

The Surreptitious *Leviathan*: Concealing the Beast of Scientific Reason

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Typically, in the political scholarship on Thomas Hobbes, the political theory expressed in the *Leviathan* is understood as logically independent of Hobbes' mechanistic materialism and his geometric methodology. Scholars intent upon viewing Hobbes' *magnum opus* strictly as a work of political theory identify the 'right of nature' as a first principle of his political philosophy, yet in doing so, they pass over, or de-emphasize the unity between this principle as it appears in the *Leviathan* and Hobbes' mechanistic view of human nature explicit in his earlier works. Furthermore, those scholars completely miss an important stylistic aspect of the *Leviathan*, namely its surreptitious tone. In this paper, I argue in support of the unity thesis and highlight two important consequences of viewing Hobbes' political theory as a consequence of his mechanistic view of human nature. Not only does the "grand atheist" accusation gain more traction, but the degree to which Hobbes' thought surreptitiously fools the majority of his contemporary readers can be better understood through a surreptitious reading of the *Leviathan*.

The Unity Thesis: Hobbes' Political Philosophy as a Consequence of His First Philosophy

We shall approach Hobbes' *Leviathan* through the unity thesis. It is my contention that Hobbes' political philosophy is an extension of, or an application of, his mechanistic first philosophy and his theory of knowledge. The best way to understand Hobbes' political philosophy, and to a lesser extent his theology, is to view Hobbes' philosophy as a unified whole. Hobbes begins the *Leviathan* with a description of the genesis and function of sense perception, a fact that Cees Leijenhorst (2007) finds quite surprising for a work that introduces Hobbes'

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political theory and its implications for theology.¹ Hobbes' mechanical explanation of sense perception in the first two chapters of *Leviathan* are admittedly crude; however, as Leijenhorst (2007) writes in reference to *De Corpore*, "we do indeed find a more refined and extensive account [of sense perception] than offered in *Leviathan*" (p. 87). Though Leijenhorst's interest is in establishing the extent to which Hobbes' polemics in the first two chapters of *Leviathan* are the result of his anti-Aristotelian philosophy of science, his insight here is helpful toward determining whether or not Hobbes' methodology in *Leviathan* is consistent with his methodology in *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law*.

Hobbes' methodology is akin to the geometric method in which complex theorems are derived from axiomatic first principles.² While In Switzerland in 1628, the forty year-old Hobbes discovered Euclid in a private library in Geneva.³ His discovery of Euclid prompted Hobbes to pursue philosophic truth through the method of geometry, where truth is a function of a reasoning that avoids contradiction through systematic analytical ordering. Later, when Hobbes would develop a mechanistic conception of the universe consisting only of extended body, it was the method of geometry, as observed by Hobbes in his discovery of Euclid, that provided the type of verbally acute lucidity necessary to

¹ References to *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law (Human Nature and De Corpore Politico)* are derived from the *Oxford World's Classics (OWC)* edition listed in the end reference to this paper. This edition of Hobbes' works includes complete translations of *The Elements of Law*, along with three appended chapters from *De Corpore* (Chapters I, VI, and XXV). When citing from *De Corpore*, I will use the abbreviation "DCo" followed by the pagination from *OWC*. When citing from *The Elements of Law*, I will use the abbreviation "EL" followed by the pagination from *OWC*. References to *Leviathan*, will use the abbreviation "L" followed by the pagination from the Curley edition (1994) of *Leviathan*, also referenced in full in the end references to this paper.

² Jesseph (2002) expresses the same point when he writes, "Hobbes conceived of philosophy as an enterprise that begins with quite general definitions and principles and proceeds *more geometric* through demonstrative syllogisms to establish irrefutable truths" (p. 163).

³ Mintz (1962) presents a charming description of Hobbes' discovery and subsequent fascination with the proof method of geometry.

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present his mechanistic materialism as a systematic whole. In 1636, eight years after his exposure to Euclid, Hobbes, in a letter addressed to William Cavendish, writes of his displeasure with Walter Warner and Claude Mydorge for their failure to properly demonstrate their findings in optics. Hobbes (1994a) writes, “but they do not well to call their writings demonstrations, for the grounds and suppositions they use, so many of them as concerne light, are uncertayne and many of them not true” (*Correspondence*, p. 34). It is evident that Hobbes has a clear conception of the necessity of employing true first principles as a proper ground for one’s inquiry, if one’s inquiry is to yield accurate experimental results.

Hobbes’ first formulation of his mechanistic materialism can be found in an untitled work that was added as an appendix to Ferdinand Tönnies edition of Hobbes’ *The Elements of Law*.⁴ This work, roughly dated in 1637, presents Hobbes’ mechanistic materialism through a thoroughly deductive argument, in which conclusions are syllogistically drawn out from a few first principles or definitions. In section I (of III sections), Hobbes identifies four primary principles or definitions:

1. That, whereto nothing is added, and from which nothing is taken, remains in the same state it was.
 2. That which is in no way touch’d by another, hath nothing added to nor taken from it.
 3. Agent is that which hath power to move.
 4. [The patient is] that which hath power to be moved.
- (Brandt, 1927, p. 13)

Hobbes felt these four principles were self-evident, and were therefore certain. From these principles, Hobbes deduces the various laws of his mechanistic

⁴ See Brandt (1927) for a more detailed discussion of Hobbes’ *The Little Treatise*.

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philosophy.⁵ These laws are meant to explain phenomena as experienced in nature; Hobbes feels sense experience can be explained through local motion alone. In short, if there is no motion, then nothing can be sensed. Brandt (1927) writes, “If we are to characterize the little treatise in one single sentence it will be in the following words: *The little treatise concerns the problem of the act of sense in a broad signification. Hobbes’ leading thought is that both the external and the internal act of sense and the higher, psychic functions derived therefrom are local motion and nothing but local motion*” (p. 46) Here, we see that Hobbes has remained true to his geometric method, deriving explanations for various sense experiences from first principles; each principle reflects both a generalization from empirical observations and a mechanism that requires bodies in motion for sense experience to occur. Recalling his earlier criticisms of Warner and Mydorge, we can see that Hobbes, the naturalist philosopher, has developed a systematic method for explaining phenomena that is consistent with his vision of the correct manner in which one ought to do philosophy. Furthermore, as we shall soon see, Hobbes’ methodology and mechanistic materialism has been refined so as to closely resemble the mechanism and methodological analysis presented in *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law*.

Thus far, Hobbes’ strict mechanism seems to only apply to what we might call, today, physics, or neuroscience if one wishes to stretch things a bit. *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law* succeed in bringing Hobbes’ mechanistic materialism and his geometric method to bear on his epistemology and theory of mind. Hobbes distinguishes between two types of knowledge—knowledge acquired through prudence and knowledge acquired through ratiocination, while claiming that prudence “is not to be esteemed philosophy” (*DCo*, 1999, p. 186). Hobbes here makes a case for a computational theory of mind, while still holding true to his empirical roots. In distinguishing between two types of knowledge, and insisting that philosophy should focus upon ratiocination, or computation,

⁵ Again, for reasons of brevity, we shall not go into the detail required to state and elucidate these laws as Hobbes’ describes them in 1637—I refer the reader to Brandt (1927).

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Hobbes at the same time distinguishes man from the brutes while also rejecting any innate hypothesis or any immaterial substantiality. Like the brutes, man extrapolates from past experiences, but unlike the brutes, man can demonstrate, through powers of ratiocination, truths that are the proper object of philosophic study. Hobbes writes, “we must remember and acknowledge that there be in our minds continually certain images or conceptions of the things without us, insomuch that if a man could be alive, and all the rest of the world annihilated, he should nevertheless retain the image thereof” (*EL*, 1999, p. 22). All mental images and concepts are derived from experience for Hobbes. Again, Hobbes holds to his empirical roots, while maintaining his distinction between the two types of knowledge when he writes, “and all experience being (as I have said) but remembrance, all knowledge is remembrance...the registers of the latter are called the sciences” (*EL*, p. 40). There are no other sources of knowledge besides perception, yet the second type of knowledge is distinct from the first type of knowledge despite beginning with the same raw materials. Human reason as Hobbes’ describes it, is the creation of man, made possible through language, which, through naming, identifies the concepts that makes this second kind of knowledge possible.⁶ Hobbes writes, “By the advantage of names it is that we are capable of science, which beasts, for want of them, are not” (*EL*, p. 36). Hobbes is a nominalist; he rejects the “universality of one name to many things” as that which “hath been the cause that men think the things themselves are universal” (*EL*, p. 36). Proofs manipulate words, not abstract objects; this manipulation is a systematic connection of words to propositions to syllogistic conclusions. Yet, this is not enough for one to profess scientific knowledge—one must also have evidence, which Hobbes defines as “the concomitance of a man’s

⁶ I use the word ‘creation’ in this sentence to coincide with my claim that the Leviathan is Reason as Hobbes’ conceives ratiocination, but the word ‘discover’ may, indeed, be more apt in terms of Hobbes’ philosophy, particularly considering his own discovery of Euclid. I am unwilling to submit Hobbes’ philosophy to the sort of anachronistically revisionist-historical analysis which would suggest a Darwinian explanation for the ‘evolutional appearing’ of Hobbes’ second type of knowledge, thus I have decided to stick with my rather misleading description of the genesis of the Leviathan as a ‘creation of man.’

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conception with words that signify such conception in the act of ratiocination” (*EL*, p. 41). Though this may read like the writing of a rationalist philosopher, Hobbes’ insistence that both kinds of knowledge derive from experience suggests that Hobbes’ conception of scientific knowledge is grounded in experience, and that the distinctly human ability to manipulate words, propositions, and conclusions into the form of a truth claim, while also maintaining the ability to judge the appropriateness of evidence with respect to these truth claims, is itself explainable in terms of his mechanistic philosophy. It is this latter point which brings us to Hobbes’ theory of mind.

Hobbes believes in the transparency of the mind; there is no unconscious iceberg of mental casuistry beneath the surface of man’s reflective awareness. Furthermore, Hobbes’ strict mechanism and its deduced laws, i.e., that sensation requires bodies in motion, is extended to the mind—there is nothing immaterial about the mind which cannot be reduced to a science based upon the laws of cause and effect as they pertain to motion. Hobbes writes, “That the said image or colour is but an apparition unto us of that motion, agitation, or alteration, which the object worketh in the brain or spirits, or some internal substance in the head” (*EL*, p. 23). It is clear from this principle that Hobbes has retained the mechanism of bodies in motion that he describes in his *Little Treatise*. However, here Hobbes explicitly applies his mechanism toward understanding the manner in which the human mind functions. Brandt (1927) echoes this point when he writes, “The reason why moral philosophy is treated after physics is that the motions of the mind (as examples of such Hobbes mentions appetite, aversion, love, benevolence, hope, fear, emulation, and envy) have their causes in sense and imagination which are the subject of physical contemplation” (p. 244). Hobbes views all mental phenomena as reducible to the motions of bodies coming into contact with each other, whether that be tiny corpuscles of light making contact with the retina to explain vision, or whether that be some sort of intra-cranial motion within the nerves of the brain to produce pain. Those that arrive at an understanding of the material causes and effects of motion within the

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mind that produce the various emotions are in a position to understand the motivations of the human will. It is at this point, that Hobbes is able to extend his mechanistic philosophy to his political philosophy.

Hobbes rejects the idea of a *summum bonum* that motivates humanity. Hobbes thinks people will always disagree about what is good, or what is evil, but will always agree on the continuance of what is experienced as pleasurable, and the avoidance of what is experienced as a displeasure. This early version of the Freudian pleasure principle is elucidated quite clearly when Hobbes writes, “and as we call good and evil the things that please and displease, so call we goodness and badness, the qualities or powers whereby they do it” (*EL*, p. 44). Hobbes’ celebrated negative view of human nature makes its appearance in *The Elements of Law* in 1640, though this was unpublished, roughly ten years before Hobbes began work on *Leviathan*. It is clear that Hobbes felt his description of the state of nature is a logical consequence of his conception of human nature and the will, though it is unclear whether or not Hobbes thought the state of nature actually occurred in history. Hobbes imagines humans in their natural state, *sans* any social obligations. Humanity seeks after its desires, and these are most often in conflict with each other. In such a state, war is constant, yet because there is no social obligation, there is no law to be broken. Man has a right to everything, but does not have law. Hobbes writes, “and forasmuch as necessity of nature maketh men to will and desire *bonum sibi*, that which is good for themselves, and to avoid that which is hurtful...it is not against reason that a man doth all he can to preserve his own body and limbs...that which is not against reason, men call right...it is therefore a *right of nature*; that every man may preserve his own life and limbs, with all the power he hath” (*EL*, p. 79).

Many political scholars refer to this *right of nature* as Hobbes’ first principle of political philosophy,⁷ and it does set in motion all that is to follow with regard to the raising of *Leviathan*; it is the motivating factor for the

⁷ See Strauss (1986) and Jaume (2007) for examples of how the *right of nature* principle can be used to argue for Hobbes’ political theory as a source of liberalism—a thesis I wholeheartedly reject.

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emergence of the reason that breaks man free of the state of nature and into covenant with one another; however, it is clear from a consideration of Hobbes' geometric method, and our study of Hobbes' theory of knowledge and theory of mind, that this principle is a theorem that is ultimately derived from his theory of motion, whose principles were first elucidated in Hobbes' *Little Treatise*. In short, it follows from Hobbes' earlier thought that a failure to understand Hobbes as a philosopher of motion, even when he discusses social organization and political theory, will inevitably lead to misunderstandings of the various mechanisms at play in Hobbes' political philosophy.⁸ It is precisely this failure on the part of some Hobbes scholars that has led them to identify the Leviathan with the sovereign, or with his political philosophy as a whole.⁹ However, *Leviathan is reason, the reasoning that provides the impetus for man to make covenant and rise out of the state of nature.*

In discussing the three primary motivations that "incline men to peace," Hobbes identifies fear, desire, and hope which he calls "passions" (*L*, p. 78). Yet Hobbes also includes a rational supplement to these inclinations. He writes, "And thus much for the ill condition which man by mere nature is actually placed in, though with a possibility to come out of it [the state of nature], consisting partly in the passions, *partly in his reason*" (*L*, p. 78).¹⁰ Hobbes then describes reason as that which "suggesteth convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement" (*L*, p. 78). The Leviathan is the

⁸ Waldman (1974) rejects any psychological egoism in Hobbes' view of human nature in order to view those that seek covenant out of the state of nature as committing sacrificial acts that betray an enlightened self-interest of altruism. Such a reading is only possible if Hobbes' geometric method of analysis and his distinction between the two types of knowledge is de-emphasized in favor of an altruism that is non-existent in Hobbes' descriptions of human nature. Hobbes rejects the possibility of an intrinsic good, so from where would this altruistic form of self-interest be derived?

⁹ Tralau (2007) argues that the use of the Leviathan as a mythological symbol serves a theoretical purpose that contradicts his geometric methodology. His argument identifies the Leviathan with the "otherness" of the "absolute power of the sovereign," such that there is a contradiction implicit in Hobbes' methodology and his mythological symbolism (77).

¹⁰ I have added the italics here for emphasis.

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rationality that makes possible the second form of knowledge; the knowledge that separates us from the beasts and our beast-like existence when man is observed in the state of nature; the knowledge of science—obtained through the very method Hobbes discovered when he first uncovered Euclid in Geneva in 1628. Again in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes, “The other [form of knowledge] is of consequences, and is called science, the record of which is usually called philosophy” (p. 49).

It is the *Leviathan* that is the *lex naturalis* that compels man to divest his natural right in favor of the law of the sovereign. Mankind in the state of nature uses his reason to establish his right, but this type of reason cannot establish law. It is evident that there are two types of reason at play in Hobbes, just as there are two types of knowledge and two types of natural law. The type of reason that yields natural right is the type of reason that the beasts employ when they develop prudential knowledge. This is a type of instrumental reasoning that involves a mere extrapolation from past experiences—one can imagine a human being in the state of nature reasoning as follows: “The last person I encountered stole my food, thus I should either kill the next person I meet, so that I won’t have my food stolen, or I should hide my food and pretend to be without food to steal.” Hobbes writes of a different kind of reason when he claims, “there can be no other law of nature than reason, nor no other precepts of NATURAL LAW, than those which declare unto us the ways of peace, where the same may be obtained” (*EL*, p. 82). This is a law that is issued by human rationality, as distinct from the reasoning powers of the beasts, and as distinct from a law that is issued by divine command. Again Hobbes appeals to what I am calling the *Leviathan*, when he writes, “reason therefore dictateth to every man for his own good, to seek after peace, as far forth as there is hope to attain the same” (*EL*, p. 81). In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes expands upon this point by describing two laws of nature. The first, which he calls “fundamental,” is *contained* within man’s right of nature such that “*he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war*” only whence he cannot obtain the peace “that every man ought to endeavor” (p. 80). From this more fundamental law of nature, Hobbes derives the second law of

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nature which provides for a “contract in way of peace”—a covenant through which man lays down his right of nature (*L*, p. 80).

If the unity thesis is defensible, then Hobbes’ *Leviathan* must be understood in reference to his mechanistic materialism. This is quite problematic when one considers the manner in which Hobbes’ opens the book:

For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within, why may we not say that all *automata*...have an artificial life? For what is the *heart*, but a *spring*; and the *nerves*, but so many *strings*; and the *joints*, but so many *wheels*, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer?
(*L*, p. 3)

This mechanical description of man’s anatomy mirrors the mechanical description of Hobbes’ Commonwealth, and is consistent with Hobbes’ mechanistic materialism as described in *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law*. However, Hobbes employs this analogical symbolism throughout his brief introduction and the use of mythological imagery and rhetorical flair in *Leviathan* marks a distinct change of style from his earlier writings. This change in style does not indicate a change in his methodology. Hobbes’ method in *Leviathan* remains strictly geometric. The first 16 chapters can be seen as summaries of his work in *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law*; Hobbes briskly runs through his thoughts on his mechanistic materialism, his philosophy of language, his epistemology, and his distinction between the two versions of natural law and the right of nature. This summary exposition of his thought can, indeed, lead one to think that the method of deduction from first principles employed in *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law* has been abandoned in *Leviathan*; however, Hobbes himself clarifies the issue when he writes in reference to his (as then unpublished) work in *De Corpore* and *The Elements of*

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Law, “I have elsewhere written of the same [the natural causes of sensory experience] at large. Nevertheless, to fill each part of my present method, I will briefly deliver the same in this place” (*L*, p. 6). It is clear that Hobbes feels that his methodology *requires* him to discuss his mechanistic materialism; however, it is also clear that Hobbes feels he has bigger fish to fry.

Hobbes writes *Leviathan* in Paris, while England is engaged in a bitter Civil War. King Charles I has been executed and the other English Royalists in Paris are unsure of what to do—ought one support the Prince of Wales and continue the fight, or ought one accept the new Commonwealth (established in 1650, a year prior to the completion of *Leviathan*) and the ‘terms of engagement’ that were offered for their return?¹¹ Hobbes addresses the diehard Royalists when he writes in the ‘Review and Conclusion’ to *Leviathan*, “and though in the revolution of states there can be no good constellation for truths of this nature to be born under...I cannot think it [the new Commonwealth] will be condemned at this time, either by public judge of doctrine, or by any that desires the continuance of public peace” (p. 497). Hobbes also addresses the new Commonwealth when he warns, “I have set down for one of the causes of the dissolutions of commonwealths their imperfect generation, consisting in the want of an absolute and arbitrary legislative power” (*L*, p. 491). Like Machiavelli, Hobbes envisions his *Leviathan* as a textbook in political philosophy that can prevent future civil wars if the King of the new Commonwealth follows its mandates, but he also views it as clarion call to the defeated Royalists urging them to finally come home. Hobbes crafts *Leviathan* for a much broader audience than his previous works, and such considerations help explain Hobbes’ shift in style and his de-emphasis upon the methodology that is vital to his conception of the proper manner of philosophizing. *Leviathan* needed to be a book that pulled at the heartstrings as well as one that appealed to scientific

¹¹ The Terms of Engagement stipulated that many of the Royalists in Paris could return to England if they paid a heavy fine and swore an Oath of Engagement to the New Commonwealth, and their titles and lands would be returned to them. See Martinich (1999, pp. 219-25) for a detailed description of “the Engagement Controversy.”

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reasoning. It is for this reason that he likens the creation of the Commonwealth to an art that “created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH...which is but an artificial man” (*L*, p. 3). It is best to read Hobbes’ introduction to *Leviathan* as a work of rhetorical irony, what Hobbes’ literally says—the claim that the Leviathan *is* the Commonwealth—should be understood as an intentional oversimplification, written in order to help reinforce the perception that the head of such a Commonwealth, the sovereign, is absolutely powerful. In order to discover what Hobbes literally means, one would need to consider his entire philosophy in both its geometric methodology and its mechanistic roots, to discover that the birth of the Leviathan is an event in which human reason distinguishes itself from the madness of the beast-like state of nature, where the Commonwealth is understood as the product of Leviathan.¹²

It is at this point that we will venture away from Hobbes’ political philosophy as contained within the pages of *Leviathan*. We have established a congruence between the methodology involved in *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law* and the methodology employed, though downplayed, in *Leviathan* with respect to the genesis of Hobbes’ political philosophy. We have shown, through careful study of Hobbes’ *De Corpore* and *The Elements of Law*, the manner in which Hobbes envisions his political thought as derivable from his work in natural philosophy, particularly his conception of human nature as being reducible to the laws of motion. Furthermore, we have placed *Leviathan* within its proper historical context to explain the manner in which Hobbes’ title monster is best understood as representative of Hobbes’ conception of the reason that yields both scientific knowledge and political science; after all, Hobbes did not

¹² Though it is beyond the scope of this paper, I believe that this interpretation of what the Leviathan actually represents can shed new light onto the debate amongst Hobbes scholars regarding his strange manner of scriptural interpretation, his atheism, as well as his negative view of human nature *sans* Leviathan, i.e. humanity devoid of scientific reasoning, as in the divine command theory accepted prior to *Leviathan*. All of which would be better understood (and more acceptable interpretations), if viewed as the consequence of his mechanistic philosophy and his geometric methodology.

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feel *Leviathan* was a work of political philosophy *qua* political philosophy *circa* 1651, but Hobbes felt *Leviathan* was a work that established the first political *science*.

Yet, if we are to understand the underlying motivation for viewing Hobbes' *Leviathan* as a surreptitious work, we must consider the reaction to the book from Hobbes' contemporaries. Hobbes was no doubt aware of the sort of controversy the book would generate.¹³ Armed with these considerations of what sort of firestorm his 'little pamphlet' might generate, Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* with the sort of surreptitious irony he thought necessary to pull the wool over the eyes of those that would not understand the true meaning of the text, while pacifying those that were prepared to accept the consequences of the new science. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, for the sake of his neck, Hobbes failed in this effort. Too many of his contemporaries rejected his mechanistic materialism, balked at his conception of human nature, and demanded retribution for his blasphemous scriptural interpretations, while a scant few understood that *Leviathan* was meant to be a precise description of man's new God in action. Those that understood this were prepared to follow the path of the Leviathan through to Hobbes' conclusions, however frightening these conclusions might be. Those that failed to understand the Leviathan understood only enough to reject Hobbes based upon his various 'theorems' and 'secondary principles' without understanding from where these principles were derived. It is for this reason that we will understand *Leviathan* as a work of surreptitious irony that conceals the Leviathan of scientific reason beneath its symbolism and rhetoric.

¹³ Though Hobbes' belief that the book would force Aristotelian Scholasticism from the schools of England reflected a rather naïve faith, not in scientific reason, but in humanity's readiness to accept this new type of reason, Hobbes still understood that the book would face serious opposition from his contemporaries.

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The Negative Reception of *Leviathan*

Hobbes' denial of the *summum bonum* was a controversial point of disagreement between Hobbes and his contemporaries. Hobbes' claim that there is no moral good or evil that is not a relative good or evil and that man is motivated strictly by self-interest, although latter echoed in the 18th Century by Bernard Mandeville, places him strictly in the minority with respect to English Moralists from the 17th century and 18th Century.¹⁴ G. A. J. Rogers (2007), commenting on the English reception of Hobbes' moral theory, writes "his philosophy was seen as implying a subjectivism about moral theory that opened the floodgates to wantonness and vice" (p. 425). Daniel Scargill, a former Hobessian forced to publish a recantation of Hobbes in 1669, describes Hobbes' moral theory as "founded only in the law of the civil magistrate" (as cited in Parkin, 2007b, p. 448). This damaging admission helped foster public opinion of *Leviathan* as a book that would lead one into moral corruption. Thus, the British Moral Theorists of the 18th century often chose Hobbes as their foil in their arguments for their respective moral theories. Seth Ward, in 1651, felt Hobbes' fatal error was in Hobbes' refusal to recognize that "judgments...about good and evil are made at the ordaining, and almost incitement, of nature, and before Hobbes all men were accustomed also to call them justice and injustice" (as cited in Parkin, 2007a, p. 167). Thus, Ward feels Hobbes has reduced moral law to the whim of the sovereign, as opposed to a law of nature. Ward's interpretation is half correct. Hobbes' moral theory does indeed depend upon the law of the sovereign; however this law is indeed the law of the Leviathan—the scientific reasoning that produces scientific law, which is further reducible to Hobbes'

¹⁴ For an entertaining version of Hobbes' rejection of *summum bonum*, described within English society as opposed to the state of nature, please see Mandeville's (1924) *The Fable of the Bees*, originally published in various installments in the years between 1720 and 1730. Contrast this with the dominance of the moral sense theorists of 18th century England (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler, Balguy, etc.).

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theory of motion. Again, Hobbes' *Leviathan* proves surreptitious in that it does not explicitly emphasize the connection between his moral theory and his mechanistic materialism.

While subsequent political theorists adopted many of Hobbes' ideas in their political philosophy, they often went to great lengths to either disguise or deny the influence Hobbes' political philosophy had upon their work. Others would borrow Hobbes' political ideas while "nest[ing] them in theoretical frameworks at odds with Hobbes' theory" (Parkin, 2007a, p. 138). Thomas White's political theory rejects Hobbes' emphasis upon fear with regard to the motivating factors involved in achieving rational consensus within the state of nature.¹⁵ White's political theory borrows from Hobbes when considering the need for covenant under a sovereign power, but White's motivation is Aristotelian, in that the desire for covenant is not a fearfully motivated self-interest on the part of those under the state of nature, but a recall to man's natural sociability. Man's social nature is here understood to be paramount, in opposition to Hobbes' right of nature which White believes to be "against all generosity, and embraces Nature it self...agreeth neither with Philosophy nor Morality" (as cited in Parkin, 2007a, p. 47). Unlike Hobbes, White rejects man's instrumental reasoning in the state of nature as a mere embracing of nature, while White holds to a form of reasoning that recognizes love and social desire as that which pulls man from his base state. This difference from Hobbes is slight but substantial. Hobbes' instrumental reasoning on the part of man in the state of nature must be distinguished from the scientific reasoning involved in man's decision to make covenant, if Hobbes' theory of knowledge is to retain his distinction between prudential knowledge and scientific knowledge. Furthermore, unlike White, Hobbes views self-interest as the motivating factor for the occurrence of both types of reasoning, and this must be the case, otherwise an inherent sociability within man would imply scientific reasoning as being inherent in man, yet *not* inherent in nature, a thesis that would contradict Hobbes' mechanistic materialism with respect to human nature.

¹⁵ See White (1655).

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John Hall's 1654 work, *Of Government and Obedience*, defends absolute rule by a sovereign power as well; however, Hall denies Hobbes' conception of the state of nature as a state of war because Hall believes such a conception of the state of nature implies that "they [men in the state of nature] could be left by a careful God in such a confused condition, where...they should fall to slaughter of one another, till their bleeding wounds, and not His Precepts of Providence, had taught them rules of Subjection" (as cited in Parkin, 2007a, p. 79). Hall's argument suggests that an *omni-benevolent* God cannot permit a state of nature that is warlike, such that fear of war prompts man to covenant, rather than fear of God. Hobbes' political theory rejects a divine right model in which the sovereign becomes sovereign due to the will of God—Hobbes' model does not require the providence of God, while Hall's model does require the providence of God. Under Hobbes' model, individuals within the state of nature agree to covenant under the sovereign as protectorate and representative of "all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will, which is as much as to say, to appoint one man or assembly of men to bear their person, and every one to own and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that beareth their person shall act" (*L*, p. 109). The authority of the sovereign is not derived from, and is thus independent of, the authority of God. Hobbes' cause of the generation of the commonwealth is the individual's giving up of his rights in the state of nature to the law of the sovereign, which, at least in Hobbes' optimism, is co-extensive with the laws of nature, unless the sovereign no longer has "the power...by which he is able to protect them [his subjects]" (*L*, p. 144). Hobbes implicitly argues against the divine right model when he writes, "a subject that has no certain and assured revelation particularly to himself concerning the will of God is to obey for such the command of the commonwealth" (*L*, p. 188). This passage can indeed be interpreted as leaving the door open for divine command if it is considered separately from Hobbes' later scriptural interpretations; however, Hobbes makes it clear that the age of prophecy is over when he writes

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(after considering several scriptural descriptions of prophecy that involve visions and dreams), “for when Christian men take not their own Christian sovereign for God’s prophet, they must take their own dreams for prophecy they mean to be governed by, and the tumor [tumult] of their own hearts for the Spirit of God... and by this means destroy all law, both divine and human, reduce all order, government, and society to the first chaos of violence and civil war” (*L*, p. 293). Hobbes’ warning is clear. Those that *think* they are following divine command are incorrect, because divine command cannot contradict the will of the sovereign, and this mistaken prophecy can lead to civil war, or a return to the state of nature. Though Hall obviously borrows some of Hobbes’ political ideas, he employs them to different ends—the ends of identifying the sovereign as subject to the will of God.

Of all the points of disagreement between Hobbes and his contemporaries, Hobbes’ perceived atheism was the most damaging and threatening accusation hurled at Hobbes in response to *Leviathan*. Whether or not Hobbes was an atheist is not pertinent to our present considerations.¹⁶ It is pertinent that a common attack of Hobbes’ philosophy by his contemporaries centered on his manner of interpreting scripture to support his political philosophy, no matter how unorthodox the interpretation. Due mainly to these unorthodox interpretations, Hobbes was branded an atheist by many writers, yet this brand was not often a public brand. As Jon Parkin points out, “Hobbes’s early critics tended to shy away from public accusations of atheism, and what is remarkable is not the volume of such accusations, but rather how few there were, and how cautiously they were made” (Parkin, 2007a, 133). Early criticisms of Hobbes’ theology focused upon the heretical nature of his scriptural interpretation, not on any claim that their author was an atheist. Alexander Ross compared Hobbes’

¹⁶ For detailed cases supporting the claim that Hobbes was an atheist, see Jesseph (2002), Curley (1992), or Skinner (1996). For the opposite position, see Taylor (1965), Warrender (1957), or Zarka (1996).

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scriptural interpretations to those of “Cerinthus the heretick.”¹⁷ When Hobbes writes of the resurrection and the Kingdom of Christ as an *earthly* kingdom, Hobbes unconventional scriptural interpretation allows his contemporaries to attack his theology as heretical.¹⁸ Yet, in private letters, Hobbes’ name was besmirched by the brand of atheism, to the public effect of Hobbes’ removal from the English court in Paris; Sir Edward Nicholas expresses this private opinion in the following:

I hear Lord Percy is much concerned in the forbidding Hobbes to come to Court, and says it was you and other Episcopal men, that were the Cause of it. But I hear that Wat. Montagu and other Papists (to the shame of the true Protestants) were the chief Cause, that the grand Atheist was sent away. (As cited in *Correspondence*, 1994b, p. 800)

This sentiment would slowly grow until Hobbes’ name was publicly linked to atheism. Thomas Tenison writes, “of late, [Hobbes] hath set forth his *Leviathan* in the Latine Tongue; declaring his desire of spreading his Malady throughout the World” (as cited in Parkin, 1997a, p. 174). In fact, Hobbes’ name would soon become a negative epitaph for any poorly received work. Parkin notes, “after contributing to Hobbes’s pamphlet he [Henry Stubbe] was accused of Hobbism by the Presbyterian Daniel Cawdry” (Parkin, 2007a, p. 174). George Lawson attacks Hobbes’ scriptural interpretation as written in “such a loose and impious abusive manner, that I verily perswade my self, he doth not believe them

¹⁷ See Ross (1653, pp. 35-6). Parkin describes in footnote 114 Cerinthus’ distinction between Jesus and Christ, where Jesus “was a mere man, though eminent in holiness. He suffered and died and was raised from the dead...and will be raised from the dead at the Last Day and all men will rise with him” (Parkin, 2007, p. 125).

¹⁸ See *Leviathan*, (p. 302, [3]).

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to be revealed and written from heaven, or that Jesus Christ was an ordinary just man, much less the Eternal Son of God Incarnate” (as cited in Parkin, 2007a, p. 50).

It is my contention that much, if not all, of Hobbes’ scriptural interpretations are meant in a surreptitiously ironic manner. They are not to be taken literally, but are meant to cover over Hobbes’ true rationale for presenting them—they are the theological consequences of his political philosophy, which in turn, is a consequence of his mechanistic materialism. Hobbes ought always to be thought of as a philosopher of motion first, a political philosopher, moral theorist, and theologian, *after* this fact. Henry Rosenthal (1989) strikes this chord with a strangely Heideggerian description of Hobbes when he describes *Leviathan* thusly, “the flourish of this title is truly esoteric; it conceals by revealing” (p. 32). Hobbes, in revealing his political philosophy and its theological implications in *Leviathan* conceals the very mechanistic materialism that grounds his thought. Doug Jesseph (2002), in consideration of the manner in which Hobbes ironically interprets scripture, writes, “Hobbes himself approached problematic passages in the Scriptures with precisely the kind of critical “sifting out of Philosophicall truth by Logick” that he claimed to be inappropriate” (p. 157). Edwin Curley (1992) suggests that Hobbes’ philosophy in *Leviathan* should be understood as intentionally less bold than it could have been; Curley thinks Hobbes employs a “suggestion by disavowal” approach, in which the author leads one to a conclusion, before disavowing the conclusion just as it begins to seem logically consequent—one can imagine Hobbes defending himself in such a case with the phrase, “you said it, not I!”

The majority of Hobbes’ 16th Century contemporaries who attacked him so viciously on his moral theory, his political theory, and his theological interpretations, failed to attack Hobbes at his most critical point—his mechanistic conception of the universe and the scientific reasoning that is the true *Leviathan*. Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, two Cambridge Platonists, were two of Hobbes’ contemporaries that *did* see through the disguises of

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Hobbes' *Leviathan* to the mechanistic materialism at its core. Rogers (2007) describes their main disagreement with Hobbes' philosophy in the following:

The crucial premise for both of them is that materialism is a philosophy of both mind and nature that is quite incapable of doing justice to the facts of human experience. More had in his early studies come to a great admiration of the philosophy of Plotinus as well as Plato, and it was the undeniability of a spiritual agent or force that could not be squared with [the] materialism that dominated philosophy. (p. 431)

More thought that Hobbes' mechanistic materialism required a material God, yet God could only exist as a spiritually immaterial being, therefore Hobbes' mechanism, and with it, Hobbes' political philosophy, moral philosophy, and theology, ought also to be rejected. Cudworth was more direct in his attack on Hobbes but for similar reasons as More. Cudworth writes, "that prodigious paradox of Atheists, that cogitation itself is nothing but local motion...a modern atheistic pretender, to wit, hath publicly owned his name to this same conclusion, that 'mind is nothing else but local motion in the organic part of man's body'" (as cited in Rogers, 2007, p. 432). Cudworth argues that a materialist philosophy fails to adequately describe human nature. Both of these rationalist thinkers saw Hobbes' *Leviathan* as dependent upon a mechanistic materialism that was unacceptable. They were one of the few, though they were *not* influential, English contemporaries of Hobbes whose rejection of Hobbes' political philosophy and theology, was a consequence of their rejection of his underlying mechanistic theory of motion.

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A Surreptitiously Ironic Reading of Leviathan

We have explicated the degree to which the political philosophy and the scriptural interpretations described in Hobbes' *Leviathan* can be read as a consequence of his mechanistic materialism, and more particularly, his first principles reducing sensation to bodies in motion, and only bodies in motion. It is not my intention to demonstrate the truth of the claim that all of Hobbes' philosophy necessarily follows from his mechanistic conception of the universe; we only need to understand Hobbes' *Leviathan* as Hobbes understood it—the logical consequence of a mechanistic universe. This scientific reasoning, this logic that Hobbes' believes all things are in deference to, is indeed his mortal God, the Leviathan. Thus, we now understand the book *Leviathan* as a description of *the* Leviathan—a description of the event in which an artificial man, man in the state of nature, creates an artificial God, the commonwealth, in the image of his mortal God, Leviathan.

Man is assumed to exist in the state of nature prior to this monumental event. This man, very much like the beasts, is motivated strictly by self-interest and employs instrumental reasoning to wage war on his neighbors. And then, the event occurs; a thinker, motivated by the scientific reasoning of the new science, applies Euclid to human nature. The Leviathan is called up from the depths and emerges in the form of the commonwealth; a commonwealth created by trust, a trust that transcends the self-interestedness that creates it. Man's initial state is transcended and the possibility is born for man to govern himself, instead of being governed by the myth of his youth. The old mysteries are explained by the new science; the world is disenchanted. Whether or not God exists is a question no longer fundamental to man—in its place, a new question arises; is man prepared to accept the consequences of the Leviathan?

Can man accept this new, will-less existence? For in the commonwealth, man has given up his right of nature, in favor of the law of nature. His will is usurped by the will of the sovereign—a figurehead for the law of Leviathan. Can man accept an ex-istence in which God cannot be appealed to as the ultimate

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arbiter in difficult disputes? It is my claim that Hobbes' *Leviathan* is surreptitiously ironic, because Hobbes' feared that his society would not accept a will-less existence, or a God-less existence, yet the historical milieu in which Hobbes found himself, required that he *finally* publish his mature thought. The new commonwealth must be educated as to the proper manner of governance, if it is not to slip into another civil war. The Royalist expatriates must give up the old fight—they, and Hobbes, had lost. Hobbes was faced with the daunting task of presenting a coherent political philosophy that was a consequence of the methodology and mechanism which underwrites his thought, while at the same time, concealing his mechanistic materialism so as not to have England throw out the baby with the bath water. *Leviathan* fulfilled this task, while at the same time branding its author an enemy. In 1657, a Hobbes who seems tired and worn down by his critics, writes to his friend, Samuel Sorbière, "you will become a perpetual object of hatred to the doctors, just as I am (because of my political theory) to the theologians. The kingdom of truth is not of this world, but the next" (1994b, p. 448).

Had the Leviathan become Hobbes' failed God? One imagines Hobbes running the English countryside in pursuit of his creation, like Dr. Frankenstein, willing to destroy the beast through recantations and apologies. Rogers (2007) writes, "His picture of knowledge was a unified one, and he may well have believed that if he were wrong on this front [mathematics]...then his whole philosophy would have collapsed" (p. 435). Jesseph (1999) notes that Hobbes had committed the same error in mathematics—his claim to have squared the circle—which he identified in *Leviathan*. Hobbes writes, "and as in Arithmatique, unpractised men must, and Professors themselves may often erre, and cast up false; so also in any other subject of Reasoning, the ablest, most attentive, and most practised men, may deceive themselves, and inferre false Conclusions" (as cited in Jesseph, 1999, pp. 355-6). Perhaps Hobbes' failure in mathematics, colored his opinions of his entire philosophy, then again, Hobbes' fought his battles in mathematics to the end of his life. As A. P. Martinich (1999)

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writes, “His aches and pains notwithstanding, Hobbes was not going to “go gentle in that good night;” He published three large-scale geometric works in the last decade of his life” (p. 336).

Our surreptitiously ironic reading of *Leviathan* remains. John Dewey (1974) writes of Hobbes’ conception of his philosophy:

Whether or not he believed in a theological God, he did believe that reasoning was divine, and that there is a sincere piety toward reason in his regarding rational precepts as divine; and that accordingly he believed in some genuine sense that God was reason. (p. 27)

Long after its creator has passed, the Leviathan still lives. Like Hobbes’ 17th century contemporaries, we are frightened of its power. Unlike Hobbes, we are unwilling, or unable to view ourselves in the light of our creation—this artificial God may indeed reflect ourselves, yet the truth grinding in its internal gears is a truth we are not prepared to accept. The Leviathan remains surreptitiously underwater; we cannot accept its monstrous logic.

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