

Religious Belief, Ecclesiastical Authority, and Sovereign Power: Parts III and IV of *Leviathan*

On the title page of the *Leviathan*, the sovereign wields both a sword and a bishop's staff. The reason for this is, for Hobbes, that the sovereign must maintain universal control over both the civil and the ecclesiastical domains for the sake of maintaining the peace first established by the contract authorizing the sovereign. It is not enough for the sovereign to possess only political power. The sovereign must also possess ecclesiastical power.

Hobbes begins Part III by saying that he has already derived the rights of sovereigns and the duties of subjects from the principles of nature (and with geometrical method), so it may seem strange that he begins again, in some sense, by re-establishing and re-verifying the power of the sovereign and the corresponding duties of subjects with commentary on and interpretation of religious doctrines. In other words, it may seem strange that a philosopher—who has demonstrated to his own satisfaction the principles of political organization through the use of reason and careful application of method—should turn to religious doctrines, which he had identified earlier in *Leviathan* as “superstition,” when it is not doctrine accepted by the sovereign and the sovereign is established independently of religious authority. Perhaps the reason Hobbes turns to religious doctrines is the very fact that religion is not necessary to justify political conclusions but is useful in supporting them. Paul Cooke argues that Hobbes needed to transform religion and not to destroy it because, for Hobbes, it “was essential that religion be safely maintained, since its seeds are always present, ineradicable in human nature, and are often ready to spring up into passions that potentially threaten civil order.”¹ It seems reasonable

¹ Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 201.

to believe Hobbes was indeed attempting not to destroy but to transform religion. If religion not accepted by the state is superstition, and if superstition is not just dangerous to peace but is also an irrational product of fear, and if it is possible to remove the source of fear, or fear itself—or at least make fear less severe—it may be possible to remove the source of the propensity toward religious belief. On the other hand, Cooke may have identified the reason that it is not possible to remove religious belief. He writes, “Human beings seem to want assurance ... based on concerns not only about this world, but about a world they imagine to be beyond this one. Perhaps we may also say, then, that the second half of *Leviathan* shows what tends to be lacking in regimes based on the rights Hobbes first discovered—the absence of a sense of what peace and safety are finally for.”²

There are several more specific reasons that the sovereign must have both political power and ecclesiastical authority. The first is the threat of the Enthusiasts. Enthusiasm is a general term used to describe a variety of Christian sects that focused on asceticism and individual spirituality.³ Among them are the Moravians and the Quakers. The Moravians were Czech Protestants with an earnestness for personal piety. While they recognized the office of bishop, this position lacked any substantive power. In a Moravian congregation, all members stood equal to one another on grounds of their shared confession. Their focus on spirituality, which is a second reason for a sovereign to have both political power as well as ecclesiastical power and authority, also allowed for private inspiration, that is, direct revelation from God to individuals, which is a third reason for combined sovereign-ecclesiastical authority. For the

² Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 207.

³ A very complete discussion on the Enthusiasts is found in Ronald A. Knox's *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

Moravians, prophecy was possible for anyone who shared their creed.⁴ While the Moravians were too geographically distant to be an immediate threat to Hobbes, their ideas were not. John Amos Comenius, a Moravian bishop and educator, traveled to England, France, and the Netherlands for purposes of advocating educational reforms and offering his services to the courts.⁵ Pierre Bayle, a philosopher from Hobbes' era, described Comenius as someone "infatuated with Prophecies, and Revolutions, the Ruin of the Antichrist, the Millennium, and such like Whims of a dangerous Fanaticism: I say dangerous, not only in relation to Orthodoxy, but also in relation to Princes and States."⁶ Comenius wrote on the topic of prophecy in his *Lux in Tenebris* (1650), recounting the inspirations given by Moravian prophets, which included God's coming wrath upon their occupying Austrian King and predicting a political revolution. Bayle found Comenius "inexcusable for printing such prophecies," which he called false and aimed at inciting war.⁷ Likewise, closer to Hobbes' England, the Quakers held similar doctrine: private inspiration and the individual believer receiving inspiration directly from God is a

⁴ J.E. Hutton, *A History of the Moravian Church* (Moravian Publication Office, 1909, 17-20).

⁵ For more on this, see S. S. Laurie's *John Amos Comenius: Bishop of the Moravians. His Life and Educational Works*. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1881). The Moravians will have a lasting influence, and reemerge during the 18th Century in the Americas under Count von Zinzerdorf. Jonathan Edwards criticized their ideas of inspiration and prophecy as mistaken. See Edwards' Letter to Rev. Mr. Erkine, Northampton July 5, 1750, found in the *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*. ed. Edward Hickman. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1* (London: Ball, Arnold and Co., 1840), 160.

⁶ Bayle, Pierre. *The dictionary historical and critical of Mr Peter Bayle. The second edition* (London, 1734). Volume II, 537.

⁷ Bayle, Pierre. *The dictionary historical and critical of Mr Peter Bayle. The second edition* (London, 1734). Volume II, 690-3; Volume III, 681-2.

common privilege of all saints.⁸ This is a political threat, as any rebellion could claim its inspiration as from from God.

Another way to conceive of the importance of Part III of *Leviathan* is that it has to do with subjects believing that they are exempt from obedience to the sovereign. For Hobbes, they are never exempt from such obedience, even when subjects claim and even sincerely believe that exemption has come from a divine source. Edwin Curley writes that “To be exempt from obedience to your sovereign, it is not enough merely to *believe* that the sovereign’s command is contrary to God’s, you must *know* that it is contrary. One central purpose of Part III is to show that it is impossible for a subject to know that, that he must rely on his sovereign for instruction in what God’s will is.” And to “know that the sovereign’s command is contrary to God’s you have to know what God’s command is. This requires either a direct revelation from God or a revelation mediated by someone to whom God has spoken directly.”⁹ For Hobbes, the only one to whom God speaks directly is the political sovereign.

Further, Hobbes made much of the phenomenon of fear with respect to the causes of war and with respect to the institution of the commonwealth. Since fear has such import in Hobbes' thought, it may also be that *Leviathan* has two connected parts—the political and the religious—in that “Political association based in self-preservation needs the support of religion for the purpose of governing human fear; only in this way can peace and safety be

⁸ These views are most clearly stated by the Quaker apologist, Robert Barclay in his *Theses Theologicae and An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1675), Prop. III and Prop X. There is an accessible version of this available online (<http://www.ccel.org/b/barclay/quakers/>).

⁹ Edwin Curley, “Introduction to *Leviathan*,” in *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), xlii.

guaranteed.”¹⁰ It seems clear that there are good reasons for Hobbes to have spent a good portion of the content of *Leviathan* on religion and religious concepts, and the reasons may collapse into one overriding concern: threats to the commonwealth.

Much of Books III and IV of *Leviathan* function to undermine threats from the Enthusiasts. If there is no afterlife, then martyrdom loses some of its religious appeal. If there can be no divine revelation outside of the sovereign and the Bible—of which the proper interpretation is determined by the sovereign—then anyone who claims to have an inspiration that threatens peace and the stability of the existing government can be dismissed as a false teacher or false prophet. If no one hears from God but the sovereign, then anyone who claims God commanded a political rebellion cannot have received such command from God. Cooke writes that there are twin threats to civil association: “These twin threats are the notions that the soul is immortal and the doctrine that the church of Christian believers now on earth constitutes the biblical kingdom of God. To meet the great danger presented by those who appeal, by means of these notions, to the religious susceptibility of anxious men and women, Hobbes reinterprets the Bible to render these instruments less able to prompt the division of loyalties.”¹¹ If only the sovereign can proclaim God’s word, then the believer has no other way to know God’s word and he should obey the sovereign.

While Hobbes is concerned about politically subversive theologies, a second reason for spending significant time on religion and religious thought is his concern with mainstream religion and its threat to stability of a different sort. Beginning in the Middle Ages, the Church’s authority encroached onto the civil sphere. On Christmas Day, 800 C.E., Charlemagne was

¹⁰ Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 229.

¹¹ Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 211.

crowned as the Holy Roman Emperor by the Roman Catholic Pope. To have the authority to crown someone king or emperor, the pope must be superior to the person crowned. This set a precedent for the Church as capable of holding authority over civil powers, a precedent that was largely maintained until Hobbes' day. While the Protestant Reformation unhinged the state from the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, it typically maintained a similar relation between the church and state, giving authority to some different ecclesiastical office or body instead, such as bishops, congregations, or presbyters.¹² Having just emerged from the Thirty Year's War and the English Civil War, Hobbes is acutely aware that civil unrest and revolution can arise if the sovereign is subject to a greater authority. As a result, in Books III and IV, Hobbes also takes on the task of showing why the sovereign is the rightful heir to lead the church, following such the civil-ecclesiastical leaders in the Scriptures as Moses, who led the Israelites in both spheres. Some read Hobbes rhetorically or ironically on these points, arguing that Hobbes cared only about his political project and that Hobbes' use of Scripture was only a convenient rhetorical device meant to sway his contemporary audience.¹³ Whether this reading is correct or not, it was important to Hobbes that religious enthusiasm be contained and that religious authority not extend above and beyond the sovereign, and it was crucial that Hobbes be able to sway his largely religious audience. If Books I and II use the principles of nature to defend sovereign right, Books III and IV do this again using supernatural principles. Hobbes' political project cannot be successful or complete without addressing the topic of religion.

Oddly enough, in using religion in part to defend the sovereign's right, Hobbes renders religion impotent. Even though the bulk of the argument indicates that Hobbes intended religion

¹² This is not without exception. For more on the Anabaptists and others in the Radical Reformation see George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962).

¹³ See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, trans. by Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 1963).

to be something to act as the glue of civil association, it is clear enough that it really did not matter what kind of church a state adopted. Richard Tuck describes Hobbes' ambivalence about religion when he writes, "What form a church took ... and what doctrines its clergy taught, were now to be determined solely and entirely by the fiat of the sovereign; there was no authoritative body beside him, obliging him to promulgate a particular interpretation of Scripture. The general rights of the sovereign over the meanings of words now extended to include all the meanings of all God's words also."¹⁴

In Chapter XXXII, Hobbes begins a slow dissection of traditionally accepted religious views that continues for much of Books III and IV, accounting for them in terms of his materialist philosophical system. God cannot be an immaterial substance, since "immaterial substance" is a contradiction. This becomes important for Hobbes to explain how one may hear from God and introduces the office of prophet, which in Chapter XXXVI he discusses in more detail.

In Chapter XXXIII, Hobbes undertakes the task of Biblical criticism. Historically, this is an important chapter as textual criticism had not been applied to Scripture before Hobbes' day, and he was one of the first to do so. No development begins in a cultural vacuum, however, and the seeds for this had been sown in the Reformation when the Reformers called the canon into question. The Reformers rejected the divine authority of certain books and chapters found in the Catholic Bible that were based upon a Latin edition of the text called the Vulgate. Arguing they lacked divine inspiration, these variations were rejected as apocryphal. Some Protestants took this further than others, with Martin Luther originally calling for the exclusion of the book of James from his biblical canon. Also, in the centuries leading up to Hobbes' day, Renaissance Humanists treated ancient Latin and Greek texts in critical detail. But Hobbes is among the first to apply these techniques to Scripture. He questioned not only which Scriptures were canonical but also their authorship and when they were written. Hobbes also rejected traditionally

¹⁴ Richard Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 98.

accepted Biblical interpretations, offering his own, new definitions of theological terms (e.g., “angel,” “Spirit”) and treating metaphorically some terms that have traditionally been taken literally and vice versa. In spite of his novelty in Biblical hermeneutics, Hobbes clearly was well read in the Scriptures and the pages of *Leviathan* are filled not only with Biblical citations, some of them rather obscure, but also with allusions to Biblical narratives throughout the book. Regardless of his own beliefs on religion, he would also know its potential for a positive rhetorical impact. Theism, the belief that God exists, and often Christianity in one of its many forms, was taken for granted by most Europeans during the 17th century. Showing that (or making it appear as if) the Bible supported Hobbes' other conclusions about nature and politics would come with the hope that more controversial claims would be more digestible and easier to embrace. In cases where tension exists between Scripture and his natural philosophy, one does not renounce senses and experience or natural reason (which is the “undoubted word of God”). Even though there are many things in God’s word above reason, there is nothing contrary to it. When it seems like there is in the Bible something contrary to reason, it is because we have interpreted improperly or reasoned badly.

When God speaks to people it is either immediately or by mediation of another person with whom he has spoken immediately. Even though a sovereign might command me to believe that God has spoken to him, there is no one who can make me believe anything other than what reason persuades me to believe. If someone other than the sovereign makes the command, neither belief nor obedience is required. While God may speak to a person in any way he wishes to, it is not required that I believe this is the case; a person who claiming to speak the work of God may be mistaken or may be lying.

So how do we know what God has revealed? The answer is: The Bible—as interpreted by a prophet. A genuine prophet, and thus someone with authority to interpret scripture, can be confirmed either by miracles or by not teaching any religion other than the one already

established.. In addition, in Deuteronomy it is clear that if prophet claims a miracle and also says that one should follow other Gods, that prophet is to be put to death. The words “revolt from the Lord your God” are the same as “revolt from your king.” Today, however (according to Hobbes) there are no longer any miracles. As a result, we are required to hear doctrine that is conformable to Holy Scriptures.

Hobbes' biblical criticism allows for the following two chapters, XXXIV and XXXV, where he accounts for parts of the Scripture that (under traditional interpretation) are contrary to his materialism. Examples are “Spirit,” “Angel,” what it means for the Scripture to be inspired, and the concept of “Kingdom of God.” With respect to terms such as “spirit” and “angel,” Hobbes' position is that we use these terms to denote things that we fail to understand and we simply have to be satisfied that this is the case. When talking about such things that we identify as “spirit” or “angel,” we are speaking of that which we do not understand, and we instead intend to honor God with such terms.

The Kingdom of God was traditionally considered a celestial city that crosses geo-political boundaries.¹⁵ Distinguishing the visible church—the institution—from the invisible church was important to the Protestants in justifying the Reformation. The Reformers believed it was not they who left the invisible church, but it was the visible Roman Catholic Church who abandoned the true church.¹⁶ But this distinction is not easily explained by a materialist and would cause the sovereign's subordinates to have split allegiance. If there was a revolution and the uprising claimed that their authority to rebel lay in the invisible, true church, then the state

¹⁵ The medieval philosopher and theologian Augustine clearly argued this in his *City of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

¹⁶ See John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.1.6-7. This is available partly in an accessible abridged version edited by Donald K. McKim as *Calvin's Institutes* (Louisville: John Knox Pr, 2001), 127-128.

and its visible church would be at risk of being overthrown. All of this is also politically important for Hobbes: the sovereign maintains authority over all religion, including how to interpret Scripture. In the case in which the sovereign offers no interpretation, it is up to his subordinates to interpret it in a way that affirms the sovereign's right to power, or at least in a way that is nonthreatening. By defining theological terms in ways that fit into his materialist philosophy, Hobbes not only avoids contradictions in *Leviathan*, he is also able to make methodological gains. Recall that in the geometric method, one begins with definitions and axioms and uses those as a foundation for reason. By redefining traditional theological terms (often arrived at and justified through his biblical interpretation) he is able to use those terms in common ways to communicate something extraordinary. To say that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who believe in Jesus Christ is perfectly orthodox for Christendom in the 17th century; however, Hobbes means something entirely different from the common use of that term.¹⁷ What Hobbes means by the "Kingdom of God"—and it certainly is not even close to the common use of the term—is not some ethereal location outside this world. A.E. Taylor writes, "The fundamental proposition of the whole scheme is that the 'kingdom of God,' spoken of in Scripture, is not an ecclesiastical system, but a civil government in which God, as represented by a visible human lieutenant, reigns as civil sovereign."¹⁸

At the end of Chapter XXXV, Hobbes discusses religious Sacraments—baptism and the "Lord's Supper," often called the Eucharist. Baptism is an important topic politically as well as theologically. Without separation of church and state, it is necessary to determine who has the authority to baptize and what are the implications of baptism on both church membership and

¹⁷ Loosely, the common view may be expressed as something such as those who believe the immaterial God came incarnate as a human, Jesus, who was crucified and resurrected, and will enter into the celestial kingdom.

¹⁸ A.E. Taylor, *Thomas Hobbes*. (London: Archibald Constable & Co, Ltd, 1908), 119.

state citizenship. A sect within the Radical Reformation called the Anabaptists help to illustrate this point.

The Anabaptists were a Christian sect identified with the Radical Reformation, those Protestants who had a more radical agenda than earlier reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. The Anabaptists spurned civil authority altogether and rejected *paedobaptism* (infant baptism). Although some of their motives were theological, rejecting this practice shared by both Roman Catholics and all of the other Protestants was also a political statement. It was additionally motivated by their disdain of civil authority. In rejecting baptism of children, they were refusing to enter the state-church. Hobbes returns to this topic in more detail later in Part III, defending the sovereign's right to baptize and describing the nature of the sacrament itself. He writes very little in this chapter on the second sacrament, the Eucharist, but he returns to it in Part IV.

Hobbes turns to the topics of divine revelation and prophecy in Chapter XXXVI. In his efforts to mitigate the Enthusiast threat, he must address the qualities of true prophecy and the marks of a true prophet. He presents three forms of prophecy: glossolalia ("speaking in tongues"), prediction of future events, and the figure of the prolocutor (someone who speaks to or hears from God). Hobbes is dismissive of the first two. Glossolalia is found in many different religions and those who practice it are typically insane or intoxicated. As for prophecy as prediction, Hobbes dismisses this as something unexceptional in Chapter III, writing that "The best prophet naturally is the best guesser." He allows for the third Enthusiast threat, subdividing it into a subordinate prolocutor and a supreme prolocutor. The subordinate prolocutor is one who talks to God; it is a role found in most religions when someone offers a song or other praise towards God. In this case, hypothetically, there need not even be a God at all to give this type of prophecy. This leaves the supreme prolocutor as the only type of prophecy that genuinely has any personal connection with the divine, through means of a dream or a vision. Incidentally, it is

the sovereign who fills this role of supreme prolocutor. Following Moses and the other Prophet-Kings of Israel, the sovereign is the one who covenants with God on behalf of the people and interprets the correct meaning of scripture. This supreme/subordinate distinction amongst prophets in the ecclesiastical realm correlates with the supreme/subordinate distinction in the civil sphere found in Chapter XXII.

Hobbes also discusses the marks of a true prophet. Lest an Enthusiast undermine the sovereign by a subversive prophecy, a true prophet is recognized by conducting miracles and teaching the true religion. This is a widely accepted account, one advocated from the early Christian church, through the medieval period, and through the Protestant Reformation and beyond.¹⁹ However, it is important to note that in Chapter XXXIII Hobbes states that miracles have ceased, and here he defers to the sovereign to decide whether a miracle actually occurred, a topic he discusses in the next chapter, XXXVII. This leaves only teaching the true religion to denote a genuine prophet, and the true religion is established by the sovereign. Therefore, the only true prophet is one who is aligned with the sovereign who writes in support of or in praise of the true religion as established (in which case, the sovereign would be the subordinate prophet), or the sovereign himself (the supreme prophet).

In Chapter XXXVII, Hobbes claims that we call things “admirable” and “objects of wonder” when they are strange and uncommon and we believe they cannot be produced by natural means. Because of that, we believe such things can only be produced by God. But for Hobbes, miracles simply do not exist. When it is possible that there is a natural cause of a thing

¹⁹ See for example Volume I of the Roman historian Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* (trans. J.E.L. Oulton. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1973), V.xvi.18-19; V.xviii.11. Also, Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* II-II, Q.170 and Q.171 (for English translation, see *Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas: Latin-English Edition*, Secunda Secundae, Q. 141-189. California: CreateSpace. 2014.) A.P. Martinich comments on the topic in *The Two Gods of the Leviathan* (New York: Cambridge UP. 1992), 228-9.

or event, even when we think it is a rare thing and no matter how impossible we may think it is, it is no longer a wonder and it certainly is not a miracle. Further, Hobbes insists, there are things considered to be miracles by one person that are not miraculous to another. He explains, for example, that eclipses at one time seemed miraculous, but once we know how they come about, they no longer seem that admirable after all. Hobbes concedes that there might be miracles, but if they exist, that they are designed to create belief in the elect, and this leads Hobbes to define a miracle as a work of God meant to make clear to the elect the mission of an extraordinary minister for their salvation. So prophets do not perform miracles, and it is certainly not the case that there is a devil, an angel, or any other created spirit that can perform miracles. As for people who pretend to be able to perform miracles, they are simply deceivers, and to deceive people is easy to do. As Arrigo Pacchi notes, for Hobbes, “as the range of scientific explanation of events broadened, Hobbes believed, the margins of the supernatural are inexorably narrowed down, thus doing away with any explanation in the area of superstition, magic, or miracles.” So “the entire interpretation of the Bible as suggested by Hobbes consists of a systematic bringing of the supernatural, the rationally inexplicable, down to the natural, to what is earthly material, explicable in rational terms.”²⁰ In sum, where there is scientific understanding, most if not all claims to miraculous occurrences, and all human claims to be able to perform miracles, are false.

Hobbes' skepticism concerning miracles foreshadows other modern opinions that question the existence of miracles. David Hume, a philosopher coming after Hobbes, writes in his short treatise *On Miracles* that he is skeptical about the existence of miracles because they

²⁰ Arrigo Pacchi, “Hobbes and the Problem of God” in G.A.J. Rogers and Alan Ryan, *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1988), 184.

are contrary to ordinary experience.²¹ Most purported miracles have very few eyewitnesses. Hume believes that not only are there good reasons to question the veracity of these testimonial accounts themselves, but even if a person is trustworthy, their trustworthiness is one piece of evidence among many. Even if someone claims to see the dead resurrected, for instance, there is overwhelming evidence from experience and observation to incline one to believe the contrary. An even more scathing and humorous critical evaluation of miracles appears in Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*.²² Regarding those who claim to have experienced miracles, Paine discusses the likelihood of their being perceived as liars. He notes that "nothing can be more inconsistent than to suppose that the Almighty would make use of means such as are called miracles, that would subject the person who performed them to the suspicion of being an impostor, and the person who related them to be suspected of lying, and the doctrine intended to be supported thereby to be suspected as a fabulous invention." Further, Paine doubts that many of the miracles related in the Bible are really miraculous as they stand. One of his examples is this: "The story of the whale swallowing Jonah, though a whale is large enough to do it, borders greatly on the marvelous; but it would have approached nearer to the idea of a miracle, if Jonah had swallowed the whale. In this, which may serve for all cases of miracles, the matter would decide itself, as before stated, namely, is it more that a man should have swallowed a whale or told a lie?"

In Chapter XXXVIII, Hobbes extends his skepticism applied to miracles to what are typically considered as within the domain of the afterlife: eternal life, hell, and salvation

²¹ This text is published with other relevant texts in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 2nd ed., with *Of the Immortality of the Soul, Of Suicide, and Of Miracles* (ed. by Richard Popkin. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).

²² Online, <http://www.ushistory.org/paine/reason/singlehtml.htm>.

(especially redemption).²³ One motivating factor for mutiny, revolution, or other civil unrest is the promise of life after death. If there were an uprising, the religiously devout would be more eager to lead and join in rebellion if they believed not only that it was God's will, but that eternal blessing and reward awaited them for obedience, and this even if they died in the conflict or were executed for their treasonous actions.

Combining his materialism with analysis of terms, which makes accounting for the afterlife in any traditional Christian form difficult, Hobbes collapses elements of the purported afterlife into various instantiations in this life. Hell, for instance, as an idea in the minds of believers, is nothing more than the remnants of a story of the Valley of Hinnon or Ghenna where fires burned to clean up filth and garbage from the city. So hellfire is metaphorical. And Satan is nothing more than any enemy of the Church, not some kind of demon in an imaginary netherworld. The notion of there being a second death of all who are condemned on Judgment day just means that they will not die again. Heaven (the Kingdom of God) is not where someone "goes" after she or he dies, but instead a perpetually perfect society under a sovereign. So by "world to come," the phrase is understood based on three worlds. The first "world" is from Adam to the flood, the present "world" spans from the time of Jesus Christ to now, and the "world" to come is the time when Jesus reigns over all forever. There is, then, nothing in the concept of an afterlife that is mysterious or miraculous, or indicative of anything beyond this worldliness.

Hobbes spends the next several chapters, XXXIX-XLI, describing what the church is, the rights allowed for those who were priests in the Kingdom of God, and the rights exercised by

²³ This skepticism for which Hobbes sets the tone persists into the 20th century. Theologian Rudolf Bultmann, for instance, believed that it was unimportant whether religious narratives were historically true, and instead what matters was whether it was of existential importance to oneself. See Anthony C. Thiselton's "Biblical Interpretation" (*Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2005), 291-294.

Jesus. Of particular importance for Hobbes' political system is the conception of "Church."

Hobbes notes that there are various meanings of the term "Church" in Scripture. Sometimes it is "God's house" where people assemble publicly. Sometimes it is a congregation for hearing magistrates speak. For Hobbes, "Church" is the sense of a church, where it is one "person" having the power to will, command, and so on. This sense of "church" is like the meaning of the Hobbesian sovereign in being one person representing all. The sovereign *is* the church in being the unity and unifier of it. So, a "church" is a group of men who profess Christianity and are united in the person of the political sovereign by the sovereign's command; and without sovereign command, they should not assemble. An important point for Hobbes, this definition essentially means that if there is a church in the commonwealth that is not permitted by the sovereign to assemble, it is an unlawful church. This definition also tells us that there is no universal church at all, and thus no such church that everyone must obey. This is true because there is no earthly power to which all commonwealths are subject. So the church is really nothing more than the commonwealth acting in judging, absolving, condemning, ruling, and so on. The church is composed of Christian men. It is called a civil state because the subjects are human beings. It follows that the claim that there are two sovereigns—one temporal and one spiritual—is simply a matter of making "men see double" and as a result they are confused about their lawful sovereign.

Mirroring some of the historical foundations for the sovereign in Books I and II, Hobbes traces a history of sovereigns who held civil and ecclesiastical power. The sovereign is naturally the next in this lineage of supreme prophets. Hobbes ends Chapter XLI with one of the more controversial claims in the text, that the trinity is Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, and *not* God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

In Chapter XLII, Hobbes writes on ecclesiastical power. Ecclesiastical power concerns the various offices and gifts within the church. Based on the previous chapter in which Hobbes

has claimed to show that the kingdom of Christ is not in this world, it cannot be the case that His ministers—unless they are kings—require obedience in his name. Christ's ministers in this world are to make people believe and have faith, but it is also the case that faith cannot be commanded, and the ministers of Christ have no power to punish anyone for not believing or contradicting what they say. On the other hand, such ministers may punish violation of laws, and since the right to punish for violations of law belongs only to the sovereign (as Hobbes has established in Chapter XXVIII), it must be only the sovereign who is the true minister of Christ. However, because it is possible for those who *claim* to be ministers of Christ to command people to do things contrary to the command of the sovereign, it is clear to Hobbes that Jesus Christ did not leave command over subjects except to the person who has civil authority, the sovereign.

Hobbes is quick to qualify martyrdom at this point in his discussion of civil authority: genuine martyrs are those who were called to teach the true religion and have been put to death for that reason. Anyone, then, who opposes the laws and authority of the civil state, and thus the sovereign, is not in the least bit a martyr. The traditional martyr was someone who died for religious convictions or actions. But someone who dies in a political revolution dies for nothing. Someone who dies in a political revolution, then, is a traitor and not a martyr, even if the person claimed to do it in God's name. The pretended martyr, therefore, is nothing more than a criminal because the political sovereign is also, as Hobbes has argued, the supreme prophet who teaches the true religion.

Hobbes also contends with respect to excommunication that no authority can excommunicate the sovereign, and the right of the sovereign, who holds *all* the authority of a priest, can also appoint priests. The right and power of the sovereign to appoint priests is the same sort of power the sovereign has with respect to civil laws. The sovereign is not subject to

civil laws since he creates them; and the sovereign is not subject to the decrees or decisions of priests since he appoints them.

Perhaps most controversial of all, since the sovereign is the final authority on all matters of teaching, anything the sovereign commands in the ecclesiastical sphere is to be obeyed, and even if that command forbids one to believe in Christ it is of no matter to the subordinate. Belief does not follow the commandment that a person gives; one can believe whatever he or she wants so long as the subordinate outwardly obeys the laws established and the religion permitted. Similarly if one is commanded to profess disbelief in Christ, it is merely an external gesture and does not necessarily reflect someone's actual beliefs.

Chapter XLIII includes some practical matters in context of what Hobbes has already established previously in Part III. If one wishes to be in the Kingdom of God, that person must obey all the laws of the political state. Laws of God are the same as the laws of nature (as established by Hobbes in the first half of *Leviathan*). Since it is impossible to follow all of the laws in a country perfectly, the alternative is to have faith in Christ. Yet, in the previous chapter Hobbes said belief in Christ depends upon whether the sovereign commands it. Thus, in this chapter he explains what is really entailed in believing that Jesus is the Christ: having the best intention to follow the laws (established by the sovereign alone) to the best of one's ability. So while no one can obey laws perfectly, a person can at least have the desire to do so.

More specifically stated, it is confusing to the subjects when one person says that they ought to do something (to obey the sovereign and his laws) and they think at the same time that God has commanded them to do something else. Hobbes' position is that, in cases like this, the people need to be taught what is truly necessary to eternal salvation. What is necessary to eternal salvation is not actions and requirements promulgated by religious organizations whose doctrines are contrary to the state. There are religious "authorities" who will tell people that if they are given a command that can be obeyed without endangering their chances of eternal life,

then they should obey it; but they also say that if a command cannot be obeyed without risk of eternal death, the command should not be obeyed. All this, in short, is simply confusing to believers. Hobbes makes it simple. Everyone is a sinner, he points out, and if anyone thinks that God requires perfect innocence, there would be no one capable of being saved. So all that is required to secure eternal life is to accept that Jesus is Christ, and that is the entirety of the question of salvation.

But there is so much controversy, and there are so many differences of opinion with respect to who knows—and how they know—the word of God. Even within the individual, how is it possible to know when one's own claims to private spirit are right? It is perfectly clear that in all cases, people *do not know* but only believe Scripture to be the word of God. So with respect to the problem of various interpretations and being unsure of the accuracy of one's belief, Hobbes provides a solution: it is the sovereign, and only the sovereign, who is appropriate to determine what is the word of God. It cannot be priests or other individuals because they can all make mistakes. Instead, authority in the word of God rests only in the sovereign prophet in whose words there can be no contradiction between the laws of God and of the Christian commonwealth.

It is certainly clear at this point that Hobbes has described the status of the political sovereign as the prophet of God with absolute power not only in the civil sphere, but also with absolute power (and knowledge) in the sphere of religion. So what is the status of the claims of a political sovereign who is an infidel? The answer is clear. The subjects whose sovereign is an infidel sin against the laws of God because they reject the counsel of the Apostles who say to obey princes, and for children and servants to obey their parents and masters. In other words, the theistic subject is bound to follow—but only in outward action—the commands of a

sovereign who is an atheist, and not to do so constitutes a sin against God.²⁴ Further, it is here that Hobbes has made a claim that is understandably of some significant moment to Christians. Scholar Patricia Springborg puts the case like this: “Hobbes followed the formula of the great theocracies in making behavior, and not belief, the test of fidelity. His follower Henry Stubbe correctly intuited that a religion of ritual was better suited to the state than a religion of belief, pondering whether Islam was not preferable. ...”²⁵ Especially from the early modern period to the present in Western democracies and other societies that insist on the separation of Church and state, Springborg’s comment about Hobbes and theocracy might be more alarming than any of Hobbes’ previous comments about the nature of Christianity.²⁶

²⁴ Augustine writes in Book III of his *Confessions* that the government a society receives reflects the virtue of those people. Basically, a people are deserving of the government they have as it is a reflection of themselves. (See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2001)).

²⁵ Patricia Springborg, “Hobbes on Religion” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* edited by Tom Sorell (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 352.

²⁶ Howard Warrender and A.E. Taylor both argued that Thomas Hobbes was certainly not an atheist. Warrender claimed that in the state of nature, all people have an obligation to God. See Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (London: Oxford UP, 1957) and A.E. Taylor, *Thomas Hobbes* (London: Oxford UP, 1908). But this seems unlikely to be the case since, first, Hobbes insists that subjects have an obligation to follow the commands of a sovereign who is a non-believer. While Hobbes held that only external actions required by religious doctrine are to be considered in determining whether a person has followed the laws of the sovereign, there are religious doctrines that a Christian sovereign might adopt that include the notion that it is unlawful for a subject to follow any doctrine that is contrary to some specific version of Christian belief, and in particular it might be that there is religious reason not to follow the commands of an infidel sovereign. Further, there are Christian doctrines promulgated that consider all non-Christian beliefs to be themselves heretical. There is nothing in Hobbes' doctrine making it impossible for a sovereign to decree that this is the case because

The most significant difference between Part III and Part IV is one of emphasis, not of content, as many topics are shared between the two. Part III is more constructive while Part IV is more critical. Part IV begins with Chapter XLIV. In Chapter XLIV, Hobbes returns to the Bible, refuting misinterpretation and providing his own interpretation of the religious text. The focus of his interpretation at this point is the Kingdom of Darkness—those who threaten the commonwealth, especially theologically. The enemy, he says, comes from our ignorance of Scriptures, introducing fantasies such as demons and ghosts, mixing ancient philosophy (especially Aristotle) with Scripture, and placing tradition over Scripture. To avoid the first, Hobbes says one person (or assembly) must be responsible for giving law to all Christians. And for Hobbes, the person so responsible is the head of state and *not* the Pope.

To expound on the other origins of the enemy, Hobbes gives the example of the Eucharist. The Roman Catholic Church holds the doctrine of transubstantiation, that when the bread (“host”) and wine are prayed over for the “Lord’s Supper,” they actually became the body and blood of Christ. This doctrine was questioned during the Reformation. Lutherans embraced consubstantiation (Christ’s body enters, but does not change, the host), Calvinists taught that the host does not change from being but it imparts a special grace to the Christian who consumes it, and the Swiss Reformers believed it was merely a symbolic representation of Christ’s death but nothing more. Hobbes’ target is transubstantiation as he describes the priests who pretend that, by saying the correct words, the nature of the bread changes to Christ’s body. Though this may have won him some sympathy from Protestants, it was dangerous for him to say it at all. The Eucharist was one of the most controversial doctrines during and following the

there is nothing the sovereign cannot command. In short, it is not reasonable to believe that Hobbes intended to create a political system in which the justification of government depends in any way on religious belief. It is, rather, the other way around. Otherwise, an atheist sovereign would be one against whom subjects would be justified in revolting.

Reformation. Even among Protestants there was hostility on the issue and it became the only issue that kept the Protestants from uniting at the Marburg Colloquy.²⁷ Likewise, at the Council of Trent (the council which began the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation), the topic of the Eucharist was defended in detail.²⁸ Any deviation from it, such as calling the Eucharist merely spiritual and not literally the body of Christ, was anathema. Hobbes' description is brief, but per the Council of Trent, heretical. Others who dared address the topic were not so fortunate.²⁹

Another mistaken view, Hobbes argues, is Eternal Life and Death by means of an immortal soul. The immortality of the soul was another topic under discussion in Hobbes' day. For example, Descartes' popular work, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, was fully titled

²⁷ The Marburg Colloquy was a series of two meetings called by a German Prince (or "Landgrave"), Philip of Hesse. These meetings, called with hopes of providing doctrinal unity to strengthen political alliances among Protestant Princes included Protestant Reformers such as Luther, Zwingli, and Melanchthon. Though generally the Colloquy was considered a success for their agreement in broad doctrinal themes and a shared mission, after agreeing to fourteen of the fifteen points under discussion, their movement towards unity fell apart over heated disagreement between Luther and Zwingli concerning the nature of the Eucharist in the middle of the final point. These tensions lasted. For example, John a Lasco, a Dutch Reformer influential in the English Reformation empathetic to Zwingli and Calvin, refers to Luther's consubstantiation cuttingly as "Lutheropapist." (It became a term of criticism for Protestants to refer to a doctrine as papist, meaning it was guilty of being, or resembling, a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church). See Michael S. Springer's *Restoring Christ's Church: John a Lasco and the Forma ac ratio* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013), 17-20; 56.

²⁸ It was in the Thirteenth Session of this council.

²⁹ Robert Desgabets, a disciple of Descartes, published a Cartesian account of the Eucharist (*Considérations sur l'état présent de la controverse touchant le T. S. Sacrement de l'autel* (Holland, 1671)) that Descartes was unwilling to include in the *Objections and Replies* to his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. His work was immediately condemned by the Catholic Church.

Meditations on first Philosophy in which the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are demonstrated. Hobbes makes a break not only from the theologians of his day, but also from the philosophers. For Hobbes, it is impossible and undesirable to maintain belief in the immaterial and immortal soul if he wants to ensure political stability. Martyrdom arises when people believe they are obeying God's will, and even if they die, eternal happiness and reward await them. In the case of an uprising, people would not fear death if they believed a better life of reward awaited them. Hobbes was concerned to ensure that doctrine of the immateriality and immortality of the soul would not become or continue to be dangerous to the stability of the commonwealth.

In Chapter XLV, Hobbes moves to reject demonology and "other relics." To spend an entire chapter on Demonology and related topics may seem strange to the contemporary reader, but in 1597, King James I authored a text exploring these topics in detail (*Demonology*). Even as late as 1694, philosophers were commenting on this issue. One of Descartes' followers, Antoine Le Grand, authored a textbook for teaching Descartes' philosophy in England and in chapters on metaphysics he included sections dedicated to angels and demons (*An Entire Body of Philosophy*). It exists among those doctrines which may incite fear or another motivation beyond obeying the sovereign.

Hobbes then transitions to an attack on ancient philosophers in Chapter XLVI. He has critical comments on all the ancient schools. However, his main target is Aristotle, who was the authority on whom the Scholastics relied and that Hobbes is trying to overturn. His criticism of Aristotle is scathing, writing that this "study is not properly philosophy (the nature of which is not dependent on authors) but Aristotelity." These philosophies are very dangerous because they frighten men away from obeying laws, who instead expect a spirit of God to blow obedience into them.

Hobbes continues to criticize religious doctrines grounded upon ancient philosophy in Chapter XLVII, discussing who benefits most from these falsehoods: Popes and Presbyteries. The final pages of the text solidify his scathing tone towards them, comparing the Papacy with a fictional Kingdom of Fairies, ridiculing the Roman Church for many pages, and accusing Catholicism of being as fantastic and equally absurd as a doctrine of fairies.

The content of these chapters may seem superfluous. However, as Richard Tuck nicely notes, Books III and IV are the main reason for writing *Leviathan*: “Parts One and Two were a restatement of Hobbes' psychological and political ideas, and were substantially the same as the earlier versions [of Hobbes' political theory in works such as *De Cive* and *The Elements of Law*]. What was significant about *Leviathan*, and the reason why Hobbes wrote it, was the argument embedded in the parts of the book which few modern readers have ever read.”³⁰ Hobbes had already written treatises *On Man (De Homine)* and *On the Citizen (De Cive)*. Parts I and II are clearly important and essential for Hobbes since *Leviathan* is a work in political philosophy and not religion or philosophy of religion, but he found that his work on knowledge, science, man, and the commonwealth deserved reiteration, with commentary on religion. Previous Hobbesian writings on these matters described man and civil power and arguments related to them, but *Leviathan* must have sovereignty over the church and state. Of considerable importance in Part IV of *Leviathan* is Hobbes' concern to obviate religious warfare that comes about inside a commonwealth when individual citizens or groups claiming to represent God challenge the sovereign on the basis of their claims to access to God's word immediately or by some special gift. But for Hobbes, only the sovereign is the prophet of God, and only the sovereign can be recipient of any special knowledge. So, as Griswold has noted, “an entire section of the *Leviathan*, entitled ‘Of Darkness,’ is devoted to heaping scorn on Aristotelian Christianity in particular.” From Aristotelian Christianity, “religious wars will be

³⁰ Richard Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 37.

waged in the name of meaningless doctrines and in the cause of raw power.” Hobbes was intent on ensuring that such civil war based on religion would be unlikely to occur. He intended his *Leviathan* to provide a solution that Griswold identifies as having two parts: first, he “seeks to persuade us that the commonly received dogma—both Christian and non-Christian—is by and large meaningless” and, second, “he argues on both biblical and independent grounds that no sect can claim to represent the kingdom of God. There is no ‘spiritual’ authority above the temporal.”³¹

It is surely not surprising that Hobbes' religious message did not usually meet with a friendly audience in his own time and even in ours. In 1683, *Leviathan* was condemned and burned by Oxford University for implying, among other things, that the sovereign may impose religious requirements on the people.³² Similarly, the Presbyterians banned *Leviathan* as blasphemous for claims including Hobbes' contentions that the Scriptures should only be followed in so far as they are commanded by the sovereign, that the Kingdom of God is a civil kingdom, and that the sovereign is also the supreme prophet.³³ In the English context, however, though Hobbes' religious views were controversial (such as his textual criticism of the Bible), his reception is more nuanced, sometimes sympathetic. Similar opinions to those elaborated in *Leviathan* were even espoused by more orthodox figures. In some ways, for instance, Hobbes' views reflected those of the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker (1554–1600) who had also strongly advocated that the authority of the church should reside in the same person as the

³¹ Charles L. Griswold, Jr., “War, Competition, and Religion: Hobbes and the American Founding,” in *The Causes of Quarrel*, ed. Peter Caws (Boston: Beacon Pr., 1989), 25.

³² See A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 37-39.

³³ Fawn, Luke; Samuel Gillibrand, Joshua Kirton, John Rothwell, Thomas Underhill, and Nathaniel Webb. *A Beacon Set on Fire* (London: 1652).

authority of the state.³⁴ Still, Hobbes' commentary on religion set a precedent for future biblical criticism by Spinoza and many others into the present day and is a masterful example of his ability to synthesize the rhetorical flair of the Humanists he studied in his youth with the geometric science of an early modernist that he discovered in his more mature writings.³⁵

The end of *Leviathan*, Hobbes' "A Review and Conclusion," is the point at which Hobbes gives an overview of the significance of his work. He allows that there are clearly some difficulties with respect to whether human beings will be ruled by their reason or by passion, and human life is always attended with the propensity toward competition for power in the form of honor, wealth, and authority. For Hobbes, however difficult these facts of human existence may be, they are not insurmountable. They are surmountable through education and discipline. The person to whom Hobbes dedicated *Leviathan*, Sidney Godolphin, Hobbes says, was such a person in whom all these apparently inconsistent characteristics appeared, and in their combination they are virtuous in a good man: clear judgment and "largeness of fancy," rationality combined with ability and grace in speaking, courage in war and fear for laws. It is from the character of his friend and from the deductive arguments in which Hobbes has engaged throughout *Leviathan* that he therefore derives another law of nature, "That every man is bound by nature as much as in him lies to protect in war the authority by which he is himself protected in time of peace."

³⁴ See Book VIII of Richard Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989). For more on the reception of Hobbes see Johann Sommerville, "Leviathan and Its Anglican Context"; G.A.J. Rogers, "Hobbes and His Contemporaries"; and, Jon Parkin, "The Reception of Hobbes's *Leviathan*" (all found in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan* edited by Patricia Springborg. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007)).

³⁵ For a detailed study of the development of Hobbes' style from a humanist to a geometer, and the synthesis of the two in the *Leviathan*, see Quentin Skinner's *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

The derivation of this law of nature, to protect one's protector, may seem antithetical to Hobbes' insistence that no one may ever be required to give up the right to self-preservation. That, however, is not the case. To his detractors who claim that the right of nature allows any subject to abandon the sovereign and the state in time of great need, Hobbes can say in principle that it is contradictory to do so. In fact, and Hobbes makes this point clear, it is part of the agreement made in giving up the right to all things that made the creation of the sovereign possible, and that provides for peace under ordinary circumstances. This does not mean that the subjects of the sovereign are bound to fight for a lost cause. Hobbes retains in all things the right of a subject to leave the condition of submission to a sovereign who is unable to provide adequate protection, and this even for a soldier who has sworn to support and defend the sovereign. A soldier whose means of subsistence as a soldier are provided to him, however, is obligated by the contract he lawfully made to continue in defense of the sovereign. Again, and contrary to those who claim that Hobbes leaves open the possibility for an entire army to desert the sovereign and the state, there are concerns of honor and obligation that override such considerations. The subjects, whether soldiers or ordinary people, are obliged to follow the commands and decrees of a sovereign that they have authorized and whose decrees are law.

Not only is it the case that the sovereign's power and the stability of the commonwealth are secured through the authorization of the people and the power of the sovereign in having the multitude of people behind him. It is also the case that the sovereign has the power of God as God's "lieutenant" on Earth and whose power, Hobbes is convinced, is augmented in having ecclesiastical authority. To those who doubt that Hobbes' arguments for the power of the sovereign in civil and religious affairs for the establishment of peace for a commonwealth are in some way unsatisfactory, Hobbes has ready answers to justify his positions.

Since the truth of doctrines depends on Scripture or on reason and not the power or force of the eloquence or popularity of any writer, we ought to turn to matters of right and not of

fact for truth. Hobbes has, at least to his own satisfaction, derived the rights of sovereigns and the duties of subjects from a method of reasoning yielding certainty on the model of geometry and not on the simple and often unreliable facts of the world. The ancient writers and their followers, on the other hand, often contradict themselves and, as a result, their claims are insufficient to establish what they purport to have established. In place of doctrines like those of the ancients and medievals that lead to confusion, civil strife, and adherence to falsehoods and absurdities, Hobbes contends that his work ought to be taught in the Universities. Since it is in the Universities that civil and moral doctrine are taught, using *Leviathan* will ensure that they will be purified “both from the venom of heathen politicians and from the incantation of deceiving spirits.”

Hobbes saw great benefit in the adoption of his work by the Universities, and while his statement of the case might seem obscure to many 21st century readers, he contends that the good sense presented in *Leviathan* will be of considerable benefit to state and society. Among the benefits are peace and stability arising through clear knowledge of duties that will, in turn, tend toward less discontent, which will therefore require a military no larger than needed to protect against potential invaders. Following the Thirty Years’ War, it was clear that the existing systems failed to deliver these things; Hobbes believed his politics would. With respect to these benefits, Hobbes concludes that his doctrine was founded on his observation of the conditions of Civil War in his own time, and that his words will not be condemned by anyone who desires peace.

Concluding Remarks

Having provided an introductory overview and commentary on Hobbes' *Leviathan*, it is important now to return to the topic with which Hobbes began: method and its careful application to the moral, social, religious, and political lives of human beings. Hobbes employed philosophical and scientific method to determine the origin, nature, and power of the

commonwealth. The philosophical method he used is the method of early modern science, that of resolution and composition. Hobbes found the strength of conclusions previously reached by other theorists insufficient to ensure the stability and reliability of conclusions in the political sphere, like Descartes found conclusions to be insufficient in the epistemological sphere. To solve the problem, Hobbes engaged in analysis of what he considered the simplest component parts of a political whole, the individual (through resolution of a “whole” down to its “parts”). Doing this, Hobbes considered the whole (problematic and unstable) political state and determined that if we were to “abstract” away the artificial constraints of the state and our social relations, we would find at the base of all political organization the individual human being with her individual desires, aversions, endeavors, hopes, and goals. Just as a political state can be analyzed with respect to its component parts, so also can the component parts be both identified and analyzed down to their own component parts to reach the atomistic element that is the foundation of the political state. The individual parts of the political state are individual human beings. The resolution of human beings to their component parts includes their vital motions as well as their animal motions (as Hobbes referred to them early in *Leviathan*). Hobbes determined that the animal motions, the desires and aversions of individual human beings, are their elemental parts. Just as Descartes identified the most elemental, simple, and essential part of an understanding of human knowledge to be the individual thinker and the mind, soul, or spirit that thinks, so Hobbes identified the elemental parts of a human being as desires and aversions.

As he recognizes that all human beings desire and seek power to preserve their lives, and sees that the ultimate human aversion is death, Hobbes attempts to rebuild the entire edifice of social and political organization into the political state, which he designs with the intention to create a “mortal God” under which human beings can pursue their desires of self-preservation and avoid of early, violent death. In designing the political state in such a way,

Hobbes illustrates the application of the resolute-compositional method in the ultimate science of his philosophical system, political or civil philosophy. In making the individual and her desires the elemental pieces of the edifice of the state, Hobbes ushers in—with careful employment of the method of modern science and geometrical reasoning—the modern era in political philosophy in which the interests and lives of individuals are the central focus of social and political existence. In virtue of this method, Hobbesian individualism becomes the first in a long series of individualistic political theories that continue to this day. Such theories reject the absolutism characteristic of ancient and medieval views of the subordinate place of the individual in society and the state, and replaced that view with one giving primacy of place to the individual and her ability to seek out her own conception of the good and to live a good life on her own terms.

The impact of the moral, social, and political work of Thomas Hobbes is unquestionable. For some of his contemporaries, he was “the monster of Malmesbury” because of the doctrines he put forth (especially those concerning human behavior in a natural condition), because of his argument for absolute sovereignty, and because of the simple audacity apparent in the Hobbesian transformation of religious doctrines. It was common in Hobbes' time to think of human beings as naturally social or political beings, and therefore not naturally endowed with a propensity for war. Some of his contemporaries took exception to the description of what they took to be a barbarous form of humanity in the natural condition to be an insult to God.³⁶ Others

³⁶ Kinch Hoekstra notes that “there could hardly be a more dramatic contrast to this portrait of prelapsarian harmony or subsequent salvation than the account Hobbes provides. Contemporaries accused him of impiety, thinking it an affront to God to say that he had placed human beings in such a condition of misery - an affront they thought was exacerbated by the position that redemption from this condition was to be found without appeal to him.” See “Hobbes on the Natural Condition of Mankind,” *The*

found Hobbes' justification for absolute sovereignty repulsive to human reason and human interests. And many considered his religious doctrines to be nothing more than the ravings of an atheist and heretic.³⁷ But for all that, Thomas Hobbes' ideas are with us today in more than just books. His reasoning and many of his ideas manifest themselves in works, doctrines, and in political and revolutionary actions that have made contemporary liberal democracies possible.

While Hobbes argues for what at first sight seems to be paradoxical in the authorization of absolute power of sovereigns through free acts of autonomous agents, his arguments have influenced philosophical and political discussion and have led to implemented policies regarding the proper balance of citizen rights and government powers in modern democratic societies. Hobbes describes a natural condition of mankind that at first appears anything but laudatory regarding human nature and behavior. But the description influenced the development of contemporary moral and political thought of theorists of freedom and justice like Locke, Rawls, Nozick, and many others whose works enhance our ability to engage in active debate and to make informed decisions with respect to our moral, social, political, and religious lives.

While Hobbes argued for the power of government to silence doctrines deemed dangerous to peace and stability by the sovereign, it is truly ironic that Hobbes himself critically

Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 111.

³⁷ A different view of Hobbes' project from that of his contemporaries might be expressed well in Hood's claim that "Scientifically considered, the commonwealth is the artificial unity of an artificial body, but, considered religiously, the commonwealth is the moral unity of natural persons bound together by God by His natural laws." See F.C. Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1964), 137. The point for Hobbes is that it is unity, and in unity is peace and protection. The ability to show how to attain peace from both a secular and a religious point of view, far from it being irreligious or heretical, is an expression of devotion to the law of God and love of humanity more than doctrines teaching disunity, disagreement, and war.

evaluates some of the very works he sees as causing civil strife in order to reach that conclusion. But perhaps Hobbes engaged in a bit of irony and exaggerated some of his claims to bring his readers attention to the importance of clear thinking—through application of proper method, of course—in the fight against irrationality and ignorance. If nothing else—and we are certain there is much more to Hobbes' influence than this alone, but that this is one of the most significant achievements—Hobbes' individualist, methodological, and rational approach to questions about human goals and the way to go about achieving them is a hallmark of modernist thinking that continues to enhance our lives to this day. In modern democratic societies founded on the principles that Hobbes either explicitly stated or foreshadowed in his work, citizens remain free to determine their own life plans and ways of living that do not encroach on the rights of others. Even Hobbesian absolutism is not so absolute after all when we take into account that there is no pre-established goal to which all of us must strive, complete with a prescribed way of living demanded in light of that externally imposed goal. Instead, the Hobbesian project defends individuals and their right to create themselves in ways suitable to their propensities, interests, and their very dignity and value as human beings. While absolute government is probably not the most desirable way to express an individualist system of thought and make it largely effective, Hobbes is one of the “fathers” of modern Western philosophy who introduces the centrality of individual interests and knowledge in political life in much the same way that Descartes succeeded in establishing that knowledge does not depend on authority and tradition, but that in fact knowledge and progress are impeded by mere claims to authority that are not based in argumentation and rational discussion.

While it is true that in our own time not everyone agrees that rugged individualism is either an accurate description of human life or a type of life to which human beings ought to strive, individualistic thinking and reasoning continue to have great value to us all. It helps in the battle to protect freedom from the confines and chains of authoritarianism, tradition, and the

eloquence of passionate speakers for whom truth is at best secondary to winning an argument or an office. Individualist thinking is a means to protect the rights of individuals to live lives consistent with goals of their own choosing. These are invaluable benefits that are at least a partial inheritance from Hobbes that we continue to reap from early modern Western thought.