Filozofski vestnik Volume/Letnik XXIV • Number/Številka 2 • 2003 • 7–35

THE DEMOCRATIC ELEMENT IN HOBBES'S *BEHEMOTH*

INGRID CREPPELL

Hobbes states at the end of *Leviathan* that "the disorders of the present time" (L 491)[1] provoked him to write his famous work. *Behemoth* is Hobbes's retrospective look at the disorders of the English Civil War and is therefore inherently interesting in what it reveals to us about Hobbes's view of the context that shaped his fundamental political theory, which features of that context he found most provoking.[2] In what follows, I consider *Behemoth* not only as a work meant to reinforce the cause of peace against agitators, but also as grappling with fundamental problems about the nature of modern democracy. By reinterpreting the factors Hobbes highlights as contributing conditions of civil war, I believe we come to understand that it is not just disorder per se that Hobbes seeks to address in his work. Rather, his writings are a response to a new social condition – a democratizing world and the demands from mobilized populations. *Behemoth* is an extended description of and reaction to that dynamism, both positive and negative, of new conditions (circumstances) of democracy. While the text is at one level an attack on democracy, it is simultaneously at another level a recognition of the necessity of

[1] I have used the following editions of Hobbes's works: *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). All quotations from *Leviathan* will be cited in parentheses as L with page numbers following. All citations from *Behemoth*, because they are so numerous, will simply refer to the page numbers of the University of Chicago Tönnies text.

[2] In the spirit of Skinner's work, I take historical context to be significant in understanding the meaning of a philosophical text such as Hobbes's. Skinner's recent work on Hobbes situates him in the rich literary and linguistic context in which Hobbes worked (primarily the rhetorical tradition of Renaissance Europe). I will focus on a specifically political context to which Hobbes was responding and I will read *Behemoth* as showing us that Hobbes's context of work is also not fully categorizable in Hobbes's own terms, that is, not all the problems that Hobbes struggled with were perfectly transparent to him.

constructing political principles as responsive to a politicized people. *Behemoth* thus exemplifies Hobbes's ambiguous approach to the democratic question raised by the English Civil War. In particular, I emphasize that Hobbes presents a history of the Civil War in which ideas are active forces in a public setting, with the implications this has for how his own positive political philosophy might be made a source of motivation for people. *Behemoth* is a text that shows Hobbes confronting questions about the public mind – its shaping, motivation and the collapse of agreement.

I shall focus on both elites and the people but will pay special attention to the latter since it has remained relatively unremarked upon in the secondary literature. The question of the people may seem to be only tangentially relevant to Hobbes's analysis, but I argue that it plays a central role and that it has implications for understanding his basic political principles. *Behemoth* is about political rebellion and breakdown. Hobbes consistently blames ambitious elites for having instigated the disorders. In the larger picture, however, the breakdown would not have occurred if the common people had not gone along with the seditious elite. One might contend that their seduction was a foregone conclusion, but if one holds this, there must be some explanation for treating the cooptation of the mass of humanity as an easy achievement. The question in *Behemoth* is – how were the minds of the common people seduced? This same question confronts Hobbes: how are the minds of the people to be seduced into upholding his ideas?

Hobbes believed his own work constituted a body of ideas that could be transformative and conducive to peace and order. He also considered belief and opinion to be the basis of stability and power: "For the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people" (16), is one of the more striking statements in *Behemoth*. In the best of all worlds, people would read or become aware of Hobbes's political principles and their justification, and this set of beliefs would then transform what had been a contentious, irreconcilable clash of religious and political doctrines leading to political disorder into an agreement about the rights of sovereignty for the peace and good of the whole. But how would the transformative effect work and who was the audience for these principles?

One of the more active areas in present Hobbes scholarship focuses on the means by which Hobbes sought to convey his ideas given their purpose to change minds and action. As Sorell notes, Hobbes "intended his treatises to have an effect on public opinion and behaviour." [3] The contemporary an-

[3] Tom Sorell, "Hobbes's Persuasive Civil Science," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (July 1990): 342.

swer to this has mainly come in two (not mutually exclusive) forms: rhetoric[4] and education.[5] Skinner's comprehensive treatment of Hobbes's use of science and rhetoric concludes that while the conventional view had held Hobbes to reject humanist rhetoric upon his discovery of scientific reasoning, the truth is that Hobbes goes back to rhetoric: "having initially abandoned rhetoric in favour of science, he eventually sought to found his civil science on combining them."[6] The purpose of his civil science is not to argue deductively from an egoistic conception of human nature to the necessity of a Leviathan but rather to argue for a "steady commitment to justice and the full range of the other social virtues...[his] civil science centres on the claim that the avoidance of the vices and the maintenance of the social virtues are indispensable to the preservation of peace."[7] These truths (proved by Hobbes scientifically) must be conveyed to as broad an audience as possible through rhetoric, since scientific reason alone will not bring about persuasion. Alternatively, Lloyd emphasizes education as the most important mechanism for the transference of Hobbes's ideas. Her argument is that obedience (hence order) is brought about in two steps: first through Hobbes's construction of a version of political obligation that warring parties could come to adopt on a redescription of their "transcendent interests" (these are, notably, beliefs about one's duty to God but also include beliefs about justice or liberty) – this revised construction brings about agreement/consensus on conflicting judgments, and second, by maintaining and reproducing this consensus in judgment through education.[8] Lloyd contends that "Education

---

[4] See, among others, on Hobbes's use of rhetoric and scientific reasoning: Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Tom Sorell, *Hobbes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), and "Hobbes's Persuasive Civil Science"; and David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[5] See, for example, the works on Hobbes and education by S.A. Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes's Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Geoffrey M. Vaughan, *Behemoth Teaches Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002).

[6] *Reason and Rhetoric*, 12.

[7] Ibid., 11.

[8] She writes: "It is not enough that the people who pick up *Leviathan* be persuaded by Hobbes's argument; the insights it contains must be very widely disseminated, and reproduced perpetually, if Hobbes is to succeed in this practical political project. Part of this task will involve reproducing acceptance of Hobbes's argument for his principle – his 'science of politics' – and part will consist in reproducing those interests that, when properly conceived, provide people with reason for adhering to the principle...How are these things to be done? They are to be done through an aggressive process of education...Pursuing a process of socialization, or of moral education, will encourage the formation of properly conceived interests, and instill in people a desire to do what the satisfaction of these interests requires. A solid education of this sort will, Hobbes thinks, eliminate both

in subjects' moral and civil duty will be enough to ensure the maintenance of social order because human beings are, in Hobbes's view, quite malleable...Education involves for Hobbes not the mere *presentation* of ideas, but also their *inculcation*, or what we might call more broadly a process of socialization...Hobbes stresses the need to educate people in their moral and civil duty, and to *instill* in them a *disposition* to do what they ought to do."[9] While their approaches to Hobbes are very different, both Skinner and Lloyd agree that Hobbes emphasizes civic virtue as a means to bring about a stable and peaceful commonwealth.[10] Clearly, Hobbes sought to create citizens who acted upon a duty to obey the sovereign. This refocusing on Hobbes as a theorist of civic virtue is convincing and a welcome shift.

In this reading of *Behemoth*, I will offer an additional way to understand what Hobbes sought to change and how he saw the transformative nature of his ideas. I want very briefly to consider the relationship between *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* before presenting my view of the latter's independent value. It is impossible to read *Behemoth* without the shadow of *Leviathan* in mind.[11] The

---

the discontent and the 'pretense of right' that are, in his view, necessary conditions of rebellion. This makes reeducation *necessary* to Hobbes's project of building a perpetually stable social order...But not only is proper education *necessary* if social stability is to be maintained: Hobbes comes very close to suggesting that it may also be *sufficient*" (Lloyd, *Ideals and Interests*, 158, 159, 161).

[9] Ibid., 161, 162.

[10] See also Mary Dietz, "Hobbes's Subject as Citizen," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990), for a discussion of *Leviathan* as a tract on civic virtue.

[11] Most commentators on *Behemoth* see it as reinforcing or reflecting the analytic conclusions of Hobbes's *Leviathan* and insofar as it does that, it is taken to deepen our picture of Hobbes's political theory. Royce MacGillivray, in "Thomas Hobbes's History of the English Civil War A Study of *Behemoth*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31 (1970): 179-98, notes: "it is necessary to ask what connection exists between the political doctrines of *Behemoth*, with its fierce Royalist loyalties, and the political doctrines of Hobbes's previous writings...In *Behemoth*, Hobbes has applied to actual political events the conclusions of his political philosophy" (183). Stephen Holmes, in his "Introduction" to *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), vii, likewise comments that in the later text, Hobbes applied historically and concretely the analytical framework about sedition, rebellion, and the breakdown of authority that he had developed in his earlier positive political writings. Richard Ashcraft, in "Ideology and Class in Hobbes' Political Theory," *Political Theory* 6 (February 1978): 27-62, sees it as closely tied to Hobbes's moral science laid out in *Leviathan*, making it a "scientific history," and not a "history" yielding only prudential knowledge, as Hobbes's classification of Thucydides might lead one to expect. Lloyd also emphasizes *Behemoth*'s corroborative effect – the causes of disorder are religious conflict and diversity of judgment about one's transcendent interests, which, according to her, a reinterpretation of the whole of *Leviathan* would lead one to see.

aim of all Hobbes's political theory is to instill obedience to the sovereign, because only then can the peace and flourishing of a country be secured. How one instills obedience is however an open question. It appears that Hobbes uses one means to advance this in *Leviathan* and another in his historical work *Behemoth.* In *Leviathan* Hobbes presents the content of his ideas in abstract terms (humans are described as basically driven by fear of death, competition and pride/glory; the state of nature is a state of war; consent to an absolute sovereign is justified rationally; and a revised exegesis of key components of Christian theology is offered) and through the telling and in their content these ideas are presumed to work their effect. *Behemoth* takes a different approach. In the dedication, Hobbes states "There can be nothing more instructive towards loyalty and justice than will be the memory, while it lasts, of that war" (x). He later reiterated his purpose: to demonstrate to the people why "calamities ever follow disobedience to their lawful sovereigns" (144). History is a vivid reminder of the chaos and destructiveness of war, and Hobbes in opening recent wounds is keeping memory alive to lead his readers to a sober realization of the necessity of obedience as the only way to avoid those consequences.[12] The book is clearly not a typical "history" as a cool recounting of a sequence of events, but a highly charged, engaged polemic defending the king against rebellious elites. *Behemoth* is emotional while *Leviathan* is abstract as a means of approaching obedience. Thus one might be tempted to conclude that obedience is instilled through prudence in the first case[13] and through the idea of duty and moral and scientific reason in the second.

An important insight of *Behemoth,* however, is that views are always in contention with other sets of beliefs to persuade the people. Politics is about contention and gaining the strongest position. The role of the people is essential here because they are the great mass of public opinion that must be moved in one direction or another to stabilize or overthrow the sovereign. If one holds that the people are basically empty-headed and will necessarily follow the most flamboyant orators, they become essentially ballast for the most

[12] Hobbes explicitly stated his intent to have *Behemoth* published. He explains in 1679: "I would fain have published my *Dialogue of the Civil Wars of England,* long ago; and to that end I presented it to his Majesty: and some days after, when I thought he had read it, I humbly besought him to let me print it; but his Majesty, though he heard me graciously, yet he flatly refused to have it published." *English Works,* ed. William Molesworth (London, 1839-45 [hereafter cited as EW]), 4: 411.

[13] As many commentators have noticed, *Behemoth* is an example of what Hobbes commended Thucydides for accomplishing: "the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future." EW 8: vi.

emotionally charged views. But Hobbes doesn't assume this, and his portrayal of them is not so one-dimensional. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes had written about the people in this way: "the Common-peoples minds, unlesse they be tainted with dependance on the Potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their Doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Publique Authority shall be imprinted in them" (L 233). This remark, far from a criticism of the people, was a recognition of their potential capacity to learn the essentials of a science of virtue and vice. In reality, however, all peoples are embedded somewhere and necessarily come to politics dependent on their ruler; only infants have minds like clean paper. Yet, one condition of the Civil War was its calling into question the accepted justifications for authority. In Hobbes's telling of the story, the people are not automatically controlled like puppets from above. He explicitly acknowledges that ideas in public cannot be fully controlled: "A state can constrain obedience, but convince no error, nor alter the minds of them that believe they have the better reason. Suppression of doctrine does but unite and exasperate, that is, increase both the malice and power of them that have already believed them" (62).

Why then might the mass public have ended up being more susceptible to the leaders who sought the king's overthrow? Was it features of these leaders, of the people, or of the king himself (or his position) that made the breakdown likely? To claim that the people and leaders were made "disobedient" by seditious ideas, and therefore that the solution is to cultivate a virtuous, obedient citizenry who see the king's rule as absolute is highly inadequate. For the solution of "civic virtue" to work, the stress must be not on encouraging duty (the devoutly religious are supremely dutiful), but rather on transforming the values by which people act. Civic virtue is conducive to peace because it ranks civic, public, political accommodation ahead of particular beliefs about religious truth, or other matters contending for predominance. Therefore, before practices of civic virtue can become effective, there must be a shift in perception about how the world works and about the goals of a collective life. Specifically, civic virtue that would predictably lead to peace and order depends upon the existence of a powerful, public belief in the value of the political sphere.

If this is true, the breakdown is also due to the failure of the king to present a powerful ideology or world-view to counter the demands of particular mobilized groups. Hobbes recognized that the sovereign had to have a "fighting creed" of his own to do battle with other competing world-views in a public sphere. At the time of the Civil War the king did not have an ideology that could assert the dominance of political reasoning. *Leviathan* was Hobbes's comprehensive and systematic attempt to provide this alternative world-view

to challenge and compete with those religiously inspired views that claimed so much of the public airwaves. Thus, *Behemoth* retrospectively demonstrates why *Leviathan* cannot accomplish its goals unless it secures itself in the public mind. *Behemoth* shows why conditions of democratization demand that the king maintain hegemony of belief and why his incapacity to do so led to his destruction.

Early modern democracy

One might object that democracy is a premature issue for this period, and certainly if we presume "democracy" to consist in demands for full participation with accompanying rights and institutional safeguards that would be true.[14] But we cannot ignore the proto-democratic features that characterized the agitation of seventeenth century England. It becomes clear in reading *Behemoth* that Hobbes was and had to be centrally concerned with issues that we would identify as democratic questions, even though Hobbes would not have named them as such himself.

If democracy is an important concern of Hobbes, we should clarify what democracy meant at the time. Since classical antiquity, philosophers had denounced democracy as dangerous, seeing it as the rule of the mob who were by definition incapable of governing a state with any degree of competence. The connotations of the word democracy during the Civil War in England were negative, therefore, when I speak of groups or ideas defending, supporting or advancing the cause of democracy, I mean by this components of political systems and relationships that we now take to be essential to democracies. We might describe the English Civil War as a democratic revolution in two senses. First, the demands put forward by the rebels against the established powers constituted the origination of core ideas of modern democracy – notions of inalienable rights and equality of legal and political rights; participation as popular involvement in political decision-making in some form; accountability; and restrictions on sovereign/executive power.[15] These ideas were only beginning to be shaped in modern terms. Second, the civil

[14] The modern form of democracy to which we now nearly universally pay tribute – the right of every adult regardless of sex, property, or educational status to elect officials – was not adopted until the 20th century. And the word "democrat" was until the late 19th century a negative term.

[15] See David Wootton, "Introduction" to *Divine Right and Democracy*, ed. David Wootton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), for a helpful synopsis of the democratic elements of the English Civil War.

war carried forward democracy not only in its ideas but also in the mass mobilization of the citizenry surrounding the war. It was democratic as an historical reality. That is to say, the Civil War was much more than a spontaneous popular revolt on the one hand or a constitutional conflict among elites on the other.[16] Secular political parties like the Levellers and Diggers were only the most dramatic examples of popular involvement.

The Civil War was notable in the extent to which it challenged at a fundamental level the regime of social and political hierarchy and in its engagement of a broad swath of the population in political and ideological turmoil. Parliament continually appealed directly to the people in their resolutions challenging the King, thus stirring up popular emotion and reaction, if not reflection. The conflict created a roiling public sphere of argument and debate. Lawrence Stone notes that well over 22,000 sermons, speeches, pamphlets and newspapers were published between 1640 and 1661, making the engagement much more than a set of grievances lodged against a despised ruler.[17] Hobbes in *Behemoth* describes at length the "paper war" preceding the military conflict in which the question of the rights of sovereignty are debated and challenged even by the common people, ultimately leading to the destruction of the monarchy.

As a constitutional upheaval, the war challenged the fundamental institutions of church and state, but its radical aspirations quickly failed, monarchy was restored, and a hierarchical social system retrenched. This failure of what was clearly a revolution pursued with democratic means and ends may lead us not to take those democratic aspects of the conflict seriously. Their explosion appears only to have characterized an "era of collective insanity"[18]

---

[16] There is obviously a long and complex story to tell about the connection between an increase in popular revolts and elite conflict during the 16th and 17th centuries. Christopher Hill observes that "In all countries of Western Europe the period of peasant revolts was the period of the formation of absolute monarchies," but if and when those monarchies became "absolute" they had first to quell not only the peasants and common people, but the newly empowered propertied classes. *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 182. Indeed, it was fear of the radical headless mass that led the bourgeois into dependence on the monarchy. Elite differences could be buried to crush the destabilizing aspirations of the lower orders.

[17] Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution 1529-1642* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 49. See also Tuck's discussion of the republican nature of the English Revolution in Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Hill emphasizes the politicization of the general population as well, noting that the Commons began to appeal to the people in resolutions against popery, Arminianism, and tonnage and poundage, and extended this appeal to the "lower orders" by encouraging them to sign the Root and Branch Petition in 1640. Hill, *Change and Continuity*, 192.

[18] Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 432.

before everyone came to their senses and settled back into traditional roles. Hobbes did not make that mistake. After the Restoration, when he was nearly eighty, he writes a vehement polemical history against the war. Why might Hobbes have been compelled to do so? It was probably not backward-looking anger that motivated him to write but a forward-looking attempt to assert control over the description and explanation of the most significant and traumatic collective event of the century. The terms in which the Civil War was understood were necessarily part of a general ideological debate that continued after the Restoration.[19]

I will use the distinction between democracy as a set of ideas about freedom and self-government and democracy as the circumstances of active political mobilization of the people as a way to address Hobbes's response to it. When reading *Behemoth*, we can decipher his divided approach.[20] Hobbes rejected the appeal to democratic ideas and he scathingly attacks university scholars who, through their studies, fall in love with ancient Greek and Roman politics. But he took seriously the mass politicization of the people and the theoretical implications of putting the king on trial in the name of the people of England: this he could not ridicule.

The role of democracy should not only be addressed because of the historical fact that a politicization of the general population had taken place.[21]

---

[19] Ashcraft "Ideology and Class," 29, emphasizes Hobbes's "outrage" in *Behemoth*, but as Skinner notes "to think of Hobbes's prose as a clear window through which we can gaze uninterruptedly at his thought is a serious mistake" (*Reason and Rhetoric*, 13). Vaughan has perhaps gone farther than any other commentator on *Behemoth* in reading between the lines, indeed as ignoring what Hobbes seems to be evidently arguing in his explanation and denunciation of the Civil War. I think this sensitivity to Hobbes's ulterior ends and his sophisticated use of language is very important but can be overextended. For a discussion of the *Behemoth* as a work of Restoration history see Vaughan, *Behemoth Teaches Leviathan*, 92 ff. He claims that Hobbes had no interest in joining the ideological war fought by historians after the cessation of civil war violence. While it may be true that he did not want openly to side with the Royalist as opposed to Republican camp, this should not prevent us from seeing Hobbes's efforts as essentially ideological nonetheless. "Ideology" is not reducible to the standard party positions.

[20] Normally, readers see only one half Hobbes's approach and paint him as an arch anti-democrat. For example, MacGillivray observes: "Hobbes has sometimes been recognized as one of the prophets of modern totalitarianism, and there are passages in *Behemoth* in which he seems to foreshadow some of its darker practices." "Thomas Hobbes's History," 197.

[21] An interesting question is whether Hobbes saw himself as writing during a time of unique historical significance. One might interpret Hobbes to regard his own analysis and solution as unique without his considering the problem he was solving to be unique to a changing world. In this sense, Hobbes would not have believed that historically significant and truly new changes were taking place. In Dialogue II of *Behemoth*, Hobbes presents the

It is important also because of the implications it holds for the essential theoretical tenets of Hobbes's work. In concluding *Leviathan*, Hobbes explains the purpose of his writing: "to set before mens eyes the mutuall Relation between Protection and Obedience" (L 491). In that relation, one is obligated to obey because of the power of the sovereign to protect. Yet, *Behemoth* describes in detail the collapse of the power to protect. Democracy is responsible for this collapse because it instigated ideas that challenged the King's authority, and also because once the king has been weakened and the people mobilized to make a choice, they were led to nonobedience to the sovereign. If it were just a matter of the publicity of a few seditious ideas, the power to protect would not have been fundamentally challenged. The cause of the collapse is the choice by the mass of the common people to follow the agitators instead of remaining loyal to the king, hence taking away his base of power. As Hobbes emphasizes: "It is not the right of the sovereign, though granted to him by every man's express consent, that can enable him to do his office; it is the obedience of the subject, which must do that" (144). *Behemoth* documents the dissolution into thin air of the authority to rule and to claim obedience, leaving the sovereign with a transparent shell of a mere right to sovereignty. The question must be, how in this situation of extremity is the power reconstituted, such that obligation to obey again comes into effect?

In what follows, I shall try to reconstruct a plausible interpretation of Hobbes's reaction to democracy and a possible answer to how power might be reconstituted.

The critique of democracy

Hobbes rejection of democracy appears first of all in his explanation of the Civil War. In one guise, we might take him to say that the war itself was

---

following exchange which would support the conclusion that Hobbes saw the nature of his solution as singular but not the historical problem itself: A: "[F]or the government of a commonwealth, neither wit, nor prudence, nor diligence, is enough, without infallible rules and the true science of equity and justice." B: "If this be true, it is impossible that any commonwealth in the world, whether monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy, should continue long without change, or sedition tending to change, either of the government or of the governors." A: "It is true; nor have any the greatest commonwealths in the world been long free from sedition. The Greeks had for awhile their petty kings, and then by sedition came to be petty commonwealths; and then growing to be greater commonwealths, by sedition again became monarchies; and all for want of rules of justice for the common people to take notice of; which if the people had known in the beginning of every of these seditions, the ambitious persons could never have had the hope to disturb their government after it had been once settled" (70). Ultimately, I believe Hobbes saw the conditions he lived in as new.

the inevitable outcome of democratic activation and ideas. We should turn to that explanation in order to determine the sense in which Hobbes links democracy and the Civil War. Hobbes cites both ambitious elites and seditious ideas as responsible. While some commentators have accentuated either elites[22] or ideas[23] as more important, Hobbes explains the war as brought about by both factors, which he ultimately cannot completely separate. A major theme clearly is the cynical use of power through political, ideological and military means. The "seducers" are mainly Presbyterians and democracy-loving Parliamentarians, but Hobbes singles out as well Papists, Independents, Anabaptists, Quakers, Fifth-monarchy-men, Londoners, and opportunists of all sorts. In this key passage, he notes the intentional agitation pursued by religious elite:

> The mischief proceeded wholly from the Presbyterian preachers, who, by a long practised histrionic faculty, preached up the rebellion powerfully...To the end that the State becoming popular, the Church might be so too, and governed by an Assembly; and by consequences (as they thought) seeing politics are subservient to religion, they might govern, and thereby satisfy not only their covetous humour with riches, but also their malice with power to undo all men that admire not their wisdom. (159)

---

[22] Much of the secondary literature on *Behemoth* sees it primarily as an indictment of elites exploiting doctrines for seditious purposes. Deborah Baumgold in particular makes this argument in *Hobbes's Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): "The menace of ambitious elites is a principal theme of *Behemoth*...The work identifies ambitious Presbyterian ministers and ambitious gentlemen – i.e., Puritan leaders and Parliamentarians – as the chief leaders in the Civil War." And she goes on to claim that "sedition requires legitimation. With respect to the role of ideas as causes of rebellion and civil war, it is important to distinguish the idea of a conflict over ideology from that of conflict legitimized by ideology. Hobbes held the latter view of rebellion, but not the former" (81-84). Skinner claims that "*Behemoth* lays the blame for the catastrophe of the 1640s on two groups above all...the Presbyterians 'and other Fanatick Ministers'...[and] the democratical gentlemen in the House of Commons." *Reason and Rhetoric*, 431-32. Robert P. Kraynak in "Hobbes's *Behemoth* and the Argument for Absolutism," *The American Political Science Review* 76 (December 1982): 837-47, links the content of ideas and elites but then denies the inherent power of the content itself: "Hobbes's history shows that the civil war was caused by opinions and doctrines of right, which were created and exploited by ambitious intellectuals solely for the purpose of displaying their wisdom and learning" (838).

[23] Lloyd writes: "For Hobbes, the English Civil War is first and foremost a religious war." *Ideals as Interests*, 193. It is however not exactly clear what it means to call a conflict a "religious war" – for discussion see for instance Konrad Repgen, "What is a 'Religious War'?" in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe*, ed. E.I. Kouri and Tom Scott (London: MacMillan Press, 1987), 311-28.

This description seems to support his observation in *Leviathan* that man sought "power after power" and has added to a typical "Hobbist" reading that sees all motivations as a ploy for power. While ambition is indisputably a factor, these actors all use ideas to gain their ends, and indeed their ends and identities are based upon ideas. Ideas and ambition in the Civil War were inextricably connected. Hobbes may impugn the authenticity of the actors by describing them as hypocritical but his analysis squarely focuses on the nature and interplay of ideas as well. Moreover, Hobbes is purporting to explain the complete destruction of a commonwealth. This destruction could not have come about solely through the play of individual ambition, as if it were a palace coup he were concerned with. It is only because of a certain conjunction of democratic conditions and a structure of beliefs that contention over power could have progressed to such fatal society-wide effect.

The three seditious ideas Hobbes blames for the king's downfall are (1) that politics is subservient to religion; (2) popular government; and (3) mixed monarchy. The most damaging belief is that political authority is not supreme in the public realm and must be subordinated to religious truth. "If it be lawful then for subjects to resist the King, when he commands anything that is against the Scripture, that is, contrary to the command of God, and to be judge of the meaning of the Scripture, it is impossible that the life of any King, or the peace of any Christian kingdom, can be long secure. It is this doctrine that divides a kingdom within itself, whatsoever the men be, loyal or rebels, that write or preach it publicly" (50).[24] In the past, this principle was dangerous because it juxtaposed the power of the church against that of the secular sovereign. By the time of the Reformation, however, its danger had taken on a new form. If each individual's relationship to God were more important than any other and each person had personal access to interpreting the Bible, then the result would be a proliferation of competing churches. "I confess this licence of interpreting the Scripture was the cause of so many several sects, as having lain hid till the beginning of the late King's reign, did then appear to the disturbance of the commonwealth" (22).

There is an additional problem with the effect of religion in the political realm. Hobbes opens Dialogue I with an attack on papal authority. While he does not blame Catholics or Catholic theology for the Civil War, the principle of religious superiority is criticized. Another important feature comes into view here, however. Religion maintains habits of mind in thinking about

[24] This doctrine confuses the people about which authority should determine action for public purposes, leading to "two kingdoms in one and the same nation, and no man...able to know which of his masters he must obey" (8).

and acting in the public sphere that emphasize dependence on a human authority. "I think that neither the preaching of friars nor monks, nor of parochial priests, tended to teach men what, but whom to believe" (16) he pointed out. This objection to paternalistic religion may seem much more applicable to Catholicism than to Presbyterianism, Hobbes's main nemesis in *Behemoth*. But in that case as well Hobbes pointed out the advantages that any clergy gain when religion succeeds in claiming ascendancy over politics. A comments: "for religion has been for a long time, and is now by most people, taken for the same thing with divinity, to the great advantage of the clergy" and B replies: "And especially now amongst the Presbyterians...To believe in Christ is nothing with them, unless you believe as they bid you" (57).[25] In this way, religion is dangerous because it grounds authority in a person, whose personal interests and egoistic pride are advanced under the trappings of the public good.

Hobbes does not believe the Civil War could have come about only on the basis of religious causes, and he goes on to link religious agitators with Parliamentarians who had adopted ideals of liberty, democracy and popular sovereignty. "It was not their own art alone that did it, but they had the concurrence of a great many gentlemen, that did no less desire a popular government in the civil state than these ministers did in the Church" (23). In the view of democrats, monarchy is equivalent to tyranny and inherently prone to destroy the people's liberty. This cluster of ideas emanated out of the universities: Hobbes observes that most of the House of Commons was made up of "men of the better sort, that had been so educated, as that in their youth having read the books written by famous men of the ancient Grecian and Roman commonwealths concerning their polity and great actions, in which books the popular government was extolled by the glorious name of liberty, and monarchy disgraced by the name of tyranny; they became thereby in love with their forms of government" (3). In fact, Hobbes equates clerical behavior with that of classical democratic agitators: "I do not remember that I have

[25] In presenting the remarks of "A" and "B" as signifying a face-value meaning, I do not assume that Hobbes wrote without rhetorical effect in mind or without layers of pedagogy embedded in his presentation of ideas. There is no doubt that Hobbes was not always straightforward in his meaning. Yet, I read the dialogue in *Behemoth* as for the most part representing alternatives that Hobbes countenanced and that his purpose was to manage the logic of their presentation, leading the reader to denounce fragmenting religious and democratic demagogues. While I find Vaughan's imaginative reading of *Behemoth* fruitful, I am not convinced that the substance of what the interlocutors say is only meaningful to the extent that it tells us how A is educating B – such that we as readers are only meant to witness B's reaction to A's arguments and not meant to react to the arguments and narrative of war themselves.

read of any kingdom or state in the world, where liberty was given to any private man to call the people together, and make orations to them frequently, or at all, without first making the state acquainted, except only in Christendom. I believe the heathen Kings foresaw, that a few such orators would be able to make a great sedition" (16). The universities are the seedbed for this mutual agitation: "For such curious questions in divinity are first started in the Universities, and so are all those politic questions concerning the rights of civil and ecclesiastic government; and there they are furnished with arguments for liberty out of the works of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and out of the histories of Rome and Greece, for their disputation against the necessary power of their sovereigns" (56). The linking of democrats and religious clerics is a constant theme of the book (cf. 40, 43, 95).

If the downfall of a ruler were insured by the enthusiasm of his enemies, then perhaps Charles I would have been doomed by the existence of Presbyterians and Parliamentarians. But the monarchy was far from a house of cards, and the dynamic of disintegration required additional elements of belief. Absolutely essential in Hobbes's estimation was the idea of mixed monarchy. This was the notion that absolute monarchy "should be divided between the King, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons" (33). This idea served as a fatal linchpin in the collapse because it was held by the King's supporters as well as his enemies, thus weakening and confusing their resolve in responding to attacks by the enemy. In Dialogue 3, B asks A: "But what fault do you find in the King's counselors, lords, and other persons of quality and experience?" and A answers: "Only the fault, which was generally in the whole nation, which was, that they thought the government of England was not an absolute, but a mixed monarchy; and that if the king should clearly subdue this Parliament, that his power would be what he pleased, and theirs as little as he pleased: which they counted tyranny. This opinion, though it did not lessen their endeavour to gain the victory for the King in a battle, when a battle could not be avoided, yet it weakened their endeavour to procure him an absolute victory in the war" (114-15).

The effect of each one of the ideas – religion, popular sovereignty and mixed monarchy – is to dissolve the absoluteness of the sovereign, hence by definition, Hobbes rejects them. However, in *Behemoth*, Hobbes is concerned more with the consequences of these ideas than axioms. Taken together they have two notable consequences, which characterize democracy as we know it as well: they lead to elite competition and they encourage mass political involvement. I take up the first of these here and consider the second in the next section.

As stated earlier, Hobbes's primary focus in *Behemoth* appears to be elite

struggles for power,[26] but perhaps a better way to conceptualize this problem is elite competition within democratic conditions. Self-government institutionally requires that persons come forward and compete to lead the people, who in turn choose which candidate ought to govern. We are naturally led to ask – under these circumstances, who comes forward and why, and who wins and why? Hobbes focuses on the motives of those seeking political leadership (pride and power) and the debasing of the presentation of the public good due to competition among the contenders for the people's approval. Democratic politics rewards capabilities of leaders to appeal to the lowest common denominator, a familiar complaint about democracies: "impudence in democratical assemblies…'tis the goddess of rhetoric, and carries proof with it" (68-69). The most clever, the best demagogues, not the most wise or the most just, triumph, as he notes: "those that by ambition were once set upon the enterprise of changing the government, they cared not much what was reason and justice in the cause, but what strength they might procure by seducing the multitude with remonstrances from the Parliament House, or by sermons in the churches" (115-16). Democracies compel leaders to appeal to crudely emotional, awe-inspiring, fear-inducing, and self-inflating ideas and arguments. This trait of democracies arises from a need to gain the approval of the multitude in competition with other contenders. It is not that the people are too simple to understand any other type of public rhetoric but that *in competing* to gain one's widest possible appeal, the democratic contender must project a language that trumps his competitor's – it's a race to the bottom. In remarking on Thucydides's dislike of democracy he writes: "And upon divers occasions he noteth the emulation and contention of the demagogues for reputation and glory of wit; with their crossing of each other's

[26] Again Baumgold, in *Hobbes's Political Theory*, and in "Hobbes's Political Sensibility: The Menace of Political Ambition," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Dietz, argues that Hobbes's political theory was constructed as a response to the ambitious and power-hungry. Hadn't Hobbes described Leviathan as King of the children of pride? She writes: "In the world of politics as Hobbes conceives it, elite actors are the principal figures. Ordinary subjects are subordinate figures on the landscape, followers who 'receive their motion' from rulers and those who would be rulers." *Hobbes's Political Theory*, 121. While she rightly emphasizes his concern with elite conflict, we need to keep in mind that Hobbes was concerned with a more systemic social collapse and not simply with sources of disturbance or disruption that all political regimes inevitably harbor. There is no political system in which elites do not struggle for power. Under what combination of factors would system dissolution occur? The mobilization of the masses must be an important part in answering this. While they may initially "receive their motion" from instigators (given the fact that they are not generally political initiators) ordinary people are not unthinking, disinterested place-holders for the elite. They cannot be counted on to be completely predictable and hence of no theoretical importance.

counsels, to the damage of the public; the inconsistency of resolutions, caused by the diversity of ends and power of rhetoric in the orators; and the desperate actions undertaken upon the flattering advice of such as desired to attain, or to hold what they had attained, of authority and sway amongst the common people" (EW, 8, xvii). Hobbes remarks upon the ensnaring of the people by public rhetoric: "It is easier to gull the multitude, than any one man amongst them. For what one man, that has not his natural judgment depraved by accident, could be so easily cozened in a matter that concerns his purse, had he not been passionately carried away by the rest to change of government, or rather to a liberty of every one to govern himself?" (38)

Those who come forward are driven by glory and by power, and their incentives in presenting themselves and their policies to the people are to distort the real interests of the commonwealth and of the people in the race to win. Hence, elite competition does not insure that the best will triumph, rather that the common good is destroyed. So much of *Behemoth* is a bitter indictment of the agitators: from the opening lines, Hobbes takes the reader to a mountaintop from which to view men with "a prospect of all kinds of injustice, and of all kinds of folly...produced by their dams hypocrisy and self-conceit" (1). Hobbes sees the struggle for leadership by those clamoring for self-government as a stage-set for self-glorification and not as leaders and the people debating public policy for the good of the whole. In a rebuke of the religious contenders for ascendancy, he asks:

> What needs so much preaching of faith to us that are no heathens, and that believe already all that Christ and his apostles have told us is necessary to salvation, and more too? Why is there so little preaching of justice? I have indeed heard righteousness often recommended to the people, but I have seldom heard the word *justice* occur in their sermons; nay, though in the Latin and Greek Bible the word *justice* occur exceeding often, yet in the English, though it be a word that every man understands, the word righteousness (which few understand to signify the same, but take it rather for rightness of opinion, than of action or intention), is put in the place of it. (63)

This presentation of Hobbes's critique of democracy leaves us with a view of the people as highly passive and narrow-minded, even if not dumb and malevolent. How ought we to interpret Hobbes's assertion that "the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people" (16)? Even if we were to dismiss this assertion as a rhetorical ploy on his part, we cannot, I believe ignore the more subtle version of events portrayed in his history. In that subtler version, while the people are not civic heroes,

nor enlightened choosers, their actions might be seen as reasonable. I turn now to consider the important role the people played in Hobbes's history.

The role of the people

There are three dramatic structures in *Behemoth.* First, Hobbes traces long-term causes of rebellion through the interplay of certain key beliefs (as discussed previously), which structure a logic of argument and reasons for action. The second major drama is the progressive usurpation of power by Parliament and the king's gradual descent into physical and juridical weakness. I attempted to portray some aspects of the interplay between these two parts of the story in the preceding section. Here I look at the third main drama: the seduction of the people, the necessity of which stands as the background condition for the Civil War. A key dynamic of the revolution is the battle between the sides for the allegiance of the multitude.[27] It was "the common people, whose hands were to decide the controversy" (115). The designation "the people" occurs ubiquitously in *Behemoth,* an indication of the central role it (they) plays.[28]

Before presenting this third version of events, we should confront an obvious objection to seeing the people as historically important and theoretically relevant. Hobbes had described the people as corrupted and seduced,[29] as well as ignorant and gullible. Was there than any drama to their cooptation? He notes that the "ignorant multitude" (68) are swayed by the Parliament's use of words and that "the common people...are terrified and amazed by preachers, with fruitless and dangerous doctrines" (70-71). He states that the people don't understand the issues, and many do not (or cannot) read the controversies in writing, so the persuasive power of the orators

[27] Hobbes distinguishes between "the multitude" and "the people" in order to mark the difference between, respectively, a random collection of persons with heterogeneous motives and objectives (a crowd), and a constituted collectivity with a unified will. See *De Cive: The English Version,* ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), Ch. VI. "The people" is the conceptualization of a multitude who have unified into a single entity obligated to the sovereign. The actions of a multitude have no moral consequences according to this definition, unlike the actions of a people. I have used the term "the people" less formally, to refer to the multitude on the cusp of becoming a moral entity. I believe Hobbes does so as well in *Behemoth.* One point of the sovereign was to overcome the anarchic element of the multitude and to form an obligating "person" based on the consent of all.

[28] 132 times to be exact. If we also count "people" the total is 199. I thank Lee Sigelman for providing this word count based on computerized text analysis.

[29] These words are not synonymous though Hobbes uses them interchangeably.

is magnetic. He describes how the House of Commons "put the people into a tumult upon any occasion they desired" (69), and that the rabble were made insolent and egged on by the provocations of the leaders. This all makes the people appear as completely passive props in a morality play: the king is the innocent embattled victim and the people hopeless dupes, used as tools to bring him down. The fact that the people may serve in a dramatically pivotal role in a morality play does not indicate independence of mind. If we assume that the people are ignorant and gullible, then the mere presence of strong, seditious ideas in the pulpits is enough to insure and explain the downfall of the King.

Yet, Hobbes's treatment of the common folk is not so simple. One feature characterizing them is that they care for their own local lives and welfare first and on the whole are not drawn to an active public life on a larger scale. About them, Hobbes says at the beginning of the book: "For there were very few of the common people that cared much for either of the causes" (2). One reason for this is their lack of leisure, which prevented them from becoming more deeply involved in political disputes. The people are "ignorant" not in the sense of incapable of learning but in the sense of not having access to knowledge about the issues being debated in universities and elsewhere, issues Hobbes believed were absurd on many accounts and certainly dangerous to the commonwealth. "The people have one day in seven the leisure to hear instruction" (159), a condition that would tend to make them vulnerable to the ideas of their ministers. Another reason is that the common people are not inherently driven to seek self-glorification – indeed this may be part of the very definition of what is "common" in the common people, their satisfaction with a life not lived on a larger, ambitious stage.[30] Because of this, the people exhibit another characteristic: they are moved to action primarily by leaders. "For people always have been, and always will be, ignorant of their duty to the public, as never meditating anything but their particular interest; in other things following their immediate leaders; which are either the preachers, or the most potent of the gentlemen that dwell amongst them: as common soldiers for the most part follow their immediate

[30] The people act in typical ways. While Hobbes portrayed human nature in universal terms in *Leviathan* – notably, humans are afraid of death, they are competitive and seek glory – he also constantly took note of differences among individual types as well as distinctive characteristics pertaining to the roles of groups in society. Not all persons are equally glory-seekers, some are more generous than others, and so forth. Similarly, specific features are associated with various roles of persons in society. *Behemoth* clearly exemplifies Hobbes's sociological observations: the clergy, London merchants, Lords, vainglorious intellectuals in the universities – each group displays characteristic types of interests and attitudes in acting in the public sphere.

captains, if they like them" (39). Notably, this observation puts as much onus on the king as on the other leaders.[31]

Hobbes consistently credits the people with the capacity to reason about politics to the extent necessary for the stability and development of a regime. "Why may not men be taught their duty, that is, the science of *just* and *unjust*, as divers other sciences have been taught, from true principles and evident demonstration; and much more easily than any of those preachers and democratical gentlemen could teach rebellion and treason?" (39), he asks. When B exclaims in Dialogue 4 of *Behemoth* "What silly things are the common sort of people, to be cozened as they were so grossly!", A replies, "What sort of people, as to this matter, are not of the common sort?" (158). On the whole, the picture we can draw up is that the people are working people, busy with their own existence, politicized when they have to be and when they are drawn into it, tending to trust their immediate leadership, and fully capable of enlightened leadership. These are the people whose choice decided the direction of the conflict.

The overthrowing of a monarchy that had "by right of descent continued above six hundred years" (1) cannot be easily explained by insubordination and the "ambition of a few discontented persons" (L 491). The people began on the side of the monarch. At the beginning of the contest, the king naturally holds the advantage, or at most the sides are evenly matched. The inclination of the people to lean toward the veneration of the king or to be neutral, the institutional weight of hundreds of years of traditional monarchical power, and the army of 60,000 men under the king's command would all seem to give the king the advantage. Hobbes declares the people's predisposition to support the king on a number of occasions: "the English would never have taken well that the Parliament should make war upon the King, upon any provocation, unless it were in their own defence, in case the King should first make war upon them; and, therefore, it behoved them to provoke the King, that he might do something that might look like hostility" (28). Clerical and Parliamentary leaders purposely set out to trap the King in a premeditated and machiavellian manner, realizing they could not openly defy his supremacy until they set the stage to make it look as if the King himself has provoked war upon England. After recounting the King's military loss to the Scots in 1640 and his being forced to call Parliament into session (hence the initiation of the Long Parliament itself), Hobbes concludes:

[31] That Hobbes does not have a theory of leadership per se is indicative of his approach to politics, justice and democracy. But it may also be a theoretical weak spot in a political theory. Rousseau, who took over so much of Hobbes's work, recognized the essential foundational role of the "lawgiver."

> And yet for all this they durst not presently make war upon the King: there was so much yet left of reverence to him in the hearts of the people...They must have some colour or other to make it believed that the King made war first upon the Parliament...Therefore they resolved to proceed with him like skilful hunters; first to single him out, by men disposed in all parts to drive him into the open field with their noise, and then in case he should but seem to turn head, to call that a making of war against the Parliament. (35, 36)

What needs explaining then is why the bonds of loyalty to the king became weak and the mass of people joined the opposition side. The regime did not crumble all at once and had to be systematically attacked. At a number of key junctures, Hobbes states that the course of events could have shifted away from the momentum built up by the elite attacks and back to the traditional support for the monarchy.

Another logic of ideological interaction thus appears in *Behemoth.* The people do not appear solely as a back-up serving the purposes of seditious elites, but also as exercising a form of political judgment on their own. The King and Parliament themselves credit the people with the power to decide the conflict. Both sides are constantly writing petitions and publishing proclamations accusing their enemy, defending themselves, and attempting to corner the other in political and legal traps. The dynamic of performing for the people constitutes a persistant theme in Hobbes depiction of the conflict. B asks A: "But now that the war was resolved on, on both sides, what needed any more dispute in writing?" A replies:

> I know not what need they had. But on both sides they thought it needful to hinder one another, as much as they could, from levying of soldiers; and, therefore, the King did set forth declarations in print, to make the people know that they ought not to obey the officers of the new *militia* set up by ordinance of Parliament, and also to let them see the legality of his own commissions of array. And the Parliament on their part did the like, to justify to the people the said ordinance, and to make the commission of array appear unlawful. (118)

There are other instances in which Hobbes himself observes the independance of the people. Reiterating the predisposition of the people, he claims that if the king himself had acted more commandingly and decisively he would have garnered the people's support: "such his stoutness being known to the people, would have brought to his assistance many more hands than all the arguments of law, or force of eloquence, couched in declarations

and other writings" (116).[32] That the people must decide does not of course indicate that their decision will be what Hobbes thinks is the right one, or that their decision is wholly independent, uninfluenced by the persuasion of those competing to lead them. It does signify however that there was a judgment to be made and that their choice mattered to the fate of the nation and the king.

Hobbes's explicit answer to the monarchy's destruction does not focus on what the King did (his original mistake in attempting to impose the Book of Common Prayer on the Scots is noted at the beginning of the book (28) but not seen as fatal)[33] but on the success of the opposition in painting the King as not to be trusted because of tyrannical intentions. The situation was one in which the people had been stirred up, mobilized and forced to make a choice. In that situation, they could not remain neutral, and the fear and distrust of a king even suspected of tyrannical intentions led them to lean away from him. Once this dynamic had come into effect, a point was passed and a pervasive context of distrust made it more rational to take a stance against rather than of trust in the King. The confiscation of power by the Parliament is a story of seducing the people to the Parliament's side, to perceiving the king as the real threat. Parliament is able to maneuver the logic of the situation such that given the juridical language of fundamental right and treason, the king stands accused and the people and Parliament have no choice but to engage in war to defeat him. This dynamic uncovers the sense in which the people are at the very core of the balance of obedience and protection, not only in principle but in historical reality, a point I discuss more fully in the next section.

One might concede that in a condition of dissolution the constitutive role of the people comes to the surface, but that this crisis situation is one purposely manufactured by the ambitions of a few men, and should not therefore be taken to indicate a more generalized democratic circumstance. Yet, the evidence of Hobbes's theoretical constructs – notably his core idea of the state of nature as a state of war – is an acknowledgment that the potential for this crisis situation to emerge is always present. In this way, we might see the idea

[32] Again, on the independence of judging, in Dialogue 4, in discussing the Rump Parliament in 1648, he concludes "By these their proceedings they had already lost the hearts of the generality of the people, and had nothing to trust to but the army; which was not in their power, but in Cromwell's" (160).

[33] The King, assuming his power to be secure embarked on "that unlucky business of imposing upon the Scots, who were all Presbyterians, our book of common-prayer" (28). This provocative move triggered alarm and anger among Presbyterians and other religious dissenters within England, mobilizing them to join with democracy-minded Parliamentarians in the House of Commons to challenge the king about more fundamental constitutional issues of authority.

of the state of nature as an elemental democratic condition, one in which the people are called on to make a decision about their collective existence.[34]

But Hobbes also recognizes democratic circumstances as more than an artificial or sporadic creation of agitators, which a social contract is constructed to overcome. A number of passages in *Behemoth* testify to the fact that democratized conditions have become a pervasive cultural and structural fact about the world. That is, the people in general have become more permanently engaged in politics through changes in religious belief and economic development. Hobbes notes the political demands of the London merchants and population in general. More importantly, he is constantly referring to the politicization of a mass public under the banner of religious freedom. While I have already discussed his criticism of the use of religion by the clerical establishment, it is noteworthy that Hobbes is not critical of one of the more democratic features of the new religion – it's accessibility to the common person, a feature he believes can contribute to peace via the education in duty. He writes for example: "whereas you think it needless, or perhaps hurtful, to have the Scriptures in English, I am of another mind. There are so many places of Scripture easy to be understood, that teach both true faith and good morality (and that as fully as is necessary to salvation), of which no seducer is able to dispossess the mind (of any ordinary readers), that the reading of them is so profitable as not to be forbidden without great damage to them and the commonwealth" (53).

In these democratized circumstances – ones due to destabilization and ones growing out of more long-run social-cultural changes – the sovereign's justification must change as well. A observes that "the people, for them and their heirs, by consent and oaths, have long ago put the supreme power of the nation into the hands of their kings, for them and their heirs; and consequently into the hands of this King, their known and lawful sovereign" (152). But no doubt that was part of the problem: the settlement on the King had taken place "long ago." In a newly democratizing age, the situation was fundamentally altered, and the traditionalist acceptance of authority was no longer sufficient to secure allegiance. The problem was not only that an ambitious elite could mobilize a broad population through democratically inspired ideas, but also that the conditions for independent judgment, social power, and political mobilization had become general, permanent social-cultural conditions, thereby also making "destabilization" by elites a more chronic possibility. The "seditious" ideas of self-government themselves no doubt reflected in some sense developing conditions and aspirations. Under

[34] I thank John Ferejohn for helping to clarify this point.

these circumstances, there would always potentially arise democratic demands. I believe Hobbes recognized an inevitable, forward-marching energy in the mobilization of the multitude in the political upheavals of his time and that he must have recognized this as a new circumstance. His radically new defense of sovereign power was a response to the ideological failure of the king to present the foundations of his power in this transformed political and mental environment.

Thus, in addition to his explicit, blameful[35] depiction of the King's loss to a malevolent elite, Hobbes also gives an implicit explanation of what may have led to the failure of the monarchy. On this reading, again we go back to the structure of ideas available for justification and reasons for action. The problem was that the king did not have sufficient ideological constructs with which to take up the battle for the hearts and minds of the people.

Ideology and obedience: the continuing power of the people

Hobbes's history portrays the people as playing a decisive role politically. Of what theoretical consequence is this? The people have always been recognized to play an essential normative role in Hobbes's construction of the sovereign through their consent.[36] Wootton does link the democratizing nature of early modern English politics to Hobbes's ideas. He notes the influence of the Levellers on Hobbes's thought after 1651: "the Levellers had denied that the people could be bound by past acts of submission, and insisted that government must be founded on the continuing consent of all citizens. They had denied that the people could be fully represented by any corporate body legally acting on their behalf, and insisted that they must give their consent as a multitude of individuals. It is this universal consent, this continuing sovereignty of the multitude, that Hobbes seeks to lay claim to through his

[35] Skinner notes at the end of his study of Hobbes's rhetoric that, "[I]n teaching philosophy to speak English, Hobbes at the same time taught it a particular tone of voice. As we have seen, the tone is very much that of the sane and moderate *savant* beset on all sides by fanaticism and stupidity. We cannot expect reason to triumph, the tone implies, since the foolish and ignorant will always be in a majority. But we can at least hope to dicomfit them by wielding the weapons of ridicule, deriding their excesses, sneering at their errors, drawing our readers into a scornful alliance against their general benightedness." *Reason and Rhetoric*, 436.

[36] In principle, Hobbes stated that sovereignty could be institutionalized as monarchy, aristocracy or democracy, but that the form most conducive to peace was monarchy. In principle, Hobbes had also argued that democracy was the origination of all forms of government (see *De Cive*, VII, 5) because in the initial coming together of a group of people,

theory of authorization. It is from this continuing consent that Leviathan derives his authority and power."[37] As a matter of right, however, the people can make no claims on the sovereign. Most have stressed that while the "continuing sovereignty of the multitude" may exist in principle, it does not obligate the sovereign and the democratic potential of the idea is therefore curtailed.[38] Thus, while the principle of consent grounds the normative role of the people in the justification of political obligation, consent remains a singular act of authorization, which, in creating the sovereign, relinquishes the people's continuing judgment of the sovereign. The people give up independent judgment as a continuous political right, and the tie between the sovereign and the people is solely one of obedience.

Historically, the power of the people appeared in their siding with the rebels and their disobedience of the King. This historical fact may have had nothing to do with Hobbes's demand for nearly unconditional obedience to the sovereign.[39] Nevertheless, many writers have accentuated the seemingly blind obedience that Hobbes required of the people. Wolin for instance notes Hobbes's "despotic mentality," which sought to make "subjects fit for despotic rule."[40] If those agitating against the King – rebels and the common

---

their agreement to found a body politic was a democratic one. This original democratic moment must inevitably lead to a decision about who would govern on an ongoing basis, and this latter decision established the permanent form of government – preferably for Hobbes a monarchy or aristocracy. See Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, 310 ff., and Baumgold, *Hobbes's Political Theory*, 41 ff., for discussion of this issue. See also Murray Forsyth, "Thomas Hobbes and the Constituent Power of the People," *Political Studies* 29 (June 1981): 191-203, for the argument that Hobbes was the originator of the doctrine of "the people" as the constituent power of the body politic, the founding principle of the American and French Revolutions.

[37] Wootton, "Introduction," *Divine Right and Democracy*, 57.

[38] In Sorell's words: "the obligations of subjects to their sovereigns are entirely one-sided. By the covenant that institutes the commonwealth each of the many makes a free gift of his right of self-governance to whomever becomes the sovereign, but since this person transfers or lays down no right himself, he can enjoy the benefit of the transfer of right from the multitude without having to give up some right in return." *Hobbes*, 119.

[39] Tuck argues in "Hobbes's Moral Philosophy," *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 186, that "Hobbes regarded politics as the solution to the conflicts characteristic of *mores*." He interprets Hobbes's political theory as a response to skepticism implying that the philosophical context is more important to understanding Hobbes's work than the political one (granting of course that some philosophical problems and solutions are themselves more salient in some periods than in others). The fact that politics is itself always and necessarily a realm of conflict would seem to be an important obstacle to its providing a solution to skepticism.

[40] Sheldon Wolin, "Hobbes and the Culture of Despotism," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Dietz, 19. Vaughan insists as well that Hobbes aimed to create "docile people." Vaughan, *Behemoth Teaches Leviathan*, 134.

people – had seen it as their duty to adhere to the King unquestioningly, then the war would never have come about. As it stands, this is an uninteresting tautology – if men were angels government would not be necessary. Could it have been Hobbes's intent in writing his extended works of political philosophy to tell us that if we would all simply act as sheep we would prevent ourselves from turning into wolves?

There is, however, one indisputable sense in which the people's power continues to play a decisive role in "constraining" or shaping the sovereign, even though this role is not a "right." Hobbes concludes in the final paragraph of *Leviathan* that his aim was "to set before mens eyes the mutuall Relation between Protection and Obedience; of which the condition of Humane Nature, and the laws Divine, (both Naturall and Positive) require an inviolable observation." The sovereign protects and therefore one is obligated to obey. Hobbes does not make the argument that the people are *obligated to believe* the sovereign will protect them, just that they are obligated to obey the sovereign because he protects them. But belief is crucial here, and it is incumbent upon the sovereign to continuously produce belief in himself. As Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan*: "I conclude therefore, that in the instruction of the people in the Essentiall Rights (which are the Naturall, and Fundamental Lawes) of Soveraignty, there is no difficulty, (whilest a Soveraign has his Power entire,) but what proceeds from his own fault, or the fault of those whom he trusteth in the administration of the Commonwealth; and consequently, it is his Duty, to cause them so to be instructed; and not onely his Duty, but his Benefit also, and Security, against the danger that may arrive to himselfe in his naturall Person, from Rebellion" (L 233).

How might the sovereign do this? Part of the answer must lie in the maintenance of legitimacy through what we might call ideological hegemony, that is, a public set of ideas that serve as a collective resource around which argument and discussion can take place. Unlike a Gramscian or Marxist use of these terms, I do not mean to imply a purely manipulative control of the minds of the people. The need for hegemony as the persuasive hold on peoples' beliefs is a sign of their power – they must be persuaded, they cannot be taken for granted or counted as mental ciphers. Hobbes's recognition of the power of the people to determine outcomes did not lead him to insist on stifling political engagement but to turn people's attention to ideas and reasons for acting in the political realm that were conducive to peace, order and social productivity. One point of my reading of *Behemoth* is to show that Hobbes recognized an ineliminable element of independent judgment, which if not based solely on reason is generated from balancing various beliefs, values and interests. Therefore, we should not read the

phrase "taught their duty" to mean that people must be made unthinking rule-followers indoctrinated in the correct litany of behavior. Hobbes did not think it possible (or desirable?) to constitute a nation of such a type of person. Rather, Hobbes seeks to take the politicized mentality and turn it to a "love of obedience" (59).

Behemoth demonstrates that obedience must itself be an emotionally based *idea* to which the majority attaches value, not just propositional truth value, nor simply value as individual virtue. The idea of obedience must itself be a cause; the act of obedience cannot just be an effect of other ideas. But when would obedience make sense as a cause or the basis of an ideology? Obedience becomes a cause one can "love" when it is attached to a fully elaborated and explained view of the value of the political realm. Hobbes's solution is to give the sovereign the ideological tools for the people to identify with him as the protector of that realm. The appeal to the *unity* of the commonwealth and to the sovereign's capacity to ensure *justice* are the focal points of the sovereign's ideology. But there must be an acceptance of those values in the first place. The content of the sovereign's ideology must provide a world-view that turns people's public emotions and minds toward justifying and explaining how to achieve those values. Absolute power on the part of the sovereign is not self-justifying. It is derivative of this larger world-view. Obedience to this sovereign therefore signifies the triumph of a political point of view. This solves for Hobbes a major problem.

In *Behemoth*, Hobbes depicts in stark terms the consequences of disobedience to lawful sovereigns. Disobedience creates a collective situation of lawlessness because one authoritative version of the law is no longer collectively observed. But this collectively irrational result may be one that the parties in conflict are not convinced they want to overcome. The logic of the situation is not like a prisoner's dilemma in which all parties see the collectively rational result but cannot reach it from within the logic of individually rational behavior. In this situation, there is no collectively rational result because persons and groups see themselves and their interests in fundamentally different ways and do not want to agree to an accommodation because this would dilute who they are and what they stand for. The parties in conflict are driven to define the situation in their own terms. Therefore, one of Hobbes's rhetorical objectives must be to create a collective point of view that all could accept as meaningfully representative of them. Hobbes's theory cannot therefore aim to create passive, unthinking subjects but active, consenting citizens who have come to recognize the supremacy of a political point of view embodied in the sovereign. People must come to see who they are differently such that the self they want to protect in public terms is best secured

through the unity of the commonwealth rather than through fragmenting ideological positions (mainly religious).

Granted, Hobbes does not clearly demarcate the act of obedience from the idea of obedience, but I believe this distinction makes a fundamental difference in how we read his vision of citizenship. There are two modes of calling for or instilling obedience: one says "You should understand and see the need to be obedient" while the other says "Be obedient." These are two quite distinct directives to being a political person: the first treats persons as citizens (with implicit democratic foundations); the second treats persons as subjects. If the person's engagement with the public power is through embracing an idea of obedience, he or she is recognized as active. If that person is involved through behaving obediently, he or she is passive. Hobbes puts political justification on a democratic track by conceiving of citizen involvement in active terms, while at the same time attempting to curtail that involvement by restricting the activity to a positive assention of the mind to the sovereign himself and sovereignty generally, and not to the actual ongoing acts of the concrete sovereign. Hobbes recognizes that the human mind is irrepressible – to which *Behemoth* vigorously testifies – and that it must be harnessed to the peace of the political nation.

Hobbes acknowledges the continual involvement of the people in the sovereign's power through the sovereign's need to maintain hegemony: he (it) must keep the allegiance of the people through convincing them of the importance of a unified political nation and in the cause of justice. Hobbes's recognition that the state cannot control the minds of the people does not contradict Hobbes's doctrine that the sovereign controls public judgment. Once a sovereign is established, he determines and controls the content of public rules. The acceptance of the supremacy of the sovereign is however based not on the rules the sovereign will make once established, but on consent given initially and continually to his legitimacy and hegemony. Hobbes shows how surrounding the power of the sovereign to control public judgment is the penumbra of continual acceptance of him by the people.

While the conception of ideology may seem foreign to Hobbes's mind, he, in some not fully distinct sense, recognized the need for the idea of absolute sovereignty to be elaborated in ideological terms – that is, not simply as "the truth" as opposed to all false ideas, but as a comprehensive fighting creed, an elaborated view of how the world works and the corresponding ideas and actions that should follow.[41] We might say that what *Leviathan* offers and *Behe-*

[41] Sorell, in "Hobbes's Persuasive Civil Science," esp. 350-51, discusses the concept of "counsel" as a way to understand what Hobbes may be grasping for in a new type of pub-

moth demonstrates to be necessary is an ideology of politics itself, ironic as this might seem given Hobbes's reputation. As a political theorist, Hobbes' objectives were two-fold – to develop a science of politics that demonstrated the obligation of citizens to obey an absolute sovereign, and then to convey the necessity of this view of political obligation to his readers in order to help establish a more peaceful, ordered English commonwealth. A question arises about the compatibility of these two sides of Hobbes' work. If what Hobbes' political morality is meant to solve is the tendency of political conflict to degenerate into civil war due to ideological differences, then how is it possible to appeal to such persons as Hobbes describes them to be, driven as they are by the negative logic he presents? *Leviathan* must first create "a people" who seek laws of justice out of a fragmented multitude; hence his work, as well as the king's, is meant to appeal to the people and to the elite. Without a transformation in popular thinking and culture, political authority cannot be made secure in the long run, and in this way the people are as important as the elite in making Hobbes' political philosophy more than an exercise in philosophical argument.

Christopher Hill wonderfully describes the ubiquity of the fear and disdain of the common folk – as the "rude multitude" or "many-headed monster"[42] – which the vast majority of writers and activists, not to mention aristocrats and gentry, displayed in the early modern world. Notably, Hobbes did not share this arrogance toward the common person. "I am one of the common people" he had said, "of plebian descent."[43] Keith Thomas who contended that Hobbes remained attached to aristocratic values (against the views of Macpherson and Strauss who saw Hobbes as an ideologist for the bourgeois classes) concedes that Hobbes strikingly dissociated himself from the generally disparaging attitude toward the people. On the nature of politics, all people share the same confusions and all are cognitively capable of reasoning and acting in the public sphere.[44]

---

lic speech. "When Hobbes tries to make room for an alternative to passion-stirring speech that is still prescriptive but also rational, scientific, and material for deductive reasoning, it is not immediately clear that he has the resources to do so" (350). I would suggest that what Hobbes's own writing exemplifies is the beginnings of modern ideology insofar as it is prescriptive, explanatory, and attempts to provide a "world-view" – that is, it is not just a series of discrete counsels or pieces of advice, but gives an integrated depiction of human nature and institutions.

[42] Hill, *Change and Continuity*, 181-204, passim.

[43] Quoted in Keith Thomas, "The Social Origins of Hobbes's Political Thought," in *Hobbes Studies*, ed. K. C. Brown (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 200.

[44] That Hobbes rejected the Aristotelian conception of natural hierarchy in favor of human equality provides a foundation for the normative centrality of the non-elite person as well.

Hobbes's work is not the reaction of a timid man (all is fear) or a cynical man (all is self-interest) to his times. It is the work of a powerful mind searching for grounds to construct as broad an ideology as possible to justify the power of a unifying sovereign in the face of competing, splintering ideologies, which had taken hold of a mobilized public sphere. In a new world where ideas are the currency of power, to fail to provide convincing ideas to the people is to relinquish the capacity to rule. While Hobbes defends the king's right to rule and thus the theoretical obligation of the people to obey, the act of writing *Behemoth* is a recognition of the need for ideological power. In a sense *Behemoth* tells the story of the King's failure to convince the people as much as it was a denunciation of rebellious elites. But Hobbes did not blame the king, not because Charles I did not have the benefit of Hobbes's science of virtue and vice (no one did), but because Hobbes sought to maintain the ideological dignity of the sovereign power, and he believed in the fine art of dramatic storytelling as a means toward that political end.*

* I thank Andrew Altman, John Ferejohn and Melissa Schwartzberg for comments on this paper.