relating to peace, but the sovereign still decides what those matters are. Religious toleration may be "best," but only if "without contention," and who but the sovereign will make that judgment? Hobbes's skepticism and his denial that beliefs can be compelled do hint at liberal ideals by undermining more absolutist or perfectionist claims for uniformity,<sup>34</sup> but his overriding fear of diversity requires a sovereign who can arbitrarily regulate and censor. There are pragmatic limits to this: in general, suppressing ideas "does but unite and exasperate" true believers, a problem he illustrates by tracing the Civil War to efforts at "imposing on the Scots...our book of Common-

<sup>30</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 268-69, 189. Richard Tuck, "Hobbes and Locke on Toleration," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, p. 165, emphasizes the potential limits on sovereign authority in the limited scope of man's natural right; for a challenge to any such liberalizing interpretations, see Charles Tarlton, "The Despotical Doctrine of Hobbes, Part I: The Liberalization of *Leviathan*," and Tarlton, "The Despotical Doctrine of Hobbes, Part II: Aspects of the Textual Substructure of Tyranny in *Leviathan*," *History of Political Thought* 32-33 (Winter 2001/Spring 2002): 587-618, 61-89.

<sup>31</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 264, 388.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 526, 591, 711.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Tuck, "Hobbes and Locke on Toleration," p. 164, and Johann Sommerville, "Lofty Science and Local Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Richard Tuck, "Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century," and Alan Ryan, "A More Tolerant Hobbes?" both in *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

prayer.”<sup>35</sup> However, the same skepticism that denies a principled case for perfectionist uniformity undermines any principled case for toleration, and Hobbes is simply incapable of accepting, let alone celebrating, the religious and ethical diversity that marks our contemporary scene.

### III. Hobbes and the Denial of Individual Dignity

Hobbes’s solution to the problems of diversity assumes that individuals are rational enough to transform their natural condition into a peaceful artifice. However, in jointly creating a sovereign and self-generated obligations to obey, they alienate their future freedom and creativity by becoming artificially bound subjects. A “common Representer” requires “Authority without stint,” and since each individual “is Author of all the Sovereigne doth,” none can complain about sovereigns doing injustice or injury without self-contradiction. Famously, the sovereign has no analogous obligation to stick to his own self-willed rules since he may arbitrarily “free himselfe from that subjection, by repealing those Lawes that trouble him, and making of new.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, “Authority without stint” rests on a fundamental inequality in which one and only one agent is free to judge her own case. Moreover, since subjects abandon their right of private judgment, the sovereign is free to prescribe or proscribe both other- and purely self-regarding preferences on topics of fundamental interest to the individual. These aspects of Hobbes’s theory violate the inherent equal worth of each person and illustrate the denial of dignity involved in allowing some to “so tamper and ‘get at’ others that the others do their will without knowing what they are doing; and in this lose their status as free human beings.”<sup>37</sup>

In treating individuals as naturally free and equal, Hobbes hints at the ideal of dignity. He denies that we can rank human worth according to ascriptive bloodlines or the realization of a particular *telos*. Moreover, his appeal to self-interest as an appropriate counter to the dangers of passion is “a profoundly egalitarian and democratic idea. Only a few have hereditary privileges, but everyone has interests.”<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, however, his descriptive psychology and rigid determinism circumscribe freedom and equality in ways that are inconsistent with human dignity and that deny any special costs to

<sup>35</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 62, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 221, 232, 313.

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “On Human Dignity,” *New Republic*, Jan. 28, 2002, p. 24. For a contemporary’s concerns that absolutism undermined human dignity, see Milton, *Areopagitica*, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> Holmes, *Passions and Constraint*, pp. 63, 287, n. 18.

subordinating individual judgment to sovereign control. In fact, the real problem is the prideful failure to acknowledge that the capacity to judge is the source of problems, not an intrinsic value to be weighed against efforts to crush pride and achieve peace. Hobbesian equality thus reduces to the fact that humans are equally matter in motion, equally subject to desires, equally subject to violent death, and roughly equal in the ability to kill. Moreover, Hobbesian freedom refers only to whether, as "*Bodies*," individuals confront "external Impediments" to "motion," a freedom that applies as well to "Irrationall and Inanimate creatures." Thus the claim that individuals deserve certain treatment because they are equally capable of free agency or "dominion" over appetites rests on "confused and empty words."<sup>39</sup>

Efforts to root intrinsic human dignity in free will fail because they miss deterministic necessity. Hobbes's ontological materialism means that the knowable "*Universe*" is "Corporeal, that is to say, Body," and "that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe..."<sup>40</sup> In this universe, there are no non-corporeal but intelligible essences and there are no spontaneous or self-generated movements. His rigorous determinism treats every bit of human behavior as the necessary result of a chain of prior causes and bodily motions. The "*entire cause*" of rocks falling, animals procreating, or human action is just the sum "of all the accidents both of the agents...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." To exempt humans from these causal chains by appealing to a special power of contingent action for the sake of self-determined purposes is verbal nonsense. "*Contingents*" are simply events whose causes we do not yet "perceive," and while Aristotle's "*final cause*," or acting for the sake of self-chosen ends, may play some role in explaining human behavior, that behavior is ultimately reducible to an "efficient cause."<sup>41</sup>

Deluded by appearances and ignorance, human beings had been led to claim a special status for themselves when compared to inanimate nature, animals, and other humans suffering various compulsions and mental disorders. This self-deception had been abetted by power-hungry clerics using notions of free will to relieve God of any guilt for damning those who acted from necessity and to induce the sort of individual guilt that could only be assuaged by consultations with the clergy.<sup>42</sup> In countering such views, Hobbes

<sup>39</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 261-62, and *Hobbes and Bramhall*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>40</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 689.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, 11 vols. (London: 1839), Vol. I, pp. 121-22, 130-32.

<sup>42</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 42; see also Holmes, "Introduction," p. xii, n. 13.

denies that the will is a separate mental faculty and that it, rather than the actions that follow from it, can be either free or unfree. Instead, the will is a determined "Act," explicable as an effect of the motions of external objects that cause sensory impressions in the actor, which then cause internal motions called desires and inclinations. The appearance of inner reflection and free choice simply masks the necessity of what we finally do, and "In *Deliberation*, the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhaering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that wee call the WILL."<sup>43</sup> The will, then, is whatever desire for or against something is strongest at the time of final decision, and absent any special power to control those desires, it cannot yield any special status for those who experience them. Experience and desires "are not effects of our Will, but our Will of them," and thus whether "children, fools, brute beasts," or normally functioning adults, there is only the liberty to "do if I will; but to say I can will if I will, I take to be an absurd speech."<sup>44</sup>

In reducing the will to necessary appetites or aversions, Hobbes opens himself to the charge that he impoverishes the nature of humanity and moral life. Bishop Bramhall was only among the first to argue that Hobbes's reduction of "reasonable will" to "sensitive appetite" dishonors humanity by treating the individual as "a tennis-ball, to be tossed to and fro by the rackets of the second causes."<sup>45</sup> Charged with undermining moral reflection and responsibility, Hobbes responds with a version of compatibilism in which, if defined correctly, "*Liberty and Necessity* are consistent." As bodies, we can be free or unfree to act on desires, but those desires and reflection on them are simply part of the determined universe. Absent external impediments or the "Artificial Chains" of the law, men's voluntary actions "(because they proceed from their will) proceed from *liberty*." At the same time, all acts and inclinations are preceded by a cause, "and that from another cause, which causes in a continuall chaine (whose first link in the hand of God the first of all causes) proceed from *necessity*."<sup>46</sup>

Hobbes claims that his determinism is consistent not only with liberty, but also with notions of individual responsibility. To complain that determinism renders counsel and persuasion useless assumes that "secondary" causes are limited to external events, but for Hobbes internal reflection is also a fundamental part of the causal "chaine." When a particular choice is de-

<sup>43</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 127. Jürgen Overhoff, *Hobbes's Theory of the Will: Ideological Reasons and Historical Circumstances* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 11, demonstrates the consistency of Hobbes's theory of volition throughout his various writings.

<sup>44</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 410, and *Hobbes and Bramhall*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>45</sup> *Hobbes and Bramhall*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>46</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 263.

terminated, it is also determined “for what cause it shall be chosen, which cause, for the most part, is deliberation or consultation,” and internal opinions about the goodness or badness of an action, are then, if not “the whole cause,” at least analogous to “the last feather” that breaks “a horse’s back.”<sup>47</sup> Denying that the will can control choice does not then mean that individuals have no capacity or responsibility to work their way to better opinions and choices. This process can not be cashed out in terms of the autonomous formation of “second” order desires aimed at checking immediate desires. Nor can it be seen in terms of traditional notions of *akrasia* such as Ovid’s portrait of Medea as saying “I see and approve the better, but follow the worse.” For Hobbes, that saying, while “pretty” enough, is “not true,” and despite reasons for not killing her children, “the last dictate of her judgment was that the present revenge on her husband outweighed them all, and thereupon the wicked action necessarily followed.” However, while the will cannot be described as either free or unfree or strong or weak, as the last appetite it can still be good or “wicked,” prudent or imprudent, and “Fools and madmen manifestly deliberate no less than the wisest men, though they make not so good a choice...”<sup>48</sup>

Punishing a determined but poor choice poses no particular problems given Hobbes’s pure deterrence theory of law. Since the “intention” of the law is not to “grieve the delinquent for” past acts, but rather to “make him and others just that else would not be so,” punishments are warranted by “the good to come.” The justice of punishment does not depend on whether an illegal action was produced by necessity, *akrasia*, or full free will. Instead, it depends purely on whether the behavior is “noxious,” and that judgment depends on the act’s effects on others’ desires. Praiseworthy actions are just those that are praised, blameworthy actions are just those that are blamed, and “Things may be therefore necessary and yet praiseworthy, as also necessary and yet dispraised.” To say a thing is good is just to say that it is “as I would wish, or as another would have it, or according to the will of the state...” Thus the law and its punishments, as well as other forms of “consultation,” are not “vain” because they enter the causal “chaine” to “make and conform the will to good or evil.”<sup>49</sup>

Hobbes undermines appeals to dignity not only by denying free will, but also by denying the existence of an incorporeal and immortal soul. His con-

<sup>47</sup> *Hobbes and Bramhall*, pp. 26, 20-21.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35, 19.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26; cf. the necessarily strained case for Hobbesian autonomy in David Van Mill, *Liberty, Rationality, and Agency in Hobbes’s “Leviathan”* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

temporaries might treat the soul as a distinctive element of personhood and a moral barrier against authoritarianism. As the purely internal site for the clash of good and evil and the appearance of Christ's grace, the soul transcended civil authority, and for some antinomians, also served as a barrier to clerical authority.<sup>50</sup> Hobbes, however, consistently treats the soul as a corporeal element of the determined universe: the fact that everything in the "Universe" is "Body" does not mean that "Spirits are *nothing*: for they have dimensions, and are therefore really *Bodies*; though that name in common Speech be given to such Bodies onely, as are visible, or palpable."<sup>51</sup> With regard to questions about the soul's immortality, his early view was that Christian faith, rather than any "natural evidence," requires the belief that "the soul of man is...immortal." By 1650 though, he had moved to the "mortalist" view that Biblical references to the soul signified either "the breath of life" by which God gave "vitall motion," or more generally "a mans intention, mind, or disposition."<sup>52</sup> Thus the claim that the soul was "Eternal, and a living Creature independent [of] the body" is "not apparent in Scripture," and the proper use of the term is limited to "either the Life, or the living Creature; and the Body and Soule jointly, the *Body alive*."<sup>53</sup>

As others have made clear, Hobbes's "mortalism" was not entirely novel, but his views in the *Leviathan* were put forth in a tendentious style that was bound to offend. His mockery of deep Christian verities suggests that he was interested in more than the logical consistency of his materialism and his views on the soul and its afterlife. Earlier, he had finessed the problem by distinguishing what was philosophically demonstrable from what could be left to faith, but the Civil War had shown the weaknesses in that strategy, and in *Leviathan* his worries about the "two swords/two masters" problem had become more acute. Since acknowledging sovereign power to reward and punish is the only way citizens can avoid the state of nature, no one should be able to claim powers more important than control over corporeal life and death. All the sovereign's powers would be bootless if religious authorities could continue to claim "a power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., David Parnham, "Politics Spun Out of Theology and Prophesy: Sir Henry Vane on the Spiritual Environment of Public Power," *History of Political Thought* 22 (Spring 2001): 53-83, esp. 69-77.

<sup>51</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 689; see Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, p. 66, for a more tentative case in which Scripture "seemeth" to favor those "who hold angels and spirits for corporeal."

<sup>52</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, p. 66, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 440, 464. David Johnston, "Hobbes's Mortalism," *History of Political Thought* 10 (Winter 1989): 647-663, emphasizes and tries to explain Hobbes's change of mind on this issue.

<sup>53</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 484, 637-38.

greater punishments, than Death," and the success of Hobbes's prescriptions required him to cast doubt on traditional views of the soul's afterlife.<sup>54</sup>

In denying free will and the immortal, immaterial soul, Hobbes undermines appeals to individual dignity. Absent such notions, there is no room for subjects to challenge sovereign judgments on the grounds of the intrinsic value of the individual. In fact, there may be no such value since he defines "DIGNITY" as simply the "publique worth of a man, which is the Value set on him by the Common-wealth." The "Value or WORTH of a man" is the "Price" others would pay "for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute" but relative to others' judgments.<sup>55</sup> Claims to the contrary had often been buttressed by linking free will or an immortal soul to a special capacity called "conscience" that enabled human beings to grasp moral truths. This had led to the doctrine, "repugnant to Civill society...that *whatsoever a man does against his Conscience, is Sinne.*" Etymologically, Hobbes argues, "conscience" refers to what could be known together, but over time it had come to be used metaphorically to turn "secret facts, and secret thoughts" into constraints on authority. Since "Conscience" just means "Judgement," the simple conclusion should be that by nature men might act on their conscientious judgments, but in civil society "the Law is the publique Conscience."<sup>56</sup>

Having denied the intrinsic dignity of persons, Hobbes too often verges on treating individuals as fungible means to the agent-neutral good of peace. Human beings are like stones, not only in shunning death "no less than that whereby a stone moves downward," but also in being the building blocks of a civil "Aedifice." Those who shun the gravitational force of peace and the absolutist means to it are, like irregular stones which "hindereth the building," to be "cast away as unprofitable, and troublesome." Thus dissenters from either an original covenant or a sitting sovereign's judgment have no standing and are "left in the condition of warre" where they "might without injustice be destroyed by any man whatsoever."<sup>57</sup> Some of his scarier reasoning shows just how little standing the individual has. For example, in *Behemoth*, Hobbes considers the ancient Ethiopian practice of kings committing suicide when priests informed them that the gods had decreed their death. While noting that it was clearly "cruel," he nonetheless praises King Ergamenes for ending

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 478; see Johnston, "Hobbes's Mortalism," and Overhoff, *Hobbes's Theory of the Will*, esp. pp. 193-96, for discussions of the political motivation behind Hobbes's adoption of "mortalism."

<sup>55</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 151-52; see also Hobbes, *De Cive*, p. 295, where the "honour" of a man is in the "honourer."

<sup>56</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 132, 365-66.

<sup>57</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, p. 115, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 209, 232.

this “superstition” by killing “*all the priests.*” He follows this with the counterfactual suggestion that Charles I might have saved himself and England’s peace if he had acted preemptively to kill all the “seditious ministers” in England. It would have been a “great massacre,” but the killing of perhaps “1000” such ministers would have been offset by the good of saving the “100,000” lives ultimately lost in the Civil War.<sup>58</sup>

Since a covenant “not to defend my selfe from force, by force, is always voyd,” the religious leaders in his examples could legitimately resist those who came to kill them.<sup>59</sup> But, alternatively, neither Ergamenes nor Charles I would be wrong to engage in the actual or proposed murders. This is because Hobbes’s “RIGHT OF NATURE” establishes first-person liberties, but does so without any duties to (or limits on) second-parties. The individual’s right to do “any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason” will preserve his life entails a right to all possible means to that end, including a right “even to one anothers body.” While subjects ought to yield this right until they are directly threatened, the sovereign retains it wholly and completely, and a sovereign judgment that peace requires the death of this or that person can not be countered by a natural duty not to use others as means. Just as there is no natural right to property, but only the power to “getteth it, and keep it by force,” there is no natural self-ownership or intrinsic individual dignity that might check such judgments.<sup>60</sup>

Hobbes extends this argument to the opinions that lie behind willed actions. Just as the individual can’t appeal to bodily self-ownership to resist being used as a means to peace, neither does she own her mental life in any fashion that might morally constrain sovereign efforts to shape and control it. Pragmatically, “inward *thought*, and *beleef*” are of a sort “which humane Governours can take no notice of,” and being “invisible,” faith and mental life are “consequently exempted from all humane jurisdiction.” As even Ryan admits, however, this is a matter of “technique not principle,” and if techniques for mind control were discovered, Hobbes has no reason beyond “expediency” for not using them. His psychology means that, while thoughts and beliefs can’t be directly determined, if they could be it would be no great loss since the individual doesn’t determine or control them anyway.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>59</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 192, 199.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90, 296.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 500-1, 550, and Alan Ryan, “Hobbes, Toleration, and the Inner Life,” in *The Nature of Political Theory*, ed. David Miller and Larry Siedentop (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 217. Tarlton, “The Despotical Doctrine, Part II,” p. 70, argues that for Hobbes, men’s “inner thoughts” were “not within any liberty of their own to control in the first place.”



Hobbes's sovereign, then, has the authority to use the subjects' bodies and minds. Since "dignity" is just others' estimation of individual worth, and since sovereigns control public estimation, the only thing that matters is the sovereign's judgment regarding a subject's contribution to peace. Of course it will almost always be better to eschew Ergamines's murderous means in favor of efforts to shape the subjects' sensory experience and mental lives, and a prudent sovereign will take the steps discussed in section II in order to control what subjects hear, read, and see in order to cause more irenic opinions and wills. Such efforts certainly verge on the manipulation of things rather than the persuasion of persons, but Hobbes's determinism collapses that distinction and allows him to treat "manipulation" as just disliked efforts at causing particular wills. Moreover, while we may talk about being compelled out of fear, "Feare and Liberty are consistent." Throwing "goods into the sea for *feare* the ship should sink" or obeying "for *feare* of the law" are actions "which the doers had *liberty* to omit" despite very unpalatable alternatives.<sup>62</sup> Thus manipulation of subjects' opinions poses no real threat to liberty, and Hobbes seems indifferent regarding whether fear, manipulation, or persuasion frames the more irenic opinions. There is nothing in (or about) the subject that ought to restrain the choice among such methods, and as long as subjects contribute to peace, Hobbes's psychology precludes worries about whether such actions stem from individual judgments. If a subject comes to believe the opinions imposed by the sovereign, so much the better, but even if she conforms only from fear of punishment, her actions will still be free, correct, and virtuous.

In this, Hobbes undermines any worries about whether overt behavior is consistent with inner conviction and thus undermines concerns about the denial of individual integrity. His primary concern is to refute those like Milton, who held that religious practice or other actions were sinful and hypocritical "if not voluntary."<sup>63</sup> He acknowledges the problem of what we might call self-benefiting hypocrisy, and in fact blames much of the civil war on those whose public pronouncements masked secret and less noble motives. And at least once, he acknowledges the problem for those, such as Charles I's wife, who might be forced to the hypocrisy of subordinating authentic religious beliefs to satisfy others' desires.<sup>64</sup> However, his more typical approach draws on his conception of voluntary and involuntary actions in order to treat the latter as an empty cell. While freedom is consistent with the fear of force, behavior that results from actual external physical force is neither free

<sup>62</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 262-63; see also *Hobbes and Bramhall*, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Milton, *Aeropagitica*, p. 84.

<sup>64</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 1, 61.

nor voluntary. If "a man by force, seizing on another man's limbs, moves them as himself, not as the other man pleases," then the resulting movement is the action and the responsibility "of him that uses the force." In the *Leviathan*, he pushes this argument past physical manipulation to include the fear of punishment. With regard to questions of faith (and individual integrity), sovereigns may impose a particular "Doctrine" that obliges subjects to actions "such as they would not otherwise do," but those actions "done in obedience" and "without the inward approbation, are the actions of the Sovereign, and not of the Subject."<sup>65</sup>

While this properly mitigates moral blame of those who are coerced to act against their real beliefs, it does so at the cost of subjects' subjective concerns for their own integrity and salvation. In confining accusations of "Hypocrisy" to instances where a subject's "behaviour bee contrary to the law of his Sovereign," Hobbes rules out both Socratic claims that we should do no wrong and the more liberal view that there are at least some wrongs besides death that we ought not suffer. He can waive aside such concerns because he treats almost all matters of religious faith and practice as indifferent. Since salvation requires only "two Vertues, *Faith in Christ*, and *Obedience to Laws*,"<sup>66</sup> he can take other questions regarding faith (or a secular good life) off the table and treat them as of no great significance. From God's viewpoint, Hobbes may or may not be correct here, but from the individual's point of view, even such indifferent questions are of supreme importance. Given that, liberals have typically left such matters to the individual's judgment so that she can be responsible for the outcome. But Hobbes's denial of individual dignity means that such considerations pale in the face of threats to peace and self-preservation. Thus, even for Christians who are commanded to deny faith in Christ, his only recommendation is either martyrdom or a false swearing in which, if the subject believes internally, he will be forgiven by God if he obeys the law because "that action is not his, but his Sovereigns." Whatever the latter hypocrisy might cost the subject with regard to integrity or dignity, it does not threaten salvation or bodily death, and in such cases, Hobbes requires that we neither disobey nor forcibly depose even "Infidell, or Haereticall Kings."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Hobbes and Bramhall, pp. 78-79, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 591; see also Hobbes, *De Cive*, p. 306.

<sup>66</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 541, 610.

<sup>67</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, 384, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 528, 605-06. Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes*, p. 157, n. 11, notes that by the time Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*, he had limited acceptable martyrdom to those who actually knew Christ. Locke, who also regarded many sources of religious conflict as indifferent, nonetheless assumed that individuals ought to treat such matters as "the highest Obligation that lies upon mankind," and regarded proposals for false swearing as monstrous: "A sweet Religion indeed, that obliges men to dis-

#### IV. *Hobbes and Democracy*

Liberals typically argue that representative democracy is the appropriate procedure for settling public questions about diversity and equal dignity. For some, like Berlin, democracy is an essential, but ultimately instrumental, “means for protecting” more “ultimate” values. Others have argued for a more “intimate” relationship in which democracy itself expresses and is constitutive of values such as liberty, equality, and justice.<sup>68</sup> Either way, the assumption is that democracy will be better for such values than rule by aristocratic or plutocratic minorities or the whims of even a benevolent despot.

For Hobbes, however, the ultimate value is “the Peace, and Security of the people,” and he evaluates forms of government only in terms of their contingent “Convenience, or Aptitude to produce” those values. He follows Aristotle in part by arguing that public authority can be held by one, a few, or the many, but rejects the idea that regimes can be further evaluated in terms of whether they pursue a common good. Thus “*Tyranny*,” “*Oligarchy*,” and “*Anarchy*” are simply names used when rule by the one, the few, or the many is “misliked.”<sup>69</sup> In principle, any of these regimes could promote “Peace, and Security” if they were absolute and undivided. He notes early on that his preference for monarchy has not been “demonstrated, but only probably stated,” and as late as *Behemoth*, he argues that the real question is whether there is sufficient unity so that the sovereign speaks with “one voice, though there be many men.” If so, then even the many might “govern well enough, if they had honesty and wit enough.”<sup>70</sup> Just as obviously, however, and from an early date, he emphasizes the inferiority of democracy. In introducing his translation of Thucydides, he argues that the best reason for continuing to read that author’s gloomy history is his portrait of the idiocies of Athenian democracy. For Hobbes, it was obvious that Thucydides “least of all liked democracy” because of its “inconsistency” and tendency to demagoguery, and that his real preference was for “regal rule.”<sup>71</sup>

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semble, and tell Lies both to God and Man”; see John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), pp. 46-47.

<sup>68</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. lvii-lviii, 165; for an argument that there is a more “intimate” relationship between democracy and liberalism, see Amy Gutmann, “Rawls on the Relationship Between Liberalism and Democracy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 239-41.

<sup>70</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, p. 104, and Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 156.

<sup>71</sup> *Hobbes's Thucydides*, ed. Richard Schlatter (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1975), pp. 13-14.

Some aspects of Hobbes's political philosophy do point toward democracy. His emphasis on natural freedom and equality means that consent of the ruled is the only legitimate source of political authority and obligation. Moreover, the purpose of his sovereign is in some sense to be responsive to the interests, albeit very narrowly conceived, of the subjects, and at least from a God's eye view, the sovereign has a duty to procure "*the safety*" and "Contentments" of the subjects and should make sure that "Justice be equally administered to all degrees of People." Thus, while subjects have no right to judge the sovereign's performance, Ryan suggests that Hobbes's "ideal sovereign" would be "absolute in principle, but indistinguishable from a constitutional sovereign in practice."<sup>72</sup> However that may be, his sovereign is absolute and subjects have no real opportunity to hold it accountable. Moreover, while not demonstrated with geometric certainty, his personal preference is clear.

If we look to mere "examples and testimonies," we see that monarchy accords with the fact that "*one God*" rules the universe, that the "ancients" preferred the rule of one, and that the government of families is "monarchical." More importantly, reason concludes that monarchy is more likely to yield "Peace, and Security." In part this follows from Hobbes's claim that any sovereign will be a "naturall Person" as well as a public authority, which leads inevitably to conflicts between the sovereign's public duty and private interest. Monarchs are less likely to be led to ill-rule by this fact since "no King can be rich, nor glorious, nor secure" if his subjects are poor and weak, while this link between private and public good is attenuated in rule by the few or the many. Moreover, monarchy will also yield superior advice because a king need not listen to those who don't know anything and can recruit information from those who might be excluded from democratic assemblies. Kingship will also be superior since it will not suffer the "Inconstancy from Number" that leads the few and the many to reverse yesterday's decisions and to suffer internal conflicts rooted in "envy and interest." Finally, while kings may impoverish some in order to enrich a "favourite or a flatterer," the same is true of all forms of government, and monarchy will be better on this score simply because one man will have few friends while "the Favorites of an Assembly, are many."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 376, 385; Alan Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy," in *Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, p. 232.

<sup>73</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, pp. 224-25, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 241-43. Berkowitz, *Virtue*, pp. 65-67, roots the failure of Hobbes's argument for the harmony of monarchical and citizen interests in his question-begging assumption of "virtuous monarchs" and "craven aristocrats and democrats."

Democracy, on the other hand, cannot be expected to yield peace and security. Prior to the Civil War, Hobbes does suggest a certain logical/temporal priority for democracy since the choice of a sovereign must rest on "the consent of the major part," which makes rule by one, the few, or the many the result of what is "actually a democracy."<sup>74</sup> But he also argues that a democratic decision to implement the rule of the many would be a serious mistake. In the first place, a democracy must be based on deliberations in mass assemblies, and there, as with Pericles, either one or a few will be "eminent above the rest" so that the sovereign will really be either an "aristocracy" or a "monarchy" of orators. Moreover, democratic "deliberations" are incapable of delivering sound policy: the participants are by and large "unskillful" regarding complicated questions, the nature of "*eloquence*" is to aim "not at truth (except by chance), but victory," and factions will naturally emerge as "equal orators do combat with contrary opinions and speeches" so that losers hate "the conqueror and all those that were of his side." The result then is bad policy, "inconstant" and divisive legislation, and an inability to maintain necessary secrets.<sup>75</sup>

Events of the 1640s only served to confirm and heighten these early fears. Looking back after the Restoration, Hobbes argues that the mass of citizens were (and remain) either illiterate or too preoccupied with private affairs to understand politics. They "always have been, and always will be, ignorant of their duty to the public," and having little real care for the opinions that caused the Civil War, "would have taken any side for pay or plunder." This civic weakness puts average citizens under the sway of "their immediate leaders; which are either the preachers or the most potent of the gentlemen that dwell amongst them."<sup>76</sup> From at least the Elizabethan era, the "immediate leaders" had filled up the commoners' heads with "the love of democracy" and a desire for "popular government" in both church and state. While some acted simply out of "error," the "chief leaders" here were moved by "malice" and the frustrated ambition of men who found themselves ruled by those they thought "less learned" and "less wise" than themselves.<sup>77</sup>

Being "corrupted generally," the people chose these ambitious and democratically inclined men for their representatives, and if "not the greatest part" of the House of Commons, they were "by advantage of their eloquence... always able to sway the rest." Led by such men, Parliament pandered to economic interests by disputing Charles I's demands for "subsidies or other pub-

<sup>74</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, pp. 118-19; see also Hobbes, *De Cive*, p. 195.

<sup>75</sup> Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, p. 120, and Hobbes, *De Cive*, pp. 230-32.

<sup>76</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 39, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

lic payments” and brought accusations of treason against the king’s more hierarchically-minded advisors – for Hobbes, an example of the “Impudence” that “does almost all, that’s done” in democratic assemblies. Beyond being impudent, they were also hypocritical in claiming to desire only the restoration of a traditional “mixed” monarchy, while their real goal, revealed only after they had first “slain the King,” was to shift from “monarchical to democratical” government.<sup>78</sup> These democrats had successfully rationalized their ambitions by covering them in concerns for the people’s prosperity and liberty. Economically, those with ambitions that had been frustrated by monarchy could trot out the example of the Dutch republic’s success and argue that “there needed no more to grow rich, than to change... the forme of their Government.” Moreover, the availability of books from “the Antient Greeks, and Romans” strengthened democratic forces by spreading the idea that “Subjects in a Popular Common-wealth enjoy Liberty; but that in a Monarchy they are all Slaves.”<sup>79</sup>

For Hobbes, both claims are deeply confused. The first spuriously treats the form of government as the cause of economic “prosperity,” when in fact, national wealth stems “from the Obedience, and Concord of the Subjects” whether ruled by one, a few, or the many.<sup>80</sup> The second claim is, perhaps, more dangerous, and he tries to refute classical republican arguments that liberty inheres in citizens’ rights to share in creating the laws that bind them. Aristotle, Cicero, and other republicans had naively over-generalized from “the Practice of their own Common-wealths,” and contemporary readers had been gulled into thinking that these participatory rights were somehow at the core of liberty. In reality, he argues, classical “Libertie” referred only to the freedom of a particular community from external control and was not “the Libertie of particular men; but the Libertie of the Common-wealth” to make its own decisions. The gates of “*Luca*” may be inscribed with the word “LIBERTAS,” but that is not to say that the individual “has more Libertie, or Immunitie from the service of the Commonwealth there, than in *Constantinople*.” Whatever the form of sovereignty, “the Freedome is still the same,” and it consists simply in the ability to do “those things, which in regulating their actions, the Sovereign hath praetermitted.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, when the Rump Parliament changed England to a “*Commonwealth and Free-State*,” it did not mean

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, 68-69, 26-27.

<sup>79</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 368-69.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380. Hobbes surely underestimates the connection between economic growth and the presence of either particular beliefs favoring productive activity or political/legal rules conducive to property rights and lower transaction costs; see, e.g., Robert Skidelsky, “The Mystery of Growth,” *New York Review of Books* 50 (March 13, 2003): pp. 28-31.

<sup>81</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 264-67.

that the people were “no longer subject to law,” but only that Parliament would now be setting the laws. Absent the supposed linkage between individual liberty and democratic participation, prudent subjects should know that a prudent monarch, and even an imprudent tyrant, will be better for liberty since “no tyrant was ever so cruel as a popular assembly.”<sup>82</sup>

Thus it makes no difference to Hobbes whether democracy is justified by appeals to the “positive” liberty of fulfilling the human *telos* or as a means of holding authorities accountable for the scope of the subjects’ “negative” liberties. The former view rests on bad metaphysics, and the latter claim is historically, if not logically, mistaken in ignoring evidence that mixed or fully democratic sovereigns must collapse into internal faction and civil war. If not inflamed by erroneous opinions based on old books and foreign examples, he argues, “it is the desire of most men to bear rule.”<sup>83</sup> And if taught more correct, Hobbesian opinions, they would put aside foolish desires for a democratic voice in public authority. Doing so would not only promote “Peace, and Security,” but would also eliminate a significant source of personal discontent. That is, for Hobbes, while democracy seems to give more citizens a chance “to show their wisdom, knowledge, and eloquence,” its actual result is a higher probability of individual shame:

to see his opinion, whom we scorn, preferred before ours; to have our wisdom undervalued before our own faces; by an uncertain trial of a little vain-glory, to undergo most certain enmities...to hate and to be hated, by reason of the disagreement of opinions...these I say are grievances.

Given the zero-sum nature of these public struggles for honor, “there is no reason why every man should not naturally mind his *own private*, than the *public business*” unless driven by the perverse ambition to “gain the reputation of being ingenious and wise.”<sup>84</sup>

Ultimately then, Hobbes sees nothing but imprudence and self-defeating vanity in claims that citizens should have both the opportunity for public action and the freedom to decide how much energy to devote to public and private business. Rightly rejecting classical republican claims that full human flourishing requires an active focus on public business, he goes too far in the other direction by making the role of subject fully constitutive of citizenship.

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<sup>82</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 164, 23.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>84</sup> Hobbes, *De Cive*, pp. 229-32; Tuck, “Introduction,” p. xiii, emphasizes the influence on Hobbes of Renaissance skeptics, who suggested “a retreat into privacy and quiescence” for private citizens.

For Hobbes, no Rawlsian arguments for a democratic space in which some might find their chief good in public action and others must participate in order to express or protect justice can be instantiated without falling into dispute and decay. Instead, his critique of democracy reflects the view that “all actions and habits are to be esteemed good or evil by their causes and usefulness in reference to the commonwealth,” and the well performance of Hobbesian citizenship is “comprehended wholly in obedience to the laws of the commonwealth.” This is not just individual “prudence,” but is also “the virtue of a subject,” and “To obey the laws, is justice and equity, which is the law of nature...”<sup>85</sup>

This appeal to “virtue” cuts against pure “rational choice” interpretations of Hobbes and indicates an awareness that his politics could not work if there were nothing but sovereign force and subjects’ self-interest. Rejecting a universal “Summum Bonum” does not mean that he rejects the need for internalized ethical restraints, and substituting self-preservation for the higher ends of classical theory allows him to preserve the traditional functional form of virtue talk by treating as virtues those traits and dispositions that are good means to self-preservation. With this, we can understand his otherwise startling claim that in a state of nature, “the two Cardinall vertues” are “Force, and Fraud,” since in nature’s ethical vacuum those ethically dubious qualities are good means to self-preservation. Of course, since human beings are roughly equal in their capacity to deal death, exercising those “vertues” is very uncertain, and both natural men and citizens need to acknowledge the instrumental links between peace, preservation, and the conduct recommended by his laws of nature. Where others also abide by them, “Justice, Gratitude, Modesty, Equity, Mercy, & the rest of the Laws of Nature” are “Moral Vertues,” and recognizing that they are superior to “Force, and Fraud” as means to “peaceable, sociable, and comfortable living” constitutes a grasp of “true Morall Philosophie.”<sup>86</sup>

Hobbes’s own vanity leads him to conclude that his new and “true Morall Philosophie” can be the basis for making a “constitution (excepting by external violence) everlasting.” Since the “Common-peoples minds... are like clean paper,” if a sovereign properly controls the sources of elite opinion, he can eliminate from public view erroneous opinions that support democracy.<sup>87</sup> A sovereign’s physical force and subjects’ self-interested calculations must then be supplemented by internalizing the Hobbesian virtues if we are to avoid the calamities Englishmen endured in the 1640s. These valuable traits and dispo-

<sup>85</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 205-6, and Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>86</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 188, 216; see Berkowitz, *Virtue*, p. 53.

<sup>87</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 378-89.



sitions are clearly not the "civic virtue" of classical republicanism.<sup>88</sup> But neither are they the virtues of liberal democracy in which citizens must balance support for the regime with criticisms of particular policies and leaders based on interests and beliefs that might compete with the value of self preservation. Instead, the citizen must be a pure subject, and Hobbes's science of virtue recommends the passive and anti-democratic ideal of a citizen who accepts a "duty to obey all laws whatsoever," and whose pursuit of moral or religious beliefs is limited to "a quiet waiting for the coming again of our blessed Savior."<sup>89</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

On balance then, we must ultimately reject Hobbes's political prescriptions. His *Behemoth* and his more philosophical work do highlight the dangers of granting too much room for claims of private judgment and exemptions from general laws. And he does effectively undermine arguments for classical republican and other perfectionist views of politics, a move which aids the cause of individuality and ethical pluralism and clears some necessary ground for liberalism. But his contemporaries appear to have ignored his constructive arguments both in 1660 and, more relevantly, later in 1688, and we should follow their lead. Hobbes's ethical voluntarism and his determinism are extremely limiting in terms of what we can hope for in ethical and religious debates and in how we are to regard the relationship between the state and the individual. In denying the possibility of relatively peaceful diversity and the hopes for transparency in limits on that diversity, he denies individuals the opportunity to work out their own judgments on matters of fundamental importance. And his denials of individual dignity mean both that this process can be seen as cost free and that it does not require room for citizens actively to participate in and judge by democratic means the behavior of those they have placed in authority. In his failure to move toward these more liberal views, he fails to articulate a plausible and morally defensible political ideal even if we rightly continue to be fascinated by the logical and rhetorical power of his history and his philosophy.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Mary Dietz, "Hobbes's Subject as Citizen," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, p. 113.

<sup>89</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 58.

<sup>90</sup> Others argue that, with some qualifications, Hobbes can provide helpful insights for less optimistic and less rationalistic liberals; see, e.g., Richard Flathman, *Willful Liberalism: Voluntarism and Individuality in Political Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), esp. ch. I, and Patrick Neal, "Vulgar Liberalism," *Political Theory* 21 (November 1993): 623-42.