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Making Space for Leviathan: On Hobbes' Political Theory



Abstract: Most discussions of Hobbes' political thought leave one with the impression that Hobbes' most important contribution to political theory is the contractual nature of his commonwealth from which the modern social contract and many discussions of contemporary political theory emerge. Adopting this perspective on Hobbes' political thought risks losing sight of the philosophy of politics he develops. This philosophy not only draws on a realist attitude toward human political motivation, but it also takes a position on the place of politics in culture, and redefines the horizons of culture to emphasize the role of religion within it, at times drawing on and echoing classical Jewish sources. In Leviathan, politics inherits the classical role of religion as the determining force of this cultural horizon. Political theology legitimizes the sovereign not only politically, but culturally. Liberal political theory has for over two centuries assumed the question of religion and politics to be settled. This article proposes that this question be reconsidered in light of liberalism's foundational philosophy.

He is a king over all the children of pride.

—Job 41:34

Among students of political theory, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* is best known for its exposition of the social contract. The contract serves to deliver individuals from the volatile state of nature to the stability and security of a commonwealth, the body politic headed by a sovereign. Major works written on Hobbes in recent years, such as Jean Hampton's *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* and Gregory S. Kavka's *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, are devoted to the contractarian conception of political obligation.¹ Although this focus is by no means novel—we may recall

¹ Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

Quentin Skinner's critique of Hobbes' scholarship in the early sixties²—it has received renewed vigor from the monumental achievements of liberal political theory of the past decades, most notably that of John Rawls' contractarian *Theory of Justice*. Hobbes is thus read as the progenitor of the modern version of the social contract. *Leviathan* is approached primarily in its role as the contract's paradigmatic presentation, with theorists analyzing its rationality, validity, and utility.

This focus has been bequeathed to generations of students by the abridged editions of *Leviathan*, which typically include Part 2, "Of Commonwealth," and selections from Part 1, "Of Man," but not the rest of the book. This editing of *Leviathan* does away with more than half the work and distorts the reader's perception of Hobbes' project. The omission of Part 3, "Of a Christian Commonwealth," and Part 4, "Of the Kingdom of Darkness," from the discussion obscures the axial role of religion in Hobbes' political philosophy.³ The weight Hobbes attributed to a proper consideration of the relationship between religion and politics, and to the role of religion in the polity, is *prima facie* apparent in the sheer quantity of space he devoted to discussing these themes in *Leviathan*: The latter two parts comprise just under half the book in pages, and its longest chapter—88 pages out of 645—is chapter 42, "Of Power Ecclesiastical," Hobbes' polemic against papism.⁴ But this emphasis

² Quentin Skinner, "The Ideological Context of Hobbes' Political Thought," *Historical Journal* 9 (1966), pp. 286–317.

³ See, for example, the selection in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Francis B. Randall (New York: Washington Square Press, 1969). The editorial policy of this edition is guided by the following assumption: "[Hobbes'] book includes, among other things, a great deal of physics, psychology, and ethics, and, even more, theology, biblical study, and religious polemic. Much of this, especially the theology and religious polemic, is badly dated. But even these obsolete parts of *Leviathan*, which we should not dream of consulting for answers to any of our problems, are prime documents which tell us an enormous amount about the political and intellectual temper of seventeenth-century England..." (p. ix). In contrast, the material in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakshott (New York: Collier, 1967), provides a judicious selection of material. Here too, the modern introduction is a useful guide to editorial policy: "It is seldom realized that over half of *Leviathan* deals with religious matters. One of Hobbes' main preoccupations was to establish that there are general grounds as well as scriptural authority for his conviction that the sovereign is the best interpreter of God's will. Religion, in his view, was a system of law, not a system of truth" (p. 15).

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1985). Citations follow this edition, however, spelling has been modernized, as in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994). See the summary of relevant literature in Edwin Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly, or How to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise," in Daniela Bostrenghi, ed., *Hobbes and Spinoza: Science and Politics* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1992), nn. 2–3. Notable additions are Johann P. Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context* (New York: St.

is not only quantitative; it is a qualitative issue that bears directly upon the philosophical content of the book and informs both its thematic, or narrative, structure and the structure of its argument. As Leo Strauss aptly observed, Hobbes' works on "political philosophy may with scarcely less justice than Spinoza's expressly so entitled work be called theological-political treatises."⁵

Central to Hobbes' theological-political effort is his detailed exposition of the Hebrew Bible's politics. *Leviathan* does not reflect knowledge of Hebrew. Hobbes' interpretations often turn to the Septuagint and to the Vulgate versions but never to the Hebrew text. Even so, the Old Testament provides the initial presentations of two fundamental components of *Leviathan's* theory of legitimacy. First is the covenant; second is sovereignty. Both are embedded in a political theology that Hobbes takes great pains to articulate afresh for the modern commonwealth.

1. POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The important differences between Hobbes and Spinoza notwithstanding, Spinoza's focus on political theology provides a useful point of reference. The very title of the *Theologico-Political Treatise (TTP)* assumes a unique issue to be pursued, or, stated differently, a theological-political problem to be dealt with. Spinoza's problem is best expressed in terms of the conflicting agendas of the *TTP*.⁶ The first is his critique of dogmatism and institutionalized religion, be it Jewish-rabbinic or Christian-Calvinist.⁷ Spinoza critiques the classic themes of medieval Jewish political theology—prophecy, election, and law—and develops a historical-critical analysis of Scripture. To this day, this aspect of his agenda elicits mixed and polarized responses. It attracted the ire of readers such as Hermann Cohen, who in his essay on Spinoza's attitude toward Judaism basically accuses him of anti-Semitism.⁸ On

Martin's Press, 1992); and A.P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁵ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 71.

⁶ See Menachem Lorberbaum, "Spinoza's Theological-Political Problem," *Hebraic Political Studies* 1:2 (2006), pp. 203–207.

⁷ See Benedict de Spinoza, *Political Treatise and Theologico-Political Treatise*, in Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1955), vol. 1, ch. 13, pp. 175–181; Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 107ff.

⁸ Hermann Cohen, "Spinoza über Staat und Religion, Judentum und Christentum," in Bruno Strauss, ed., *Juridische Schriften* (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1924), vol. 3, pp. 290–372.

Cohen's reading, Spinoza is guilty precisely of "the virulence of theological hatred"⁹ he himself attacks in the *TTP*. Cohen's psychological analysis of Spinoza's motivation has the double effect of accusing the man of reason of being prisoner of his affectations, and of piety. As Spinoza himself acutely observes: "of all hatreds none is more deep and tenacious than that which springs from extreme devoutness or piety, and is itself cherished as pious."¹⁰

At the same time, the critical aspect of Spinoza's agenda has also impressed readers like Lewis Feuer, who viewed him as "the first great radical in modern Jewish history."¹¹ This reading celebrates Spinoza as a founding philosopher of modern liberalism who "virtually de-communicated himself from Amsterdam Jewry before they excommunicated him."¹²

But the *TTP* includes another, perhaps conflicting agenda. Spinoza recognizes that no sovereign can afford to remain indifferent to religion. Therefore too, no sovereign can do without a theology to buttress his reign.¹³

Spinoza is thus led both to critique theology and to supply one, both to critique Moses' prophecy and to utilize him as a model. How to achieve this paradoxical combination of the critical purpose of the book on one hand, and its political purpose on the other, is Spinoza's unique version of the theological-political problem.¹⁴ Indeed, this combination has eluded many readers, as apparent in the aforementioned one-dimensional readings of the *TTP*. In contrast, in his later reading of Spinoza, Strauss appreciated this duality of his political writing, analyzing it in terms of persecution and the art of writing. More recently, Yirmeyahu Yovel has

⁹ Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, p. 227.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 229.

¹¹ Lewis S. Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1987), p. 37.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹³ Cf. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, pp. 209–211, 229–238, for a detailed comparison of Spinoza and Hobbes. The legitimacy of the state according to Spinoza is, as Yirmeyahu Yovel stresses, immanent. See Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Vol. 2: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 11–15.

¹⁴ For a thorough examination of Spinoza's version of the theological-political problem and its role in providing a philosophical foundation for modern liberal-democratic republics, see Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): "The centerpiece of this liberalism was the attempt to replace the historical religions based on Scripture with a new kind of civil theology based on reason.... Rather than arguing for a strict separation of church and state, Spinoza seeks an alliance with the political sovereign to control religion" (pp. 21, 28).

provocatively analyzed Spinoza, the Marrano of reason, in terms of the cultural-existential complex of the *conversos* in Amsterdam.¹⁵

Although not lacking in criticism and complexity, *Leviathan* does not share the tone or rhetorical qualities of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Hobbes' critical élan is evidenced in his critique of the universities, "amongst which the frequency of insignificant Speech is one" (ch. 1, p. 87), and their dogmatic education.¹⁶ His complexity is affirmed by his republican-inclined defense of monarchy, which baffled his critics: "He was a royalist who accepted and indeed welcomed one of the key doctrines of anti-royalists—that people could defend themselves even against the king himself."¹⁷ Yet Hobbes does not share Spinoza's anger. His sense of danger is also different from Spinoza's: he fears civil war more than persecution. The theological-political problem is not at the core of Hobbes' personal identity as it is for Spinoza. The project of *Leviathan*, although it includes political theology, places it within a broader, fully developed political philosophy.

It is the second theme mentioned above, namely, that the sovereign cannot afford to be indifferent to religion, that is most important for Hobbes. Plato's notion of a noble myth in *The Republic*, and his description of the nocturnal council in *The Laws*, marks the beginning of a tradition of political philosophers who maintain that no ruler can afford to be indifferent to the effect of religion on the populace. In the Middle Ages, this tradition uniquely influenced the theology and law of Islam and of Judaism, respectively, through the work of Al-Farabi and, following him, Maimonides.¹⁸ Hobbes differs from the medieval political Platonists

¹⁵ Yirmeyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Vol. 1: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 28–39. Even so, both readers ultimately lean toward one position: Yovel views Spinoza as the first secular Jew, while Strauss views him as the formulator of a conservative politics ensuring the well-being of the philosopher in the modern polity. Edwin Curley's characterization combines these attitudes: "Though Spinoza often seems to be an extremely conservative political thinker, the emphasis he places on freedom is an important liberal element in his thought." Curley, "Kissing, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan," in Don Garret, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 332.

¹⁶ See, for example, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 30, pp. 384–385, and "A Review and Conclusion," pp. 727–728.

¹⁷ Sommerville, *Hobbes: Political Ideas*, p. 34; cf. George Kateb, "Hobbes and the Irrationality of Politics," *Political Theory* 17 (1989), pp. 355–391, who questions the coherence of Hobbes' political philosophy in light of the constraints on the state imposed by the right of self-preservation. On the democratic implications of the social contract, see Sommerville, *Hobbes: Political Ideas*, pp. 57–63.

¹⁸ I know of no citations of Maimonides by Hobbes. However, *Mishneh Torah* was translated into Latin in the seventeenth century and was read and cited by Hobbes' contemporary thinkers, as was *The Guide of the Perplexed*, which was also widely accessible

in his theory of sovereign supremacy. Maimonides' king is necessary for maintaining social order, and his authority as guardian of that order often takes precedence over the dictates of divine law. But the king does not determine the content of religious law or ritual.¹⁹ Hobbes' sovereign, in contrast, is the ultimate authority in all matters. In chapter 39, "Of the signification in Scripture of the word Church," Hobbes argues that

Temporal and Spiritual Government, are but two words brought into the world, to make men see double, and mistake their Lawful Sovereign. It is true, that the bodies of the faithful, after the Resurrection, shall be not only Spiritual, but Eternal: but in this life they are gross, and corruptible. There is therefore no other Government in this life, neither of State, nor Religion, but Temporal; nor teaching of any doctrine, lawful to any Subject, which the Governor both of the State, and of the Religion, forbids to be taught: And that Governor must be one. (ch. 39, pp. 498–499)

In its theory of sovereign supremacy, Hobbes' political philosophy marks a turning point in the shift to secularization within European cultural and political history. Echoing this Hobbesian argument, Yehoshua Arieli has defined secularization as a rejection of "the claim of the Church to be the lawgiver and foundation of all values, truth, and meaning for man, living in the world, the *saeculum*, or city of man."²⁰ Given the role of the commonwealth in liberating man from a cultureless state of nature where human existence is nasty and brutish, the theory of sovereign supremacy makes politics and the worldly sovereign the definers of the horizon of culture. Religion is one of the elements within this purview, but it no longer defines its contours. Politics instead inherits the role of medieval religion in defining the cultural horizon. Hobbes is closer here in spirit to Plato than are the latter's medieval disciples.

Hobbes' image of the state as Leviathan is normally interpreted in terms of the enormity of power invested in it. The book aims to describe "the Generation of that great Leviathan, or rather (to speak more reverently)

and had been for some time. On this see Aaron Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi John Selden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ See Menachem Lorberbaum, *Politics and the Limits of Law: Secularizing the Political in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), ch. 3, pp. 43–69.

²⁰ Yehoshua Arieli, "Modern History as Reinstatement of the *Saeculum*: A Study in the Semantics of History," *Jewish History* 8 (1994), p. 205.

of that *Mortal God*, to which we owe under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defense" (ch. 17, p. 227). However, the enormity of this Leviathan stems not only from the power it amasses but from its having inherited the role of the church, or of the historical religions' God, in defining the horizons of meaningful human existence. Hobbes is less an atheist than an idolater: He breaks with the main concern of biblical politics, which was to ensure that the king not be God.²¹ (The degree to which this was Hobbes' express intention or merely an unintended consequence of his political theology has been much debated among his readers since the book's publication. At least in retrospect, *Leviathan* helped catalyze the secularization of European culture.)²²

This political-cultural matrix is most important for the modern discussion of political theology. Given the role of Hobbes' theory of the state in defining modern conceptions of sovereignty on the one hand, and its role in enhancing the secularization of European culture on the other, the question arises as to how far the modern state has, or indeed can, truly free itself from the theological-political commitments invested in Hobbesian political philosophy. Let us return to this question after considering Hobbes' political theology in greater detail.

2. HOBBS' PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Hobbes' discussions of religion are tightly woven into the arguments of the entire book. I will concentrate on two main features of the *Leviathan*: the enormity of its power and its presentation in traditionally religious language.

²¹ See Moshe Halbertal, "God's Kingship," in Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam Zohar, and Yair Lorberbaum, eds., *The Jewish Political Tradition, Vol. 1: Authority* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 214–235. It is against this background that I reject Martinich's assessment of Hobbes as an earnest and committed Christian in his *Two Gods of Leviathan*.

²² Curley argues that "in spite of the deference [Hobbes] often shows to orthodox Christian doctrines, he is essentially a secular thinker, whose religious views are subversive of those held by most Europeans of his time." Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly," p. 512. Curley's final account is that "*Leviathan* is intended to be an ambiguous work" with regard to Hobbes' beliefs about God, "to be read by different people in different ways, as all displays of irony are apt to be" (p. 590). Ambiguous irony is Curley's hermeneutical alternative to the Straussian atheistic art of dissimulation. However, for reasons more fully developed later in this essay, I maintain that the preoccupation with the question of whether Hobbes was an atheist or not obscures the structure of his political theology. The philosophy of religion provided in *Leviathan* must accomplish the double task of cohering with the natural foundation of political obligation, therefore making minimalist metaphysical claims, while being sufficiently robust to provide a persuasive political theology.

The theoretical structure of Hobbes' commonwealth rests upon three main components: (a) A political theory in the form of a social contract that grounds the legitimacy of the sovereign. (And his concept of sovereignty is the linchpin of his theory of state.)²³ This political theory is buttressed, in turn, by (b) a political sociology explicating the concept of power on one hand, and (c) a political theology lending religious credence to sovereignty, and hence to the Leviathan, on the other.

Hobbes turned the idea of power into a useful analytic concept. He defines the power of an individual as "his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good" (ch. 10, p. 150). This definition is sufficiently abstracted from the specificity both of the means and of their ends. Abstracting from the specificity of means enables Hobbes to deal with all kinds of means—be they physical prowess, social recognition, or rhetorical qualities—and hence to avoid the common reduction of power to force. Abstracting from the specificity of ends provides Hobbes with a value-free analysis of power. The good he refers to is not a moral concept. He defines the good as "whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire" (ch. 6, p. 120).²⁴

Hobbes' analysis of power is clearly meant to contrast with Aristotle's theory of action at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle analyzes actions in teleological terms:

Every art and every investigation, and similarly every action and pursuit, is considered to aim at some good. Hence the Good has been rightly defined as "that at which all things aim." [...] If, then, our activities have some end which we want for its own sake, and for the sake of which we want all the other ends—if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for this will involve an infinite progression, so that our aim would be pointless and ineffectual), it is clear that this must be the Good, that is the supreme good. Does it not follow, then, that a knowledge of the Good is of great importance for the conduct of our lives? Are we not more

²³ "The Sovereignty is the Soule of the Commonwealth; which once departed from the Body, the members doe no more receive their motion from it." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 21, p. 272; cf. p. 81. Locke typically reserves this imagery for the *Legislative*. See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2:212, p. 407.

²⁴ Cf. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines, with an introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:2, pp. 23–26; and Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, in Spinoza, *Chief Works*, vol. 2, 4:68, pp. 232–233. See too the differing accounts of this comparison in Warren Zev Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981), pp. 151–172; and Aryeh L. Motzkin, "Maimonides and Spinoza on Good and Evil," *Daat* 25 (1990), pp. v–xxiii, respectively.

likely to achieve our aim if we have such a target? [...] we must try to describe at least in outline what the Good really is [...] presumably this [would be the task of] the most authoritative and directive science. Clearly, this description fits the science of politics.²⁵

According to Aristotle, all human ends can be organized in a hierarchy of purposes that lead to the *summum bonum*. Politics is the science studying the highest good.

In contrast, Hobbes denies an overall hierarchical scheme of the good: “the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis Ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of old Morall Philosophers” (ch. 11, p. 160). On the contrary, the concept of power enables Hobbes to focus on its dynamic quality: “the nature of Power, is in this point, like to Fame, increasing as it proceeds” (ch. 10, p. 150). Contrary to the Aristotelian analysis of action in teleological terms as motion leading to an ultimate high point of rest, Hobbes speaks of the never-ceasing human quest for power:

I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of Power after power, that ceases only in Death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. (ch. 11, p. 161)

Hobbes' concept of power is isomorphic to the concept of energy in modern physics or to that of capital in modern economics. It is a dynamic phenomenon “increasing as it proceeds.”²⁶ The problem individuals face is not a moral one of happiness and contentment, but a sociological one stemming from the constraints dictated by the effort of securing one's power, especially since

The Greatest of humane powers, is that which is compounded of the Powers of most men, united by consent, in one person, Naturall, or

²⁵ Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 1094a, pp. 63–64. Aristotle's analysis of action here seems to involve a number of fallacious inferences; see Harry Frankfurt, “On the Usefulness of Final Ends,” *Iyun* 41 (1992), pp. 3–19.

²⁶ This argument figures earlier in the book in his discussion of the passions. Analyzing felicity, Hobbes argues against the notion of a “perpetuall Tranquility of mind” in this world, stressing that “Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire.” Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 6, p. 130.

Civill, that has the use of all their Powers depending on his will; such as is the Power of a Common-wealth. (ch. 10, p. 150)

The polity is the greatest generator of power humans know. The commonwealth is a Leviathan. As Hobbes states in his introduction:

For by Art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth, or State, (in Latin Civitas which is but an Artificial Man);²⁷ though of greater stature and strength than the Natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; [...] by which the parts of this Body Politique were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that *Fiat*, or the *Let us make man*, pronounced by God in the Creation.²⁸ (Introduction, pp. 81–82)

Politics is not the guide to eudaimonia, to happiness. It is rather the science of managing power so as to ensure the peace and security of human existence. The social contract not only unites individuals into one power-generating enterprise, it also legitimizes the authority to manage that enterprise.²⁹

Hobbes must now seek to secure relations between the mortal and the immortal gods. In the first two parts of *Leviathan*, Hobbes develops a natural theology, which includes a discussion of the concept of God and the place of religion in human culture, and ends with an outline of the natural political theology of the commonwealth. Part 3 of *Leviathan* attempts to interpret a specific historical religion, namely Christianity, in terms of the book's natural political theology. Here I focus on the components of Hobbes' natural political theology.

²⁷ The notion of an artificial man alludes to a possible mixing of the theatrical and the mechanical, both of which are central to Hobbes' conception of politics. See Yaron Ezrahi, "The Theatrics and Mechanics of Action: The Theater and the Machine as Political Metaphors," *Social Research* 62 (1995), pp. 299–322. Hobbes' political sociology includes, then, an analysis not only of power but of the concept of representation as a condition for conceptualizing sovereignty too; see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 16, "Of Persons and things Personated." Ezrahi argues that according to Hobbes, "theatrical impersonation becomes a model for the institutionalization of the logic of political and legal actions in roles distinct and separate from the particular individuals who assume them" (p. 307). This may explain why Hobbes did not see fit to argue for toleration, for "Private, is in secret Free." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 31, p. 401.

²⁸ The frontispiece of *Leviathan* is an important illustration of this conception of the polity as a human body; see Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan*, appendix C, pp. 362–367; and Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes: Visuelle Strategien* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999). I thank Irving Lavin for bringing Bredekamp's work to my attention.

²⁹ See the formulation of the contract in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 17, p. 227, which enables the multitude to be "united in one Person" and clearly parallels—as a legitimizing device—the aforementioned sociopolitical formulation of the commonwealth as generator of power.

Hobbes has often been accused of atheism. However, his explicit statements about human knowledge of God or the possibility of revelation do not support this charge.³⁰ He states the position that guides him throughout *Leviathan* already in the third chapter, entitled “Of the Consequences or Train of the Imaginations”:

Whatsoever we imagine, is *Finite*. Therefore there is no Idea, or conception of anything we call *Infinite*. No man can have in his mind an Image of infinite magnitude; nor conceive infinite swiftness, infinite time, or infinite force, or infinite power. When we say any thing is infinite, we signifie onely, that we are not able to conceive the ends, and bounds of the thing named; having no Conception of the thing, but of our own inability. And therefore the Name of *God* is used, not to make us conceive him; (for he is *Incomprehensible*; and his greatnesse, and power are unconceivable;) but that we may honour him. (ch. 3, p. 99)

“God,” argues Hobbes, is a name, not an idea. Contra Descartes, he contends that we cannot conceive of God because he is, by definition, infinite. The *name* God, in contrast, has a performative function.

Hobbes reiterates this position in chapter 31, “Of the Kingdom of God by Nature,” where he makes use of negative theology in a truly Maimonidean fashion:

Hee that will attribute to God, nothing but what is warranted by natural Reason, must either use such Negative Attributes, as Infinite, Eternal, Incomprehensible; or Superlatives, as Most High, most Great, and the like; or Indefinite, as Good, Just, Holy, Creator; and in such sense, as if he meant not to declare what he is, (for that would circumscribe him within the limits of our Fancy,) but how much wee admire him, and how ready we would be to obey him [...] For there is but one Name to signifie our Conception of his nature, and that is, *I am* : and but one Name of his Relation to us, and that is *God*; in which is contained Father, King, and Lord. (ch. 31, p. 403)

Religious language is not descriptive. The significance of a theological proposition lies not in its truth value but in its practical effect. “For in the Attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of Philosophicall Truth; but the signification of Pious Intention” (ch. 31, p. 404). Therefore too, all religious language is potentially political, insofar as it seeks to lead people to action. This political potential is apparent not only in Hobbes’ shift from “*I am*” as signifying God’s

³⁰ See Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan*, pp. 19–43.

nature to the meaning of the name “God,” which signifies “Father, King, and Lord.” Elsewhere, he makes explicit his train of thought regarding religious language:

And because words (and consequently the Attributes of God) have their signification by agreement, and constitution of men; those Attributes are to be held significative of Honor, that men intend shall so be; and whatsoever may be done by the wills of particular men, where there is no Law but Reason, may be done by the will of the Common-wealth, by Laws Civil. And because a Common-wealth hath no Will, nor makes no Laws, but those that are made by the Will of him, or them that have the Sovereign Power; it follows, that those Attributes which the Sovereign ordains, in the Worship of God, for signs of Honor, ought to be taken and used for such, by private men in their public Worship. (ch. 31, pp. 405–406)

In this spirit, Anat Biletzki has argued that Hobbes’ commitment to a pragmatic philosophy of language leads him to view the sovereign “as a meaning-giving authority.”³¹

But even if we do not attribute such a strong philosophical commitment to Hobbes, we may appreciate his critique of the political implications of religious teaching. Thus, while attacking pretenders to prophecy, Hobbes cautions:

And consequently men had need to be very circumspect, and wary, in obeying the voice of man, that pretending himself to be a Prophet, requires us to obey God in that way, which he in Gods name telleth us to be the way to happinesse. For he that pretends to teach men the way of so great felicity, pretends to govern them; that is to say, to rule, and reign over them. (ch. 36, p. 466)

The teacher of religion presumes to instruct people regarding happiness and in this, argues Hobbes, pretends to govern them.

The political importance of religion is ultimately rooted in religion’s role in the formation of human consciousness. “Religion,” says Hobbes, “hath place in the nature of man before Civil Society” (ch. 14, p. 200). (Hobbes often uses the term “religion” to signify an attitude toward the world that precedes its institutionalized and politicized cultivation, or “formed Religion” [ch. 12, p. 179].) I will now turn to Hobbes’ analysis of religion as a pre-political motivational force and then turn to his translation of religion into a political theology.

³¹ See Anat Biletzki, “‘Policy Ecclesiastical’: Thomas Hobbes on Language, Religion, and Interpretation,” in Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, eds., *Interpretation in Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 70.

Hobbes does not strictly speaking provide a proof of the existence of God. He does, however, examine the reasoning that leads people to assume God's existence:

Curiosity, or love of the knowledge of causes, draws a man from consideration of the effect, to seek the cause; and again, the cause of that cause; till of necessity he must come to this thought at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternal; which is it men call God. (ch. 11, p. 167)

This logic leads people to posit a first cause, referring to it by the name "God." Hobbes describes this chain of reasoning as a natural propensity of human thought:

So that it is impossible to make any profound enquiry into naturall causes, without being enclined thereby to believe that there is one God Eternall; though they cannot have any Idea of him in their mind, answerable to his nature.³² (ch. 11, p. 167)

Now, although Hobbes did not view this ratiocination as incoherent, he maintains that it may lead the ignorant to the credulity of believing in impossibilities:

And they that make little, or no enquiry into the naturall causes of things, yet from the feare that proceeds from ignorance it selfe, of what it is that hath the power to do them much good or harm, are enclined to suppose, and feign unto themselves, severall kinds of Powers Invisible; and to stand in awe of their own imaginations [...] making the creatures of their own fancy, their Gods. (ch. 11, pp. 167–168)

Note that Hobbes here does not refute the idea of a first cause. Rather, he views the impulse to seek a first cause, coupled with the fear bred by ignorance of natural causes, as resulting in superstition. "This Fear of things invisible is the natural Seed of that, which every one in himself calls Religion; and in them that worship, or fear that Power otherwise than they do, Superstition" (ch. 11, p. 168). Natural curiosity combined with fear, a passion, results in religion. Again, Hobbes is more interested in the motivating force of religion than in the truth-value of its claims.³³

³² That Hobbes does not view this as an incoherent position is proven by the rest of this paragraph, where he likens the argument from design to blind men imagining a fire.

³³ Thus, in his discussions of the passions, Hobbes states that "Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, *Religion*; not allowed, *Superstition*. And when the power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, *True Religion*" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 6, p. 124).

The seed metaphor seeks to capture the unique social and political potential of this motivational force:

And this seed of Religion, having been observed by many; some of those that have observed it, have been enclined thereby to nourish, dresse, and forme it into Lawes; and to add to it of their own invention, any opinion of the causes of future events, by which they thought they should best be able to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their Powers. (ch. 11, p. 168)

Religion lends itself to being politicized because of its unique power, to exploit ignorance and fear.

The importance Hobbes ascribes to religion's power is reflected in the structure of Part 1 of *Leviathan*. He analyzes the concept of power in two chapters. Chapter 10 is entitled "Of Power, Worth, Dignity, Honor, and Worthiness"; there Hobbes proposes the definition of power discussed above. Chapter 11 is entitled "Of the Difference of Manners," where by "manners" Hobbes means the public actions of individuals. In this latter chapter he rejects the Aristotelian notion of the teleology of human actions and develops his theory of religion as a unique motivational force. The secret of politicizing religion is acculturation: the manner in which religious consciousness is nourished, dressed, and formed into laws. Therefore, chapter 12, as its title indicates, is indeed "Of Religion," particularly its cultured form. It is only after canvassing the meaning and sources of human power that Hobbes turns in chapter 13 to his famous discussion of the state of nature and the means of overcoming it.

3. HOBBS' POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The most important paragraph in the chapter devoted to religion is arguably that containing Hobbes' description of the manner in which "these seeds have received culture from two sorts of men" (ch. 12, p. 173). One sort is those who have nourished and ordered these seeds "according to their own invention." The other is those informed "by Gods commandment." We see here again that from the phenomenological point of view, Hobbes considers all religions to share the same foundations, regardless of the truth value of their particular doctrines. "[B]oth sorts" of men, he asserts, "have done it, with a purpose to make those men that relied on them, the more apt to Obedience, Laws, Peace, Charity, and civil Society." Institutionalized religion, based on true revelation or not, is political:

So that the Religion of the former sort, is a part of humane Politiques; and teaches part of the duty which Earthly Kings require of their Subjects. And the Religion of the later sort is Divine

Politiques; and contains Precepts to those that have yielded themselves subjects in the Kingdome of God. Of the former sort, were all the founders of Commonwealths, and the Law-givers of the Gentiles: Of the later sort, were *Abraham*, *Moses*, and our *Blessed Savior*; by whom have derived unto us the Laws of the Kingdome of God. (ch. 12, p. 173)

The contrast to Spinoza is again instructive. In the introduction to the *TTP*, Spinoza sets the tone of his book by contrasting superstition with knowledge. As we saw above, Hobbes is well aware of the role of fear and credulity in the formation of religious consciousness. He is also aware of how easily they are prone to manipulation as a source of power. Yet unlike Spinoza, he does not leave matters at that, merely equating religion with superstition. Hobbes focuses on the cultivation and acculturation of religion in the process of its institutionalization. Furthermore, whereas Spinoza's prima facie ecumenicalism of Moses and Jesus bears traces of Marrano dualism, Hobbes stresses the essential continuity of purpose between the great legislators of antiquity—Plato,³⁴ Moses, and Jesus—and, more importantly, between “humane Politiques” and “Divine Politiques.”³⁵

Hobbes' political theology assumes this continuity. It includes first a natural political theology consonant with the basic assumptions of natural law informing the creation of the commonwealth by contract. This is developed in chapter 31 of *Leviathan*, entitled “Of the Kingdom of God by Nature.” This chapter fittingly ends Part 2 of the book, which describes the commonwealth in detail and completes the natural deduction thereof provided at the end of Part 1. Second, Hobbes' political theology includes an interpretation of Jewish and Christian religions based on this natural model. The rest of *Leviathan* is devoted to detailed interpretation.

One role of Hobbes' natural political theology is to legitimize his theory of sovereignty. God in this theology is represented as king of nature.

³⁴ Although Plato is not mentioned here by name, Hobbes viewed him as a model of political science. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 31, p. 407; and Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, pp. 89–96, 138ff.

³⁵ Neither do these forms of politics differ in the possibility of personating God. As Hobbes argues: “The true God may be Personated. As he was: first, by *Moses*; who governed the Israelites, (that were not his, but Gods people,) not in his own name [...] but in Gods Name. Secondly, by the Son of man [...]” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 16, p. 220). And “[a]n Idol, or meer Figment of the brain, may be Personated” too. The difference is the author of the personation. In the former it is God; in the latter, the state: “But Idols cannot be Authors: for an Idol is nothing. The Authority proceeded from the State: and therefore before introduction of Civill Government, the Gods of the Heathen could not be Personated” (ch. 16, p. 220).

Hobbes begins by quoting Psalms, “God is King, let the Earth rejoyce” (96:1), and expounds the meaning of God’s sovereignty over nature:

Whether men will or not, they must be subject alwayes to the Divine Power. By denying the Existence, or Providence of God, men may shake off their Ease, but not their Yoke. (ch. 31, p. 395)

God’s power over nature extends itself “not only to Man, but also to Beasts, and Plants, and Bodies inanimate” (ch. 31, p. 396). Hence, we may assume Hobbes to be referring to God as king by virtue of his power as the primary cause of being.

Hobbes, however, is well aware of the metaphorical character of the title “king” when applied to God: “But to call this Power of God,” he qualifies his position, “by the name of Kingdome, is but a metaphorical use of the word” (ch. 31, pp. 395–396). In chapter 4, Hobbes had characterized metaphors as a common abuse of speech. When people use words metaphorically, “that is, in other sense than they are ordained for, [they] thereby deceive others” (ch. 4, p. 102). How, then, are we to relate to his “metaphorical” use of “kingdom” with reference to God? Does this indicate an intentionally deceptive employment of political metaphors? I think we need not attribute to Hobbes conspiratorial intentions here. He openly admits the metaphorical character of the concept of the kingdom of God in nature. Moreover, given the Hobbesian assumption that religious language is not descriptive, all attributes relating to God will be metaphorical (if not equivocal) and, ultimately, political in practice. The important point to decipher is the specific politics a given theology seeks to promote, which becomes apparent in the political ideas used to represent the divine. In Hobbes’ case it is his specific rendering of sovereignty. Thus he argues in a tone reminiscent of Spinoza’s reduction of rights to power:³⁶

The Right of Nature, whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his Lawes, is to be derived, not from his Creating them, as if he required obedience, as of Gratitude for his benefits; but from his *Irresistible Power*. (ch. 31, p. 397)

The crucial difference between Leviathan and God is the latter’s omnipotence.³⁷ Yet the real significance of the comparison lies precisely in

³⁶ Cf. Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, ch. 2; and Spinoza, *TTP*, ch. 16. See also Lorberbaum, “Spinoza’s Theological-Political Problem,” pp. 214–215.

³⁷ Cf. the definition of “will” in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 31, p. 402, and the important consequences for foreign policy in ch. 30, p. 394. Locke, however, treats God as an absolute monarch in terms of authority but by virtue of “his Wisdom and Goodness” (Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2:166, p. 378).

reinforcing the basic theoretical structure of the Hobbesian state. Thus Hobbes continues:

Seeing all men by Nature had Right to All things, they had Right every one to reigne over all the rest. But because this Right could not be obtained by force, it concerned the safety of every one, laying by that Right, to set up men (with Sovereign Authority) by common consent, to rule and defend them: whereas if there had been any man of Power Irresistible; there had been no reason, why he should not by that Power have ruled [...]. (ch. 31, p. 397)

Omnipotence, it follows, is God's most important political attribute:³⁸

To those therefore whose Power is irresistible, the dominion of all men adhaereth naturally by their excellence of Power; and consequently it is from that Power, that the Kingdome over men, and the Right of afflicting men at his pleasure, belongeth Naturally to God Almighty; not as Creator, and Gracious; but as Omnipotent.³⁹ (ch. 31, p. 397)

But because no man possesses such irresistible power, the pact becomes a necessity. In fact, it is the relative omnipotence of Leviathan as the combined power of all those contracted to the body politic that precludes any one man's amassing enough power to force a relapse to the state of nature.

By reflecting the structure of his polity, Hobbes' political theology reinforces the conception of sovereign supremacy. This is especially clear in his adaptation of the themes of natural political theology to his interpretation of the Bible. Chapter 35 is entitled "Of the Signification in Scripture of Kingdom of God, of Holy, Sacred, and Sacrament." The biblical covenant serves as a model for the Hobbesian contract. In the preamble to the Sinai covenant that creates Israel as a people, God declares:

If you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my Covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar people to me, for all the Earth is mine; And ye shall be unto me a Sacerdotall Kingdome, and an holy Nation. (Exodus 19:5)

Hobbes' interpretation of this verse leads him from the divine state of nature to the divine covenant:

³⁸ For Hobbes' more detailed account of attributes, see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 31, pp. 401–403.

³⁹ "This question in the case of Job," says Hobbes, "is decided by God himself, not by arguments derived from Job's Sinne, but his own Power." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 31, p. 398.

[B]y the *Kingdome of God*, is properly meant a Common-wealth, instituted (by the consent of those which were to be subject thereto) for their Civill Government,⁴⁰ and the regulating of their behaviour, not only towards God their King, but also towards one another in point of justice, and towards other Nations both in peace and in warre, which properly was a Kingdome. (ch. 35, pp. 445–446)

There is a fascinating contrast between Hobbes' interpretation and that of the rabbinic tradition. Thus, the *midrash halacha Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* interprets the first commandment in the Decalogue as follows:

I the Lord am your God. Why were the Ten Commandments not proclaimed at the beginning of the Torah? A parable: what is this like? Like a human king who entered a province and said to the people: Shall I reign over you? They replied: Have you conferred upon us any benefits that you should reign over us? What did he do [then]? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. [Then] he said to them: Shall I reign over you? They replied: Yes, yes.⁴¹

The rabbis here stress the role of God's power, affirmed in history, as establishing his right to reign. Hobbes, however, returns to the biblical covenantal tradition in order to utilize it as a model for his contractual position.⁴² And even though God's covenant was originally with a specific people, Hobbes views the Christian tradition as a continuation of this covenant of Exodus, as is clearly seen in his interpretation of the Lord's Prayer:

⁴⁰ This argument is paralleled in both Spinoza's and Locke's characterization of Judaism as a theocracy. See Spinoza, *TTP*, ch. 17, pp. 218–226; and John Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration*, revised and ed. Mario Montuori (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 72–77. The rhetorical purpose shared by all three—Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke—is to divest Christian polities of their theocratic mantle. The potentially dire consequences this rhetoric may hold in store for Jewish aspirations to equal rights as citizens was understood by Moses Mendelssohn and forms part of the background for the arguments in his work *Jerusalem*. See Smith's discussion of Spinoza's legacy in Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism*, pp. 166–179.

⁴¹ Walzer et al., *Authority*, pp. 27–28.

⁴² This is, of course, not the only position to be found among the rabbis. See especially *Babylonian Talmud*, Shabbat 88a, cited in Walzer et al., *Authority*, pp. 28–29. It did, however, play an important role in medieval Jewish conceptions of political obligation, which stress human indebtedness to grace as the grounds for divine authority; see, e.g., Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 3:1, p. 139; and Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld, introduction by Henry Slonimsky (New York: Schocken, 1964), 1:19–39, pp. 45–48. Maimonides has a completely different conception. See Raymond L. Weiss and Charles E. Butterworth, eds., *Ethical Writings of Maimonides* (New York: Dover, 1983), "Eight Chapters," ch. 6, pp. 78–80; and Maimonides, *Guide*, 2:40, pp. 381–385.

The Kingdome therefore of God, is a real, not a metaphorical Kingdom; and so taken, not only in the Old Testament, but the New; when we say, *For thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and Glory*, it is to be understood of Gods Kingdom, by force of our Covenant, not by the Right of Gods Power; for such a Kingdome God always hath; so that it were superfluous to say in our prayer, *Thy Kingdom come*, unless it meant of the Restauration of that Kingdome of God by Christ [...]. Nor had it been proper to say, *The Kingdome of Heaven is at hand*, or to pray, *Thy Kingdom come*, if it had still continued. (ch. 35, p. 447)

According to Hobbes, both Judaism and Christianity share a political theology that regards God's kingdom as real, not metaphorical. The difference between them is twofold. First, Judaism, the original covenant of God, was enacted with a specific people, not with the entirety of humanity (who are governed by the kingdom, metaphorically speaking, of nature). Second, according to Christianity, the actualization of the kingdom of God in the real sense is deferred to the future coming of Christ. The historical kingdom of God is suspended until that time "when Christ shall come in Majesty to judge the world, and actually to govern his own people, which is called *the Kingdom of Glory*" (ch. 35, p. 448).⁴³ This deferral is crucial for establishing the Hobbesian theory of sovereign supremacy, for until that day it is the human sovereign who reigns supreme. "There be so many other places that confirm this interpretation," he argues with his usual blend of irony and wit, "that it were a wonder there is no greater notice taken of it, but that it gives too much light to Christian Kings to see their right of Ecclesiasticall Government" (ch. 35, p. 447).⁴⁴

In sum, Hobbes' natural political theology has three major roles to play:

1. It legitimizes Hobbes' theory of sovereignty in religious terms—God himself is represented as absolute sovereign.
2. It creates a framework for reinterpreting the Judaic and Christian historical religions in a manner consistent with this theory of sovereignty.

⁴³ Cf. the detailed interpretation of the "Kingdome of Heaven" in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 38, pp. 480–482.

⁴⁴ The transition from natural theology to a reinterpretation of Christianity is further based on the following: "[...] I define a *church* to be, *A company of men professing Christian Religion, united in the person of one Sovereign; at whose command they ought to assemble, and without whose authority they ought not to assemble*. And because in all Common-wealths, that Assembly, which is without warrant from the Civil Sovereign, is unlawful; that Church also, which is assembled in any Common-wealth, that hath forbidden them to assemble, is an unlawfull Assembly" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 39, p. 498).

3. It establishes the supremacy of the sovereign over religious institutions and teachings.

Hobbes' political theology is an integral component of the overall argument of *Leviathan*. The role of political theology here is stronger than a mere contribution to an "overlapping consensus" regarding Hobbes' preferred model of political authority.⁴⁵ The first two parts of the book provide a natural deduction of political obligation. But following Hobbes' analysis of the unique motivational power of religion in human life, the latter two parts of the work supply the political theology that, appealing to canonized Scripture, will establish sovereign authority by enabling the acculturation of religious consciousness. Sovereign authority is thus founded by natural deduction and complemented by a scripturally based acculturation of religion.

It follows, then, too that Hobbes' project of political theology is not an exercise in political mythology. By political myth I mean the cultivation of myth as a basic form of political motivation and a comprehensive form of political consciousness. No doubt, *Leviathan* is a powerful mythic evocation. To quote Carl Schmitt, "No illustration of or quotation about a theory of state has engendered so provocative an image as that of the *Leviathan*; it has become more like a mythical symbol fraught with

Regarding the right of assembly in general and the place of civil society vis-à-vis the sovereign, see ch. 22, p. 274ff. Hobbes' position here is clearly reminiscent of Locke's in his *Letter concerning Toleration*. This definition of the church as a voluntary association is crucial for Hobbes' argument, as is the limiting of theocracy to Judaism.

⁴⁵ The idea of an overlapping consensus was formulated by John Rawls as a feature of political liberalism. In that context, Rawls argues that "in a constitutional democracy the public conception of justice should be, as far as possible, presented as independent of comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines. This meant that justice as fairness is to be understood at the first stage of its exposition as a freestanding view that expresses a political conception of justice. It does not provide a specific religious, metaphysical, or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself. [...] the political conception is a module, an essential constituent part, that in different ways fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it." John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 144–145. Although it bears faint structural similarities to the kind of division Rawls calls for, Hobbes' division of *Leviathan* differs both in scope and in content. Hobbes' metaphysics is an important component of the deduction. Politics' supremacy cannot be freestanding. Moreover, securing the theological backing of the reigning religion is taken up under the rubric of the same project and integral thereto. The Rawlsian idea of a nonmetaphysical idea of justice has its roots in Spinoza and Kant. Cf. Shlomo Pines, "Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Maimonides, and Kant," in Pines, *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, ed. Warren Zev Harvey and Moshe Idel, vol. 5, *Studies in the History of Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), pp. 687–711. Hobbes' project of political theology is not only a function of religious and civil wars. His analysis of religion proves it to be an ongoing source of power and therefore the single most important contender to the sovereign's political legitimacy.

inscrutable meaning.”⁴⁶ Schmitt’s Weimar project sought mythic inspiration from *Leviathan*. Myth was the imaginary mindset to inculcate so as to overcome the mechanistic emasculation of the state. Schmitt explored the utility of evoking the monstrous power of the mythic beast as an expression of reviving state power to impose its order in the face of the threatened anarchic potential of German society.⁴⁷ But Schmitt realized—as is indeed implied by the subtitle of his book on Hobbes—that the thrust of Hobbes’ political philosophy was not mythic. For those seeking mythic inspiration, Hobbes’ book was an example of the “failure of a political symbol.” The employment of a mythic symbol, however powerful, is not sufficient to constitute a commitment to develop myth as a shared mindset of a polity. Schmitt’s pernicious interpretive elaboration of Hobbes could not find grounding in Hobbes himself.⁴⁸ For Hobbes, as we have seen, invests his energy in the development of a detailed theological view of his sovereign. It includes all the apparatus of theological interpretation and argumentation fully equipped with a philosophy of religion and is hence situated in the public reason. It is precisely this elaboration that distinguishes the acculturation of the religious seed from such rampant mutation of this seed as the myth and ritual of the Nazi regime.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein, foreword and introduction by George Schwab (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood, 1996), p. 5.

⁴⁷ John McCormick summarizes Carl Schmitt’s and, following him, the younger Leo Strauss’ project of grounding the state in the fear of death as follows: “On the eve of Weimar’s collapse, they sought to retrieve this primal source of political order and free it from the elements that Hobbes himself had found necessary to employ to construct a state on this foundation—natural science and technology.” McCormick, “Fear, Technology, and the State: Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and the Revival of Hobbes in Weimar and National Socialist Germany,” *Political Theory* 22 (1994), p. 620.

⁴⁸ Political mythology is but another aspect of the allure of political romanticism for Schmitt, the paradigmatic realist: “Hobbes’ objective is the permanence of the Leviathan, whereas Schmitt emphasizes the exaltedness of the moment. Schmitt, who attacked occasionalism as a delusion specific to German romanticism, is, in fact, its involuntary heir. Hobbes is political, Schmitt romantic.” Horst Bredekamp, “From Walter Benjamin to Carl Schmitt, via Thomas Hobbes,” *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999), p. 259. Cf. George Schwab’s nuanced interpretation of Schmitt’s position on political mythology in his introduction to Schmitt’s *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, pp. ix–xxiii.

⁴⁹ See Uriel Tal’s important essay “On Structures of Political Theology and Myth in Germany prior to the Holocaust,” in Yehudah Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich, eds., *The Holocaust as Historical Experience* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1981), pp. 43–74. Tal concurs with Schwab’s position that Schmitt “is not to be regarded as one of the spiritual fathers of Nazism—despite his support of Hitler between 1933 and 1936—or as one who simply ‘paved the way for the *Führerstaat*,’” p. 44. John McCormick, however, declares that “Schmitt and Strauss’ Weimar attempt to supplant liberalism through a reinterpretation of Hobbes is a catastrophic failure [...] they render the reformulation more dangerous than the original [...] and the historical reality with which it corresponds was undeniably disastrous” (McCormick, “Fear, Technology, and

4. POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND THE MODERN STATE

Readings of Hobbes' *Leviathan* that focus entirely upon the social contract risk losing sight of the philosophy of politics he develops. This philosophy dwells not only upon such fundamental issues as his realist attitude toward human political motivation. Hobbes' political philosophy takes a position on the place of politics in culture. I have argued that his theory of sovereign supremacy entails a view of politics as the power defining the horizons of culture. This conception of politics includes a renewed understanding of the place of religion in culture. In fact, politics inherits the classical role of religion as the determining force of this cultural horizon. Political theology legitimizes the sovereign not only politically, but culturally.

Why, then, has liberal political theory neglected the political theology of *Leviathan*? Liberal political theory has for over two centuries assumed the question of religion and politics to be settled.⁵⁰ This is a philosophical and cultural assumption built into the modern republics and seldom questioned until the past decade. Let me be clear: My point is not to criticize liberalism but, rather, to elucidate the cultural assumptions built into the structure of the liberal state. Liberal political theory focuses on obligation and distributive justice, neglecting a theory of state. The lack of such a theory leaves the constitutional and distributive achievements of liberalism precariously exposed. The contingent pressures of foreign policy, especially when posed as the existential claims of the polity, easily prevail. Consider, in this context, the disturbing challenge Carl Schmitt's critique of liberalism in Weimar Germany still poses for readers today.⁵¹ Perhaps it is the relative safety of the American republic that has rendered

the State," pp. 643–644). Indeed, "in light of the emergence of National Socialism, both Schmitt and Strauss felt compelled, in subsequent works [...] either to qualify significantly or abandon completely this approach to Hobbes" (p. 620). See too McCormick's developed discussion in his *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ Cf. Stephen Holmes' analysis of constitutions' role in silencing fundamentally divisive issues in his "Gag Rules or the Politics of Omission," in Jon Elster and Rune Slagstad, eds., *Constitutionalism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 19–58.

⁵¹ See John P. McCormick, "Political Theory and Political Theology: The Second Wave of Carl Schmitt in English," *Political Theory* 26 (1998), pp. 830–854. Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* is a conceptualization of Bismarckean realpolitik, and his critique of liberalism is no less Bismarckean in origin. See A.J.P. Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman* (London: Arrow, 1961), p. 123ff.; Edward Cranckshaw, *Bismarck* (London: Papermac, 1982), pp. 176–188; and Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 120–136.

a theory of state superfluous: Federalism has proven a more persistent problem than external threat. But the history of most other nation-states has proved otherwise.⁵²

The twentieth century has renewed the discussion of the theological-political problem by turning the Hobbesian version on its head. It asks not how to form a theology in the image of the state, but rather to what degree the concept of sovereignty in the modern state has been modeled on the Godhead of traditional theology.⁵³ Can modern republics truly free themselves from secularized adaptation of religious conceptions and structures of sovereignty? On the other hand, we may ask: Must the modern state be committed to secularism?

These questions may be also stated thus: To what extent is the modern state still predicated on the Hobbesian theory of sovereignty? Liberal-democratic politics is the dream of rendering politics benign—but can *Leviathan* ever be put to rest?

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⁵² The lack of a theory of state parallels liberalism's tenuous relationship with democracy, to which Isaiah Berlin called attention. Liberty, in the negative sense, "is not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy. Liberty in this sense is principally concerned with the area of control, not with its source." Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 129.

⁵³ "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state," declared Schmitt, "are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of state [...] but also because of their systematic structure." Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 36. This declaration formed the agenda for the ensuing discussion in Germany. See Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 1–20; and the critique of this program in Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern State*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). See too the recent critical adaptation of Schmitt in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).