

A Companion to *The Essential Leviathan:* A Modernized Edition

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Authors' Note: *This online companion to The Essential Leviathan: A Modernized Edition was written with three goals in mind. The first is to provide a summary of primary contents of the chapters of Leviathan for people wishing to obtain a working overview of them. The second is to provide critical and analytical commentary on topics, concepts, and principles that are particularly interesting or problematic with respect to Hobbes' work. The third is to encourage the reader who comes to this companion prior to reading Hobbes' Leviathan to appreciate the importance of the work and to engage themselves in his arguments. We believe that doing so will be both an enjoyable as well as a profitable experience for those reading Hobbes for the first time. For those who have already read Leviathan and for those who are new to it, we are hopeful that this online companion will provide to the reader some useful (while necessarily selective) additional clarifications, critical evaluations, and commentary.*

Introduction

Hobbes, along with René Descartes, is arguably a so-called “father” of modern Western philosophy. Descartes has historically been honored with this title, but Hobbes and Descartes were contemporaries, and both ushered in philosophies that rejected Aristotelianism and the authoritarianism of the Middle Ages. Their positions, while not identical by any means, both include and are largely defined by traits that became characteristic of the Modern era such as individualistic thinking, reliance upon reason rather than tradition, respect for and use of the methods of modern science, and a rejection of the relics of authoritarianism that hindered the progress of knowledge. Descartes, for example, laments in *Meditations on First Philosophy* and

in the *Discourse on the Method* what he considered to be the inadequacy of his education.¹ Hobbes notes in the last chapter of *Leviathan* that “the metaphysics, ethics, and politics of Aristotle, the frivolous distinctions, barbarous terms, and obscure language of the Schoolmen that is taught in the universities [...] serve to keep these errors from being detected and to make men mistake the Ignis Fatuus of vain philosophy for the light of the Gospel.”²

Where Descartes’ lasting influence is primarily in metaphysics and epistemology, Hobbes is best known for his work in ethics and political philosophy. This is not to say that Hobbes did not publish works in metaphysics and epistemology. He certainly did,³ and much of Part I of *Leviathan* is devoted to those topics. But where Descartes was concerned with establishing a firm foundation for knowledge in the sciences, Hobbes’ concern was arguably to establish a firm foundation for civic and political life. Interestingly, while Descartes wrote no treatise on ethics⁴ or politics, Hobbes wrote much on these topics and also held a position on materialism that is distinct from Cartesian dualism.⁵ A brief overview of some of the most salient

¹ See for example, René Descartes. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume II*. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugland Murdoch, trans. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Vol. I, 113 (AT VI 4-6) and Vol. II, 12 (AT VII 17-18).

² Chapter 47.

³ Hobbes’ English Works are available in eleven volumes in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes* (London: John Bohn, 1839-1845).

⁴ Many who work on Descartes believe that his final publication *Passions of the Soul* (trans. by Stephen H. Voss. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989) is an ethical treatise. Even if this is true, however, it is clear that Hobbes spent more time writing and thinking about ethics than Descartes, who focused more on metaphysics, physics, and method. Descartes himself confirms this emphasis in a 1643 letter. See *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 3: The Correspondence*. trans. and ed. by John Cottingham, Dugald Murdoch, Robert Stoothoff, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 230.

⁵ Dualism is the metaphysical view that reality is constituted by two substances: matter/body and mind/spirit. Descartes was a dualist. Hobbes was, in contrast, a materialist in that he affirmed the

features of the progress of philosophy prior to Hobbes and Descartes may serve to clarify the claim that Hobbes, along with Descartes, deserves to be counted as a “father” of modern Western philosophy.

It is common to understand the entire history of Western philosophy proceeding along two parallel courses. One is the rationalist tradition and the other is the empiricist tradition. Rationalists concentrate attention on establishing knowledge on the basis of rational principles and methods while the empiricists base knowledge claims on experience. This is not to say that empiricists are irrationalists or that they reject reason, nor is it to say that the philosophers identified as rationalists reject empirical study and investigation. The distinction is, generally speaking, that rationalists will accept nothing as knowledge that derives from experience while empiricists insist that there is no idea in the mind that did not originate or derive from experience. Otherwise, for all intents and purposes, both the Continental Rationalists (René Descartes (1596–1650), Benedict (Baruch) Spinoza (1632–1677), and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716)) and the British Empiricists (John Locke (1632–1704), George Berkeley

existence of all and only matter in the universe (which is simultaneously a rejection of the existence of anything called “soul,” “spirit,” or “mind” that is not material). This issue is problematic in a number of ways and is discussed later in this *Companion to the Essential Leviathan*. Further, Hobbes' materialism is essential to his rejection of many claims regarding political power as well as to his very controversial stance on matters of religion. An interesting comment on Hobbes' attitude toward religion in general has to do with the possibility that the God of the Bible “is the disturber of civil peace and the principal reason that peace and safety are threatened in civil societies throughout Christendom.” The primary reasons are that people who act in the name of faith may often not think of their *lives in this world*, they worry over *saving themselves from this world*, rather than to try to *save themselves from death* in this world. Cooke puts it a bit differently in saying that Hobbes “would urge human beings to think of their lives, to save themselves not from the world, as the Bible declares, but from death...”. See Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 87.

(1685–1753), and David Hume (1711–1776)) agreed that knowledge is constituted by relationships between ideas and that simple sense experience and conclusions reached in reasoning about it yield at most only high probability. Although there are exceptions to these categories, they are a helpful way of understanding some of the dialectic and its development.⁶

Early Western thought as seen in Plato and Aristotle might be said to represent this distinction between rationalism and empiricism. Plato held that this-worldly experience is at best nothing more than an inaccurate “copy” of the realm of things as they actually are, and he explains his “theory of the forms” through the “Allegory of the Cave” in *The Republic*.⁷ In the allegory, we are to imagine people who have spent their entire lives in a cave, tied in one place with blinders on that force them to look only in one direction—at the wall of the cave. There are fires burning at the back of the cave, and figures move or are moved about near the fires, throwing shadows on the wall. To the inhabitants of the cave, what they see on the wall is reality. But if one of them manages to escape, to reach the mouth of the cave and see the light of the sun, he will recognize that all he experienced while in the cave was nothing more than appearances caused by the reality of things. In essence, real things are both beyond our simple experiences and the very cause of our experiences, but the experiences themselves and the ideas we obtain from them are not representative of reality or of things as they actually are. So, things in the world of sense experience are appearances, and our perceptions are appearances

⁶ There were Cartesians such as Malebranche and Desgabets who had Spinozist tendencies in their work, for example. There was also a movement of Empiricist Cartesians. For more on these, see Tad M. Schmaltz’s *Radical Cartesianism: The French Reception of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), Michnea Dobre and Tammy Nyden’s *Cartesian Empiricism* (New York: Springer, 2013), and Roger Ariew’s *Descartes and the First Cartesians* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).

⁷ Plato, *Republic*. 2nd Ed. Tr. G.M.A. Grube, Revised C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), Book VII.

of the appearances, both of which have their origin in “reality.” Reality in this sense can not be known by experience, but instead by transcending experience and contemplating the reality of things; reality is accessible only through reason and not through experience. Hobbes, however, was not interested in engaging in long conversations over the distinction between appearance and reality in the way Plato, Descartes, and others were. He certainly noted the difference between appearance and reality (which is discussed in Part I of *Leviathan*), but the distinction did not occupy much of his time for the simple reason that Hobbes was a thoroughgoing materialist and—whether this is philosophically respectable is another matter entirely—he did not bother to argue for something that was, to him, a given.⁸ He assumed materialism, in much the same way that Aristotle assumed or took for granted the existence of matter. Hobbes did, however, find it important to argue *against* dualism, which he viewed as dangerous to civil peace, containing as it does a conviction that there are both bodies and minds occupying the reality of the world. As we will see, Hobbes’ materialism and his aversion to dualistic thinking regarding the nature of reality has significant implications for his moral, social, political, and theological views. One commentator on Hobbes, A.E. Taylor, contends, however, that most of Hobbes’ arguments that had to do with materialism can be sufficiently made without materialism. That is, it is not necessary for a materialist to think the way Hobbes did about human conduct, and it is not necessary for a materialist to think the way Hobbes did about free will. So, “in short, the only advantage which Hobbes really derives from his materialism is that it furnishes him with a plausible excuse for his refusal to take theology seriously.”⁹ As will become

⁸ For example, in the Third Set of Objections to Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (as well as Descartes’ replies to these objections), many of Hobbes’ criticisms are grounded in his materialism. Their discussion is fairly unproductive as they talk past one another due to their different metaphysical assumptions, completely missing one another’s point. See René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections, and Replies* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), 100-115.

⁹ A.E. Taylor, *Thomas Hobbes* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., Ltd., 1908), 45.

clear as you read *Leviathan*, the “refusal to take theology seriously” is one of the elements of Hobbes' thought that made him a target of vitriolic criticism, regardless of whether those criticisms were entirely fair.

Interestingly, in *The Republic*, Plato envisions a great society where the rulers and leaders ought to be “Philosopher Kings.” Philosopher Kings are well-educated, they understand that this world is not “real,” and they rule not because they wish to do so, but because it is their duty to do so. They recognize the distinction between appearance and reality, and they are committed to the rational contemplation of the reality of things. Because of these qualities, the Philosopher-King rules well and makes the best decisions for this-worldly government. Equally interesting is the fact that Hobbes had great respect for Plato but not for Aristotle, even given that Aristotle viewed material things as constituting the entirety of what is real while Plato did not. On the other hand, the “Schoolmen” and their “Schools” appropriated much of the work of Aristotle. (The “Schoolmen,” also known as the Scholastics, and the “Schools,” refers to the Medieval philosophers and the Universities with whom they were affiliated, to which Hobbes constantly refers in *Leviathan* and whose work he reviled.) In using Aristotle’s work, Medieval philosophers such as St. Thomas Aquinas transformed it into a metaphysical and theological position that Hobbes abhorred not simply due to its rejection of pure materialism (that is, the Schools put forth the position that there is both matter and “soul” or “spirit” constituting reality) but that Hobbes found these views to be a basis and cause of civil strife and war. Hobbes' argued that religious views can be extremely dangerous in the wrong hands and that they and their proponents must be controlled and monitored to be consistent with upholding productive social organization and maintaining civil peace. Bernard Gert, a 21st-century Hobbes scholar, contends that there is actually no role for religious beliefs in Hobbes' moral and political theory

except insofar as the notion of God can be used to explain to those who believe in God that God is a source of morality.¹⁰

It is at least reasonable to suppose that Aristotle's position on the nature of reality was not so far from Hobbes' own in that Aristotle granted the existence of matter as a given, but it is the Schoolmen's appropriation of Aristotelianism that tends toward beliefs that Hobbes simply could not and would not accept. Some of those beliefs are standard fare in Catholicism such as transubstantiation, a doctrine of free will that is wildly incompatible with Hobbes' view of the issue of the will; belief in "spirits" and "ghosts"; and a specific conception of the soul and its immortality. Hobbes is also concerned, like others in his day, that often the Schoolmen's understanding of the world is filtered through obscure and circular definitions rather than through looking to the world itself in order to understand it. For example, the Scholastics defined light as "luminous motion of luminous bodies," then used this definition for discovering new things about light—except, as many modern philosophers pointed out, this is tautological, saying nothing more than light is that which is lit.¹¹

Aristotle, who was Plato's student, broke away from the Platonic notion that reality is not accessible to us in this world. He said that there is no reason to believe that there is some other-worldly place in which Plato's "forms" or "essences" reside. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle notes that a white thing would be no whiter if it lasted for a minute or for an eternity, so the notion that there are "eternal" essences or forms of things somewhere else (and not here in this world) may be interesting to contemplate but not useful in truly understanding this world. Aristotle's comment regarding "whiteness" (or any other "form") is a rejection of the notion that this world is not "real" or valuable and that there are eternal verities somewhere else

¹⁰ Bernard Gert, *Hobbes: Prince of Peace* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 2.

¹¹ This example is from Blaise Pascal. See Blaise Pascal, "*De l'Esprit géométrique*" *Selections*, trans. Richard Popkin (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company), 176-177.

that ought to be our points of concentration. Aristotle, however, really does not do much better than Plato in explaining the reality of things, and in fact—especially for modern philosophers—he made things much worse. One example of the way in which things are much worse from a Hobbesian point of view has to do with the notion of “*telos*,” or the purposiveness of nature.

Aristotle’s view of the nature of reality is that this world is a place of “becoming” rather than “Being,” and that “Being” is the “goal” of all things that move and change. A way to understand this notion is to consider, for example, that a college student who wants to go to law school is engaging in undergraduate education on her way to law school, and successful completion of undergraduate and law education results in achieving her goal of “being” a lawyer. “Lawyer” is the goal while the education in which she engages to reach the goal is a process of “becoming.” Things in this world are “becoming” because all things in the world of sense and experience are changing and moving, and there must be a reason that they do so. The reason, for Aristotle, is ultimately that those things are moving from a condition of imperfection to a condition (in an ideal case) of more perfection, where perfection is actually unattainable in this world. But that which “is” is the goal of all those things that are in process.

Another example may suffice to see the importance of Aristotle’s way of thinking. We know that there are acorns and there are oak trees, and the only things in the world that grow into oak trees are acorns. Acorns, therefore, are potential oak trees. Oak trees are the fulfillment and perfection of acorns. Another way to put it is that the “function” of an acorn is realized in becoming an oak tree. That which is complete (or at least more complete) is more perfect than that which is in process—that is, more complete and perfect than something that is moving and changing. Contemplating only this-worldly things in this respect, however, is not sufficient in itself to understand Aristotle’s point. The reason for this is that there are in-dwelling forms that are already “in” things that are in process that lead those things on their way to perfection or at least to more completeness. Ultimately, for Aristotle, the reason for all things is God. All things in this world have their essence or “meaning” and function inside themselves already such that

there is something that makes all oak trees to be oak trees, and it is the indwelling form. That realization to completeness and perfection—at least to some extent—of that indwelling form is the proper action of the thing that “becomes” the thing it is intended by nature to be. For Aristotle, to make a very long story much shorter, there is “becoming” and there is “Being,” and as being is completion or perfection of a thing, and all things in this world are moving and changing, there must be something to which all moving and changing things in this world strive. There is one and only one goal to which they are all striving, and that is to be as complete as they can be. For human beings, whose essence is rationality (as human beings are rational animals on this view), the “goal” is contemplation—and the most perfect contemplation is the contemplation of the most excellent, complete, and perfect of all things: God, or “Being qua Being.”

Aristotle applied the notion that there is a goal for all natural things, a proper way in which they are to live and grow, to human beings because humans are no less natural and have a *telos*, *conatus* or purpose, just as any other natural, moving thing does. In this, Aristotle contended that the goal of human beings is happiness while their function (that is, what they “do” that is uniquely theirs) is rationality. There must therefore be some way in which the goal of humanity and the function or “excellence” of humanity converge on each other. That way is to become the best human being that one is capable of becoming (that is, to practice the virtues—to become a good person, a person of good character), and in doing so through reason, one will be more god-like.

It is easy to see that from Aristotle’s way of thinking, the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages were able to adopt the notion that our goal is to be as godly as possible, and that our completion and our ultimate happiness will be in a realm with God where we will be able to look upon perfection (God). In this world, our happiness will be achieved by being as god-like as we are capable of being in a world that is itself incomplete, earthly, and sin-filled.

But it is not only notions of perfection and how to try to reach it that are relevant to understanding the difference between the Ancient and Medieval philosophers and the early moderns. It is also the ways in which knowledge and inquiry have been limited in these different eras. For example, Galileo's discovery of the moons around Jupiter was not met with ready acceptance by the Church. It is certainly not the case that Catholic Church officials were incapable of understanding Galileo's discovery. They understood it and were even willing to incorporate those findings into Church doctrine. The problem, however, is that Galileo was not willing to wait for them to do so and insisted on spreading the word of his discovery without the blessing of the Church. That landed him in deep trouble with Inquisitors, resulting in imprisonment by house arrest for the rest of his life. But this is not all. The point here, at least in part, is that the authority of the Church trumped (and silenced at least for a time) the scientific discovery that Galileo and others made. Authority, in short, overruled and impeded the search for scientific truth. It did so in extreme ways that are well illustrated, for example, by the burning of Giordano Bruno for having the audacity to defend the heliocentric theory and the work of his friend, Galileo. Hobbes, and in fact all the early Modern philosophers, followed Bruno in contending, as scholar Alan Ryan points out, that "authority stands in the way of the growth of knowledge. Hobbes insists that each man must make up his mind for himself, and believe only what he has good reason to believe; otherwise, superstition prevails, and science is throttled."¹²

Aristotelian science held sway in the Western world well into the end of the 16th century (and vestiges of it remain to this day) and geocentrism remained a major theory of science from the ancients to the Middle Ages. Galileo's discovery of moons around Jupiter proved to be a shocking contradiction of very significant proportions. If it were true that there were moons that circled Jupiter, then that meant that there was something in the universe that did not revolve

¹² Alan Ryan, "Hobbes and individualism" in G.A.J. Rogers and Alan Ryan, *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1988), 84.

around the earth. And if that was the case, it meant the entire notion that the earth and its most important inhabitants, human beings, were not the “center” of all things.¹³ It also meant that the earth moves, which was contrary to their understanding of the universe at the time. In fact, the Copernican system threw the world into turmoil in many ways, being part of the early modern rejection of Aristotelian science and the theological, scientific, moral, and political views of the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages.

There is more to the story, however, than an apparently simple replacement of geocentric theory with heliocentric theory. While Hobbes, Descartes, and other early modern philosophers entertained themselves with critical evaluation of the Schoolmen and the ancient philosophers, it is also sometimes the case that their critical evaluation is more extreme than warranted. While it is arguably the case that the Medieval era in the Western world was characterized by authoritarianism, appeals to tradition, a truncated version of logic (Aristotelian logic), and a view of science at odds with progress, it is from the Medieval era and its vestiges that the early moderns themselves were educated.¹⁴ Time and the taskmaster of humanity,

¹³ Most things also had a final cause (or *telos*) of being drawn towards the center of the universe (the force that today we recognize as gravity). So the Copernican revolution was doubly dangerous here. It made humanity no longer the center of things on one hand, while on the other hand it was once considered the lowest place in the universe--it was far removed from the heavens and the only lower place was Hell. In this sense, the Copernican revolution could also be considered scandalous as it took humanity from being among the lowliest of creation to being something much more significant.

¹⁴ Medieval philosophy was not always anti-modern, in the sense that aspects of the scientific revolution and modern ways of viewing the world began prior to the 17th century. Some of these themes are picked up by early modern authors, directly and indirectly. Among these medieval authors were Duns Scotus who allowed for freedom of the will, Ockham who divorced final causes from physics, Autrecourt who (though he had no direct influence upon Descartes) offered skeptical arguments strikingly similar to those

necessity, moved thinkers and seekers of the early modern period to the realization that the Medieval world and Western Europe were not, like the earth itself, the center of the universe.

Take, for example, the fact that exploration in the 15th century (such as Columbus's discovery for Western Europeans of lands that are now part of North America and the Caribbean) awoke Western Europeans to the simple fact that not everyone looks like, acts like, thinks like, or wishes to be like Europeans. Add to this the development of the printing press with moveable type in the late 15th century, which was attended with a truly revolutionary change in attitudes toward learning and seeking truth. Prior to the invention of the printing press, which made easy printing of multiple copies of books possible, those who could read (and they were few and far between) had minimal access to books. With the invention of the printing press with moveable type, even the simplest people could obtain copies of the Bible, for example, and could read it on their own and for the first time in the common vernacular. At about the same time, Martin Luther, with intentions to reform Catholic doctrine, ended up overturning it, and from protests against Catholic doctrine, created Protestantism. Things were changing, indeed.

Luther's Protestant thought ultimately led to the removal of the "middle man" from human beings' understanding and relationship with God. Instead of needing the mediation of priests and the complicated edifice of the Church, it became possible for the individual to experience God and God's word directly. In the Protestant approach, there is a certain kind of individualism not before seen in the Western world. It was now possible for the individual human being to gain access to scriptures and to have a personal relationship with God. Further, it is no longer the case that the earth is considered the center of the universe, and the claim that it is the center is no longer codified in scientific thinking and theological doctrine. The upshot is that the individual human being becomes the center of the universe as God's focal point.

in Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and perhaps most importantly Buridan, whose theory of motion is key to Galileo's own development of this idea.

Finally, the 17th century was the first to benefit fully from a vast wealth of ancient resources that had been rediscovered and translated by the Renaissance humanists in the previous century. Long forgotten texts in the traditions of skepticism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism became available and gave a new generation of scholars new ways of approaching old problems and an alternative tradition outside of Aristotle in which to frame their questions.

These inventions and theoretical shifts, leading to discovery and enhancing the ability of the individual to inquire and to experiment in previously unknown and unthinkable ways, are part of cultural changes that bring the early modern period into being. The discoveries, inventions, ways of thinking, the realization that the European way is not the only way, that there are people and places quite unlike anything the Europeans had previously known, are among the factors that led Descartes to wonder whether what he had been taught in the university was accurate and useful, and whether there might be something more that human beings can do to know and enhance discovery.¹⁵

So when Descartes proclaimed that “I am; I exist. This much is certain” in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, he ushered in a new way of thinking and knowing. The individual is the center of the universe of knowledge, so to speak, since it is the individual who is the guarantor of knowledge. From the process of exaggerated doubt in which Descartes engages himself (he doubted his senses, considered that he might be dreaming and that he could be insane, and he even doubted the existence of God), he came to the conclusion that “I am; I exist” is the first and most certain item of knowledge available to a human being, and anything having the same

¹⁵ Descartes, for example, said in *Discourse on the Method* of Aristotle’s logic that “its syllogisms and the greater part of its other lessons served more to explain to someone else what one knows, or ... to speak without judgment concerning matters about which one is ignorant, than to learn them” (Descartes, *Discourse on the Method in Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, tr. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 9.

quality and level of certainty that “I am; I exist” possesses is indubitably true. So it is from the knowledge gained of the individual about his own existence that all other knowledge becomes possible through “clear and distinct”¹⁶ conceptions.

Thomas Hobbes, Descartes’ contemporary, engaged in a similar process of reasoning, not so much to establish knowledge in general, but with attention to creating social and political structures that would have the same sort of strength and certainty that Cartesian knowledge was thought or supposed to possess. Hobbes and Descartes both engaged in a new kind of reasoning through the “resolutive-compositive” method.¹⁷ This method of reasoning does not look outside for a purpose or a pre-established goal to reach, but instead centers on method itself. As Hobbes notes many times throughout *Leviathan* and his other works, the ideal method

¹⁶ There is considerable controversy in the history of philosophy regarding the meaning of Descartes’ conception of the “criterion of clarity and distinctness,” but for our purposes, it is sufficient to note, and disputants tend to agree on this, that it is a criterion by which one comes to realize that anything known with the level of certainty as one’s own existence must be true, and the application of reason in the form of demonstration to such pieces of knowledge yields certainty.

¹⁷ There is some controversy among Hobbes scholars concerning whether he did, in fact, use the resolutive-compositive method. Tom Sorrel comments that “as far as [he] know[s] only a single passage about method in Hobbes’ writing support the view that his civil philosophy is concerned with analysing or resolving social compounds and reconstructing them out of the causes of their parts” (Tom Sorrel, “The Science in Hobbes’s Politics” in J.A.G. Rogers and Alan Ryan, *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr), 72). On the other hand, Douglas Jesseph specifically states that Hobbes obtained the resolutive-compositive method from an earlier source and on this “method, true knowledge comes from resolving something complex into its constituent parts, and then retracing the steps to recompose the complex whole from the simple constituents” (Douglas Jesseph, “Hobbes and the method of natural science” in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 95.)

of seeking knowledge and building moral, social, and political structures would remove humanity from the chains of superstition, from claims to magic and supernatural revelation (which is not publicly accessible, and so not fit for the name of “knowledge”), and from the “authority of books,”¹⁸ allowing humanity to proceed in inquiries with a reliable method. Hobbes notes many times that errors in reasoning have come about and continue to come about largely through “want of method,” and Descartes and Hobbes thought they found the method of science in resolution and composition.

The resolute-compositive method is easy to understand. Just as a physical structure—a house, say—will not long stand if its foundation is cracked and unstable, so also is our knowledge when the foundations of that which we have taken to be “knowledge” are unstable and questionable due to the influence of tradition, authority, and “want of method.” The best way

¹⁸ For the modern philosophers, the employment of reason and observation must take precedence over and even supplant what is simply taken on the authority of people like Aristotle and the medieval philosophers simply because it is put forth by supposed authority. Through the 17th Century, there was no distinction between philosophy and natural sciences, the latter of which were often called natural philosophy or experimental philosophy. As a result, philosophers who desired to understand human nature and the passions such as anger and joy also sometimes included scientific discussions of the human body and physiology. Descartes, for example, spends a good deal of Book I of the *Passions of the Soul* (See *René Descartes: Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*. ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 297-314) discussing the role of heat in the function of the human body and how it relates to passions such as hatred (*Passions of the Soul*, II.98; See *Passions of the Soul*. ed. and trans. by Stephen Voss. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989)) and anger (*Passions of the Soul*, III.199). Although Hobbes treats this briefly, since he is a materialist this is especially important for him to account for passions through physiological means. Hobbes also discusses his views on man in another treatise, *De Homine*. See Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).

to go about fixing the problem is to dismantle the whole edifice (if it cannot be repaired) and start over again. Replacing the foundation, or fixing it in a structurally sound way, will help to ensure that the new building constructed on it will be strong and stand indefinitely. In fact, this is Hobbes' goal with respect to the political structure he builds in *Leviathan*. While no product of human invention is perfect, the idea is to erect a commonwealth that will stand for a long time because it is reasonably secure from internal strife and is intended to last longer than any political structure human beings have previously seen.

So Descartes begins by tearing down the edifice of knowledge and Hobbes proceeds to disassemble the shaky edifices of moral and political existence that lack strength and reliability. They do this by employing a method that resolves a problematic thing (knowledge, morality, politics) into its smallest possible components, establishing a firm foundation for the new edifice to be built, and then building with the best materials available. In both cases, the foundational materials are human beings. For Descartes, the foundation is human knowledge (as it also is for Hobbes, which we will see especially in Chapter V of *Leviathan*) and also for Hobbes the foundation is human nature. From the Hobbesian understanding of human knowledge and nature follows the construction of morality and government and the principles of human desire and obligation that create the edifice of human association (the commonwealth) that Hobbes intends to stand the tests of time and change and to be the model for political organization for all time.

Chapter Guide, Summaries, and Explanatory and Critical Commentary

In the next sections of the *Companion to the Essential Leviathan: A Modernized Edition*, you will find summaries of and critical commentary on chapters and sections of *Leviathan* with attention to clarifying some commonly problematic concepts and arguments, discussing some important reactions to and developments of Hobbes' thought in the history of Western philosophy, and providing an explanation of the continuing importance of Hobbes' work.

Hobbes' *Leviathan* is separated into four separate sections, all of which are to be considered a cohesive unit. They move at first from the nature of man (a characterization of humanity, and especially the individual human being) in Part I to the nature of commonwealth (society and government, the ultimate cooperative enterprise between and among individual human beings) in Part II. If one is looking simply for something of Hobbes' theory of knowledge, a little of his metaphysics and the relationship of these areas of inquiry to a conception of human nature leading to Hobbesian social and political theory, it is possible to stop before reaching Part III. That, however, might cheat the reader out of one of the most ingenious arguments for the relationship of religious doctrine to political organization ever contrived.

There is much controversy among Hobbes scholars regarding the status of Parts III and IV of *Leviathan* with respect to whether they are necessary at all since it seems clear from Hobbes himself when he asserts at the beginning of Part III that he has “derived the rights of sovereign power and the duty of subjects up to this time from the principles of nature only such as experience has found true or consent ... has made so—that is to say from the nature of men known to us by experience and from definitions ... universally agreed on.” In other words, Hobbes has, without consideration of things like ecclesiastical authority or a doctrine of the immortality of the soul, without concern with or necessary dependence on Christianity or any other religion, provided an argument for government power and the organization of political states that are designed by Hobbes to be put into practice by sovereigns (rulers) of states. Proposing such an argument in Parts III and IV is no mean achievement since it serves as a foundational document for both the rejection of the divine right of kings and the affirmation of the doctrine that government exists by the consent of the governed.¹⁹

¹⁹ The belief that government exists by the consent of the governed was not unique to Hobbes, and in fact it was, according to Sommerville, commonplace during the English Civil War, the time in which

The revolutionary implications of arguments against the divine right of kings should not be understated. The American and French Revolutions, to name but two, hinged in large part on such arguments. Interestingly and perhaps ironically, it is the elements of Hobbes' work having to do with the "divine" that allows this. In Part III of *Leviathan* Hobbes argues that the sovereign of the political state is the ultimate religious authority and is, in fact, the ultimate prophet of God with the power to interpret God's word and to disseminate it among the citizens. Hobbes' sovereign, then, is the sovereign over political life and therefore also over religious doctrine. Thus, it is far from any divine right that a king rules. Hobbes argued, instead, that government (of whatever kind) exists legitimately only by the consent of the governed. And part of good government is the government of religious doctrines. What does remain, however, of the notion of "divine right" is that it is one of the rights of the sovereign through the authorization of his existence as sovereign by the people over whom he rules to be the sole possessor of the right to interpret, institute, and teach the word of God. So it is for Hobbes not that the sovereign has the divine right to rule (the sovereign has no need of divine right), but that the right to rule gives the Hobbesian sovereign the right (it turns out by definition) to be the spokesperson and more importantly, the interpreter, of the Divine.

The importance of the right of the Hobbesian sovereign to be the sole possessor of the right to interpret, institute, and teach the word of God (in essence, to be the head of the church, whichever church it might be) is of central importance to Hobbes both historically and theoretically. It is of historical importance because Hobbes saw (as evident in Part IV of *Leviathan*) that claims to religious authority by anyone other than the political sovereign are dangerous and threatening to civil peace, and therefore contrary to the reason that individuals have authorized the existence of government at the outset—to establish and maintain civil

Hobbes was writing *Leviathan*. See Johann P. Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context* (NY: St Martin's, 1992), 51.

peace in order that people will be relieved of the fear of early, dangerous, and violent death from the lack of strong and appropriate social and political organization. The sovereign's religious authority is important to Hobbes' overall philosophical position because it is a manifestation of the unity of his conception of science, the unity and implications of his arguments concerning human nature, the relationship of the nature of the distinction between knowledge and belief to the establishment of government power, and the establishment of social organization in its moral, political, and religious manifestations that are central to later revolutionary political ideas and actions. Hobbes ushered in modern political theory,²⁰ which led ultimately to John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* and was subsequently used by American revolutionaries to justify their revolt against the tyranny of British rule, and perhaps most importantly, his work is central to notions of rights and justice that continue to this day. Alan Ryan notes that

It may perhaps have been shocking to Hobbes that his genius was to produce a theory that, because it was built on individualist and rationalist foundations, must, in spite of its author's intentions, leave room not only for individual resistance, but also, in extremis, for full-fledged revolution. *Leviathan* may well have framed the minds of many gentlemen to a conscientious obedience, but it also framed in many other minds a disposition to ask whether the sovereign had failed to secure our peace and safety or was visibly about to do so. In so doing, it was inadvertently a prop to the revolutionaries of the next fifty years.²¹

²⁰ Leo Strauss specifically states that Hobbes' work in political philosophy is the basis for the whole of modern political philosophy. See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, tr. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 1963), 5. Similarly, Lucien Jaume argues that Hobbes' philosophy might be considered a foundation of liberalism in that it is a theory of obligation to law and it retains the right to resist government that does not satisfy the purpose for which it was founded. See "Hobbes and the Philosophical Sources of Liberalism," *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 201.

²¹ Alan Ryan, "Hobbes's political philosophy" in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 241.

... And all this from a philosopher who argued for the *absolute power* of a sovereign in an *absolute government* that exists, ironically, by the *free action of individuals* who possess originally a right to everything.