

Origins and Openings: Modernity, Time, and Finitude in Hobbes's Political Science

by

Will Kujala
B.A., University of Alberta, 2014

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Abstract

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Abstract

This thesis examines the politics of foundations in modern political thought through a reading and immanent critique of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. I argue that his thought exemplifies a specifically modern problem of foundations insofar as he must establish political and scientific foundations on the basis of precisely the impossibility of foundation. Hobbes's account of political founding and the establishment of scientific foundations is first and foremost a response to a condition of finitude in which foundations are no longer given or available but nevertheless demanded. While it appears that Hobbes describes the finitude of 'Man' and natural bodies and derives his political theory from these, in fact for Hobbes these no longer provide given foundations for political thought, but must themselves be posited in acts of political and epistemological projection. Hobbes's politics of foundations therefore demands that we fabricate political and scientific foundations for ourselves and act as if they are not incalculable postulations but calculable necessities. I call this the problem of projection, in which political knowledge is possible only because we make it and posit it ourselves. Through a reading of the role of the metaphor of making in Hobbes's account of political origins and sovereignty, I argue that this reading of Hobbes's politics of origins as the institution of foundations in the face of the impossibility of foundation exposes finitude as a groundlessness to which there is no necessary political response. It does not necessarily demand the production of foundations through the institution of sovereignty. Hobbes's *Leviathan* therefore provides a site in which we might begin to ask more precise empirical and theoretical questions about the transformative possibilities in the modern politics of foundations.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Dedication	vii
Introduction: Reading Ourselves Reading Hobbes.....	1
Chapter 1: Hobbes’s Problem: Time and Finitude	17
Chapter 2: Miraculous Origin, Scientific Machine: Hobbes’s Impossible Politics of Origins.....	55
Chapter 3: (Un)Making Sovereignty: Fabrication, Finitude, and the Politics of Hesitation	102
Conclusion: Thinking Finitude Originally with Hobbes	142
Bibliography	147

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A thesis is a strange thing. Its position (its thesis) seems so small yet takes up so much of your life that you think of nothing else, and that puts you in all sorts of positions. Happily this thesis was written in a position amongst many friends and with much support.

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Dedication

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*This thesis is dedicated to those we have lost too early and who we mourn interminably:
Troy and Dean*

Introduction: Reading Ourselves Reading Hobbes

“We have become able to see things as they really are, and that is why the foundations of life quake beneath our feet” -- Karl Jaspers¹

In the introduction to the text that is the subject of this thesis, Hobbes argues that the first dictum of political philosophy is that thou must “read thy self” (Introduction, 3). It is my central claim in this thesis that Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is, indeed, an extended attempt to read the self: it is an injunction to read oneself into the world in order to remake it in thought. More specifically, my claim is that Hobbes’s political theory in *Leviathan* arises from his claims that knowledge is certain only when we ourselves make it, and therefore only when we read, in the world, only ourselves. I defend this claim by showing that, first, Hobbes’s political arguments in favour of sovereignty are a response to his specifically modern and sceptical description of the finitude of human life in time, and second, by showing that this description of finitude is not so much a description but a postulation of what ‘Man’ must be, who we must have been and who we must be such that sovereignty can be legitimate and we can know the world. Third, I wish to show the ways in which this second conclusion unsettles the necessary connection between Hobbes’s description of finitude and his demand for modern state sovereignty.

This thesis can be read, then, as a series of essays on the sacrifices that Hobbes makes in order to establish a place in the world for modern human beings: first, a life of experience in time, open to novelty, is sacrificed in order to establish a secure future as a political fiction; second, historical memory is sacrificed to a science of political foundation that separates itself from experience in order to project a geometrical method

¹ Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 2.

onto the world; third, the uniqueness of each moment and each human being is sacrificed to the work of sovereignty, the self-completion of ‘Man’ in sovereign self-institution. In all three of these sacrificial acts in writing, Hobbes manifests a desire to escape from the finitude of human life ‘in time’ by demanding the projection and imposition of a specifically modern and scientific vision of finitude that exists independent of history and the lived experience of time. One way to bring these all together would be to say that in all three the lived experience of ‘politics’ in time is replaced by the fiction of the political as a stable origin, future, and fabricated object.

It may be that we are unfortunately no longer required to ask, as David Gauthier did in the 1960s, “Why write on Hobbes?”² I think it is necessary, especially given demands to provincialize the Western canon or do away with it altogether, and the general sense that Hobbes epitomizes everything bad about modernity: disenchantment, founding violence, demands for absolute power, and the reduction of human beings to creatures of mere first-order desire. It is, indeed, one of the main purposes of this thesis to argue for at least the theoretical importance of reading Hobbes in order to think about the political possibilities refused and offered by modernity. Of course, it is true—and I hope to show—that Hobbes invokes a sense of modern disenchantment, doing away violently with all givens, all historical memory, and even the uniqueness of each human being. Yet he is also responding to a sense of human finitude that is not entirely foreign to twenty-first century existence. On a slightly caricatured view of contemporary life, late modernity has given way to a loss of belief in historical “grand narratives,” a sense of alienation from the world, the expansion of political violence either in the form of

² David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), vi.

moralized war on behalf of transcendent principles or practices of modern state exceptionalism, and a simultaneous questioning of the foundations of science and affirmation that science represents an answer to most human problems. In a world in which we are unsure about History, but in which violence is waged precisely on behalf of eschatology and teleological understandings of history, a world in which the modern scientific method is questioned but more and more appears to be the way forward for the human sciences, and in a state such as Canada in which this thesis was written and which was founded on the ongoing erasure of historical memory and indigenous peoples, reading Hobbes is no mere historical exercise. Indeed, some of the most interesting recent work on Hobbes has been in relation to colonialism, and the way in which Hobbes both legitimates and participates in the colonial erasure of indigenous peoples both literally and metaphorically. Part of this argument is that Hobbes in fact constructs his theory only on the basis of an opposition to “America” and the “savagery” of indigenous peoples.³ To read Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is a frightening process not because he represents all that we fear—absolutism, sovereign violence, and historical erasure—but because in doing so we read ourselves and our own violence, insofar as we are modern.

Those who might object, asking who I mean here by ‘we,’ only implicitly demand a more thorough reading of Hobbes insofar as this question restates the very problem confronting Hobbes: there is no ‘we,’ no given ‘us,’ other than that which we

³ On Hobbes’s role in historical erasure, see Karena Shaw, *Indigeneity and Political Theory: Sovereignty and the Limits of the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 15-39. On Hobbes’s use of indigenous representation for his argument, see Pat Moloney, “Hobbes, Savagery, and International Anarchy,” *American Political Science Review* 105 (2011): 189-204. It is worth noting that Hobbes himself actively erases the complex interaction and traditions of indigenous people prior to contact and after as well, insofar as he in fact had detailed and intimate knowledge of indigenous-settler relations in Virginia from his work with the Cavendish Family. For a discussion of this aspect of Hobbes’s life, and his refusal to use this knowledge in his state of nature argument, see Srinivas Aravamudan, “Hobbes and America,” in *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. David Carey and Lynn Festa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 45-53

can make for ourselves. It is precisely because the criticism of political essentialism shares so much with Hobbes's own critique of essence (by way of nominalism and Galilean science) that a reading of Hobbes's account of foundations is so important. For it is in the space of modern foundation that we can glimpse, I claim, the double possibility of Hobbes's politics of origins. On the one hand, the origin disciplines the complexity and plurality of human life by gathering it into a unified 'we,' but on the other hand, because this can only be an act of scientific and political postulation it reveals the possibility for a transformative politics of being sovereign-otherwise at the heart of Hobbes's thought. In chapter two, I show that this is the case with Hobbes's account of political origins: Hobbes writes the origin as an impossible moment in order to demand the impossible over and against the possible—i.e., the historical and prudential—and it is precisely because he does this that the space is opened for politicization as the demand for the impossible. In chapter three, I show this in regard to the end toward which the origin tends: Hobbes's political thought imitates fabrication, but it undoes the trope of fabrication by no longer demanding a model but only self-identical completion, i.e., nothing. The model of fabrication becomes, in Hobbes, nothing; I argue that this opens a space of reversal and hesitation at the origin of Hobbes's thought, wherein the model can no longer demand the fabrication of existence into a single origin. Another way to put this is that the creation of the sovereign commonwealth from nothing undoes the very act of creation, insofar as this nothing is not something but is a groundless ground of which there is no necessary or inevitable consequence.

In sum, then, I am asking two related questions about Hobbes specifically. The first is: what is the relationship between Hobbes's account of political founding and

scientific foundations? The second is: what is the connection between our temporal finitude—our life in history and in time—and his abstract political science?

There is a vast literature on political origins and scientific foundations in Hobbes's thought, and I cannot hope to capture it all in this short introduction. Subtlety is required in navigating this literature; I will here simply adumbrate a few of the debates to which I think my thesis responds.

One of the most prominent debates about Hobbes in the last century has been about his account of the origin of political obligation. The debate here takes place between those who believe Hobbes thinks there is a natural or theological basis for political obligation and those who believe it arrives solely out of the will of the sovereign and the will of individuals.⁴ In the first group the two most prominent authors are A.E. Taylor and Howard Warrender. Both argued that Hobbes derived political obligation from our obligation to God and therefore articulated a Christian politics. Taylor argued that the natural law to make peace in Hobbes's *Leviathan* obliges us by looking to Hobbes's distinction between counsel and command: the natural law is not a counsel (a piece of advice) but a command that obliges us, if only *in foro interno* and not always *in foro externo*.⁵ Warrender, for his part, argued that Hobbes was articulating a theory of political authority ultimately founded in the power of God and Hobbes's argument that we are obligated to obey God in his omnipotence and omniscience.⁶ A.P. Martinich has vindicated these views in some respects, not in their detail but in their final argument that

⁴ For a framing of the debate this way and an argument for the latter camp, see LeBuffé, "Hobbes on the Origin of Obligation," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11 (2003): 15-39.

⁵ A.E. Taylor, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," *Philosophy* 13 (1938): 411.

⁶ Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 85-87, 99

God is crucial to Hobbes's argument: namely, that in the end a protestant Christianity necessitates obedience to the sovereign. He supports this argument by looking especially to Hobbes's arguments for the expulsion of atheists from political community.⁷

Against these claims, some argue that Hobbes's account of political obligation admits of no natural or external basis, but is premised only on the act of contracting and authorization itself. Thomas Nagel, for instance, criticizes Warrender (and Taylor) for ignoring Hobbes's more explicit overall theoretical purpose, which was to create a political theory that has at its "apex the authority of a person, and not a principle."⁸ As I will myself argue in chapter two, it seems more likely that both sides of this argument are correct: namely, that Hobbes's thought is both Christian and does not rely on God. First, it is doubtless true that Hobbes's thought arises out of specific problems of the use of religious conscience in political debate and from the rise of Christian nominalism. Second, when Martinich writes that for Hobbes atheists must be "banished," he is wrong to say that it is because they will not feel obligated before God. Rather, they must be banished because the sovereign decides on Christian doctrines. They must be banished because in professing atheism they disobey and defy the command of the sovereign regarding the proper doctrines. It may have been difficult for Hobbes to imagine a non-Christian state, but it is certainly possible based on will alone and not on God.

The crucial move, then, of the latter camp has been to deny an external source for obligation, finding it only in the act of covenanting itself. This sparked a larger swath of literature on the logic and strategy of the state of nature and Hobbes's hypothetical account of origins, the main works here being those of David Gauthier, Jean Hampton,

⁷ A.P. Martinich, *Hobbes* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 233-235, 230.

⁸ Thomas Nagel, "Hobbes's Concept of Obligation," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 82.

and Gregory Kavka. All three of these authors attend to the state of nature argument using analytic philosophy and game theory.⁹ They aim mainly to work out the technical details of the concepts of authorization and thus the origin of political community in the creation of a sovereign person, working out philosophical answers to the political problem of founding. Hanna Pitkin, as opposed to these thinkers, is less sympathetic to Hobbes's concept of authorization and hypothetical argument. She claims that Hobbes needlessly restricts the concept of representation to authorization to serve his overall argument, and in doing so eliminates the more ordinary concept of representation as picturing or standing-for, and with it the capacity to judge whether something is represented well or not.¹⁰ Ultimately a debate staged between these two sides would turn on the question of how we would decide whether we were adequately represented and thus the adequate authors of our own salvation from civil war. How would we know that the civil state is preferable to the state of nature? What Pitkin reveals is basically the premise of contractarian literature: namely, that there is no external standard for representation other than the demand for authorization as such.¹¹

⁹ Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1987), Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). I cannot hope to do justice to the technicalities of their respective arguments here, but rather rely on Martinich's review of this literature: Gauthier argues that Hobbes's thought about origins transforms from a purely negative account (in which individuals lose their right to everything but the sovereign keeps his or hers) to a positive one of authorization that legitimates sovereignty in an active creation. Hampton argues that it is more akin to loaning. Kavka argues that we should weaken Hobbes's account in order to establish a more suitable liberal political theory. As Martinich notes, all use the prisoner's dilemma game as a touchstone for Hobbes interpretation (Martinich, 217). See also Martinich, *Hobbes*, 214-224 for a discussion of this contemporary literature and a critique of some of the uses of game theory in approaching Hobbes. Martinich's main problem with this literature is that it imposes "strategic" thinking on Hobbes's thought-experiment, which is in fact a process of deduction (222). I agree with Martinich's critique in this respect: the state of nature is a premise for a logical and geometrical argument, and not a description of temporal activities of individual 'men.'

¹⁰ Hanna Pitkin, "Hobbes's Concept of Representation—I," *American Political Science Review* 58 (1964): 337-340.

¹¹ Pitkin, 339. We might want to take issue with her claim in this article that Hobbes leaves no idea of the "substance of the representing activity" (340), insofar as the duties and rights of the sovereign are the

In the present work I am less interested to decide whether these arguments are adequate or not, but to think through the question that they largely leave unasked: namely, the relationship between the hypothetical account of origins in Hobbes and the world that Hobbes hoped to shape with that this account. That is, what is the relationship between Hobbes's science of political origins and the historical, political world of life and experience? This is a question that, as Jody Kraus suggests, is often ignored by the contractarian literature on Hobbes.¹² However, while they might not directly ask such questions, the contractarian interpreters of Hobbes confront the problem of circularity and impossibility in Hobbes's account of the political contract without desiring to find an external basis to straighten the circle into a line. They then point, at least inadvertently, to the problem of this thesis: the relation between Hobbes's (political and natural) science (independent of experience) and the temporality and historicity of human life.

There have, however, been some who have directly attended to the split between historical life and political science in Hobbes's thought. Two of them are critics: C.B. Macpherson and Hannah Arendt. Both have claimed that Hobbes's thought is, at bottom, the result of a false abstraction. Macpherson and Arendt both argue that Hobbes does not describe natural human beings as such but only "bourgeois man."¹³ Hobbes, in his

substance of the representing activity; the substance is simply maintaining the existence of the sovereign state against internal and external threat, protecting it from weakening and dissolution.

¹² Jody S. Kraus, *The Limits of Hobbesian Contractarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 310-319.

¹³ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) 17-29; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harvest Books, 1968), 139-143. Arendt ultimately thinks that this false abstraction undermines Hobbes's own account insofar as the individual he creates owes no loyalty to others, and it is precisely this undermining that re-invigorates Hobbes's demands for sovereignty. In this way Arendt hints, despite her easy historical criticism of Hobbes, at an incredibly important critique of historical critiques of Hobbes: demonstrating that Hobbes's abstraction fails does not necessarily serve to undermine his political project insofar as his political project is premised on the impossibility of finally securing oneself and of finally ensuring one's knowledge of and place in the world. The truly difficult question facing outright critics of Hobbes is to

erasure of history from political science, inadvertently universalizes his particular situation in 17th century England, in the civil war and the industrial revolution. A third critique is that Hobbes falsely abstracts a masculine understanding of human life and its relationship to others and to nature, to the exclusion of women. While we might contest, through a reading of Hobbes's text, whether it actually embodies what Macpherson means by bourgeois "Man," namely, one with an endless possessive desire to appropriate, I think the more crucial point is the principle that Hobbes cannot but transport his historical situation into his thought. On this score, I think a satisfactory Hobbesian response would simply be that it is of course true that something is lost in the process of abstraction, especially when it comes to political as opposed to geometrical matters. But this is to say nothing critical about Hobbes, who takes most if not all political abstractions to be in some sense 'false' in the sense that Macpherson and Arendt think. As I will show in chapter one it is precisely because our abstract words are always indexed to particular situations that Hobbes believes sovereign power is necessary. These arguments then serve less as criticisms of Hobbes than as possible explanations of his thought that help to ground it in historical context.

Quentin Skinner, likewise, has attempted to contextualize Hobbes's thought in debates about the nature of liberty, the civil war in England, and Hobbes's beginnings in Renaissance humanism. The connection of historical life and Hobbes's political science is here one of strategic victory: namely, Hobbes's thought achieved the status of political science over and above other responses to his historical situation because it represented a strategy that helped Hobbes perfect arguments already in circulation about political

rethink this finitude, this "unfinished" relation to the world, in a way that no longer construes finitude as merely insecurity but as a source of transformation and political vivacity.

obligation and liberty. This is ultimately why Skinner has emphasized the role of rhetoric in Hobbes's thought: it shows that Hobbes is not merely making a scientific argument against others but engaging in a polemic for the use of science in political argument as opposed to republican and democratic opponents who wished to use historical arguments, and religious opponents engaging in theological disputations about political authority.¹⁴

Hobbes's account of "Natural Man" is, then, bourgeois, and maybe only modern and English; however, it is less an ideological mystification and more an outright postulation; all concepts of 'Man' and the human, if we think with Hobbes, are created through scientific generation and postulation and not discovered as they are given. This brings me to the final group of interpreters I want to consider: those who consider the relationship between Hobbes's natural and mathematical science and his political theory. Strauss and Spragens both maintain that Hobbes carries over an Aristotelian presumption that there *is* a nature, there, to be known and discovered, even as he attempts to articulate a specifically anti-Aristotelian, modern understanding of science and political philosophy. Strauss maintains that Hobbes's attempts to premise his moral and political philosophy on natural science still presumed the plenitude of a natural whole from which one could derive human norms, but ultimately must fail insofar as the new science can provide no moral direction because it "rejects all anthropocentrism."¹⁵ Spragens argues

¹⁴ See Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume III: Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: its Origin and its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), xiii-xv, 154. Further, Strauss interprets Hobbes's new science of politics as a return to Plato's distinction between becoming and the ideas; while I disagree with Strauss's presumption that Hobbes was merely confused about the relationship between science and his moral philosophy (which itself comes from a restricted view of what a moral philosophy or political theory must look like), Strauss's comparison of Hobbes's criticism as akin to a Platonic criticism of Aristotelian philosophy is provocative and I agree with it in many ways in chapter two.

cogently that despite premising his arguments on a new scientific worldview, Hobbes still carries over many assumptions and directions for research from Aristotelian science.¹⁶

To see the political consequence of these claims, consider Strauss's argument that Hobbes thinks there is, because of his natural philosophy, a "modern task of delineating for the first time the programme of the essentially future perfect State."¹⁷ If there is a best regime that follows from what (human) nature is, then Hobbes's project will be simply one of establishing one natural criterion for political judgment against others.. However, as I will show, the postulated character of the origin undoes the very idea that there is a model that can be judged against others. His account of the criteria of political judgment no longer relies on an idea of natural measure. In chapter three I show how his 'work,' his modelling of politics on making, is not aimed at creating according to an existing form or model but simply in complete self-institution and presence.

In other words, thinkers asking whether or not Hobbes can legitimately derive a political science from his natural philosophy are asking the wrong question insofar as they presume that Hobbes's natural philosophy is not merely itself a political postulation aimed to ground his account of political theory. I argue that Hobbes's politics is an act of self-assertion, of active creation and positing of nature and politics as they must be in order for human beings to have a place in the world. In this I follow Hans Blumenberg and Heidegger's understandings of modern finitude as characterized by a demand for

¹⁶ Thomas A. Spragens, *The Politics of Motion: the World of Thomas Hobbes* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973), 129: "For [Hobbes's] thoroughly monistic mentality the only option was to retain the notion of the natural order as a single all-encompassing whole. Anything that was not part of the bodily world simply did not exist for him."

¹⁷ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 106.

postulation and projection of, and not merely discovery of, the given.¹⁸ Hobbes therefore cannot judge existing commonwealths according to a model, and he cannot be said to be simply playing a variation on a classical theme of deriving political conclusions from natural premises. His natural premises, I argue, are fundamentally political in the sense that they can only be established through agreement and in community. His scientific project is no less political than his science of commonwealths. Therefore I side, in many ways, with those who suggest that Hobbes's thought mainly is a response to Galileo and Descartes, and that he takes up Galileo's method of scientific inquiry in his specifically political analyses.¹⁹ Yet, I also want to argue that it is never so simple as choosing separation or connection of science and politics in Hobbes; rather, the two are mutually imbricated in a series of complex ways: his science is part of a political polemic for Enlightenment and serves to discipline and exclude certain forms of argument, but Hobbes also thinks it is a genuine science that explains the world satisfactorily. Hobbes is a sceptic, but one that can be satisfied with certain conclusions and methods of natural science, precisely because we create what we know, and because certain consequences must follow from certain definitions, regardless of the definitions.²⁰ Hobbes's thinking is not only a polemic for science, but also a politicization of science in which scientific knowledge requires the guarantee of political agreement and sovereign power.

It is precisely because Hobbes's thought is an act, and postulation of what is, that it reveals the possibilities for transformation and thinking beyond it. In this I agree with

¹⁸ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982); Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," and "The Age of the World Picture," in *Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

¹⁹ For a discussion of this literature, see Tuck, *Hobbes*, 104-106.

²⁰ Martinich, *Hobbes*, 232.

Walker, who argues that Hobbes is committed to a “politics of finitude” that works through “an arbitrary distinction between the finite world within which universal truths may be possible and some world beyond in which such truths are unimaginable.”²¹

Precisely because this distinction, even as it is rendered as a scientific necessity, is an arbitrary and therefore political one, it is the place at which we must investigate Hobbes’s thought in order to think about thinking beyond Hobbes.

It is this last point that my text is oriented toward: the politics of transformation that we might find at the heart of Hobbes’s text, its account of origins. Hobbes’s superimposition of scientific necessity and the incalculable postulation of an origin both works to occlude the origin of the commonwealth as a contingent, incalculable, and impossible event, and reveals the way in which the impossibility always haunts the apparently scientific character of Hobbes’s story about origins. As Shaw puts it Hobbes’s “production of sovereignty reveals how modern political authority has come to be constituted through grounding it in a shared ontology but excluding the constitution of that ontology from consideration as political.”²² My view is similar, and I agree with Shaw that it is indigenous movements that pose serious problems for Hobbes’s account of origins.²³ However, I also think that Hobbes’s own thought contains paths beyond itself. It is only by reading Hobbes, and following his arguments about political origins, that we can begin to politicize his account as one possibility among many ways to construe and respond to modern finitude. For it is his own account of origins that demands the constitution of a shared belonging in an act of postulation that is at once grounded and

²¹ R.B.J. Walker, “Hobbes, Origins, Limits,” in *International Theory after Hobbes: Analysis, Interpretation, Orientation*, ed. Raia Prokhovnik and Gabriella Slomp (London: Palgrave, 2010), 182-183

²² Shaw, *Indigeneity and Political Theory*, 203.

²³ Shaw, *Indigeneity and Political Theory*, 207.

grounds a science of politics than ensures this account as the only possibility. In doing so I argue, ultimately, that we can open the possibility of a politics of hesitation that no longer demands an origin because it no longer demands—no longer can demand—the completion and self-institution of sovereignty.

I develop my argument in three chapters. In chapter one, “The Temporal Finitude of Thought,” I reconstruct Hobbes’s argument about the state of nature as a kind of phenomenological description of a life-world of experience. I take up a kind of ‘naïve’ description of what Hobbes takes to be our temporal finitude, our life of facticity. The first part of *Leviathan*, I argue, is a story about how the sovereign state comes about as a response to the limitations and *aporias* faced by human existence in time. Human beings, enveloped by the flux of time, grasp the world first of all through a dynamic of experience and expectation. As a modern, Hobbes describes the way in which time is utterly ‘out of joint,’ in which there is no certain connection between our past space of experience and future horizon of expectation; we respond first with the invention of language, and then with a sovereign who guarantees the meaning of words against the conflict arising from our desires and our anxieties about death. In sum, for Hobbes, sovereignty becomes an answer to temporal finitude in the sense that it establishes the possibility of temporal fixity, through an assured future made of promises and covenants backed by the sword.

In chapter two, I consider more precisely the way in which Hobbes establishes fixity, and escapes the world of temporal finitude, by considering his account of political origins as contractual. Hobbes’s account of political origins is, at first glance, paradoxical: given that the coercive power of the commonwealth is created precisely

because contracts cannot be guaranteed in the state of nature, it is not clear how the original contract is straightforwardly possible. However, the impossibility of Hobbes's political origins can be understood as precisely this: the demand for the impossible. The impossible origin separates political thought from the historical world. The origin is impossible, but is postulated, posited, hypothetically, as what must have happened: we act *as if* political community arose from an original contract, because this is what is necessary if we are to have peace. In this 'as if,' then, is contained a double move: we escape the world of historical life into a political science modelled on the idealization of geometry, and return to the world by measuring the world according to this idealization. The present, the origin, and the future are wrapped up into a synchronous whole, a line of thought that both abstracts from time and rewrites time in its own terms. At the origin, which is both for Hobbes political and scientific, the world is projected as it must be, and how it must have been, for us to know it.

In chapter three, I show how this projection is mutually constitutive of a linear temporality of 'work,' and argue that this linear temporality of work always projects and comports the future before it arrives. Thus, it is not just an epistemological projection that governs Hobbes's text but a political one: events are judged as part of a closed, fixed, and captured temporality of linear fabrication that blackmails political judgment, rendering events either as the threat of regress to irrational, unworldly chaos, or necessary for the self-making of a sovereign body. This linear temporality of fabrication allows us to escape, through political life, the mortal finitude that characterizes human life by surviving through the creation of time immanent to sovereignty. Time is captured, and finished, through the institution—as verb and noun—of sovereignty. Sovereignty is both

the institution and the act of instituting over time: the model and the process of making are contained together. Sovereignty, at its limit, as a finishing, is demanded precisely in the absence of its foundation; here the exposition of sovereignty as a response to our finitude exposes the way in which there is no necessary way in which sovereignty must be the response to finitude. Indeed, it is precisely in the failure of sovereignty as a self-finishing, self-fabricating capture of time that the possibility of thinking finitude otherwise exists. We do not, then, critique sovereignty adequately if we merely provide an historical genealogy of the concept, or combat Hobbes's ahistorical deduction with historical erudition. Instead, we need to follow Hobbes to the loss of world in order to glimpse the possibilities for undoing the teleological closure of sovereign making.

Chapter 1: Hobbes's Problem: Time and Finitude

“I have been so constituted as a kind of middle ground between God and nothingness, or between supreme being and non-being” – Descartes, *Meditations*

“We do well to be afraid of Hobbes; he knows too much about us” – C.B. Macpherson, “Hobbes's Bourgeois Man”

Introduction

In this chapter I argue that Hobbes's account of sovereignty is a response to the problem of what I will call “the temporal finitude of thinking”: the time-bound character of human thought, wherein all thought is present thinking of memories, and the future has no existence properly speaking. I argue that for Hobbes, whereas language offers an escape from this temporal finitude, it also makes possible the expansion of human conflict because of the tension between the particular, individual origin of words and their universal reach. Sovereignty, then, is the answer already presupposed in this problem: the founding moment of sovereignty, by establishing a coercive guarantee for covenants about the future, and of the meaning of the first principles of political thinking, guarantees the attempt to push against the limits of temporal finitude. It enables, I argue, a “poetics of time,” whereby the sovereign, in guaranteeing these things, allows subjects to craft a future for themselves.

§1: “A Fiction of the Mind”: Hobbes on The Temporal Finitude of Thinking

If we take Hobbes's materialism seriously, we can draw out an account of the temporal finitude, the time-bound character, of thinking. In this section I give an account of this materialism and its consequences for the temporality of thought. This has a dual purpose for my argument: first, it is what for Hobbes necessitates the moment of sovereign founding through the contract. Second, it provides an account of the double

character of finitude in Hobbes's thought, as first an expression of our "time-bound" thought and second a freezing of time through scientific knowledge of the consequences of names.²⁴

Hobbes's materialism, while articulated in the first seven chapters of *Leviathan*, is neatly formulated in chapter 46. Here Hobbes writes that "the world... is corporeal (that is to say, body) and hath the dimensions of magnitude (namely, length, breadth, and depth). Also every part of body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions. And consequently, every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe" (XLVI.15).²⁵ In other words, there is nothing in the universe that is not a material body or made up of material bodies, in a specific place and of a certain spatial magnitude.

This claim that the universe is entirely made up of "body" necessarily implies the materiality of thought. For Hobbes, our thoughts are in fact bodies. In order to establish this we can look to Hobbes's claim that thought originates in sense-perception. Sense perception is a process in which "the external body, or object... presseth the organ proper to each sense, either immediately... or mediately" (I.4). Sensation is a "fancy," or a representation of an external body's pressing on our own body (our organs of sense, and travelling through the nerves of our body "mediately" to produce a reaction). The primary implication of this account of sense perception, Hobbes notes, is that while we might think our sensations are of objects as they really are, and while this *might* be true,

²⁴ I take the phrase "time-bound" for this understanding of thought and human temporality from J.G.A. Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *The Diversity of History*, ed. J.H. Elliot and H.G. Koenigsberger (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 157.

²⁵ For the remainder of this thesis, I will cite Hobbes in text by chapter and paragraph. The edition quoted and referenced is Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668*, edited by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).

“yet still the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another” (I.4). That is, our sensations and the images of these sensations are different from the objects themselves. Hobbes’s materialist understanding of sense-perception leads him to posit a separation between our sensations and the objects themselves, because our sensations are always of an *interaction* of bodies, and never of the separate and objective bodies themselves. Pettit argues that this view originates in the science of Hobbes’s time – those in tune with such science believed that “sensory impressions” were not of objects but of their effects “wrought on us.”²⁶

These material sense-perceptions and the fancies that arise from them constitute the origin of thought. Hobbes writes that thought or “imagination” is simply the continual movement of the body that pressed on one’s senses after the body has been removed. It is the remainder of the material consequences of this body’s motion on us. Hobbes puts it in the following way: “IMAGINATION therefore is nothing but *decaying sense*, and is found in men and many other living creatures.” Insofar as imagination is nothing but the decay of sense as a body interacting without ours, it is simply memory, “so that *imagination* and *memory* are but one thing” (II.3). The entire process of imagination is conceptualized here as mimetic of sense-perception: it is because the motion inaugurated by these bodies continues in our bodies that it is possible to “re-sense” the bodies again. The body merely decays, becoming memory, because other objects come to stand in its way, drowning it out “as the voice of a man is in the noise of the day” (II.3).

²⁶ Phillip Pettit, *Made With Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 10.

Overall then, *Leviathan* orients itself from two main scientific or philosophical claims. First, the universe is matter. Second, our sense-perceptions originate our thought, and thus thought is material. Both claims make each other possible: our thoughts are material, so the world can only be known as body, and since the universe is body, our thoughts, being part of that universe, are body. It is these two claims that ultimately come to express what I call here our “temporal finitude.”

When Hobbes conceptualizes human thought as memory (nothing but decaying sense) he is giving an articulation of our temporal finitude—the way in which our finitude is expressed through the temporal condition of our thought. In Hobbes’s case this much is obvious: all thought is memory. We never think the present *per se*; we think memories of the past in the present. There is a profound sense of aporetic scepticism in Hobbes’s thought in this respect, because he claims that the past does not really have being except in memory (III.7). Properly speaking, the past does not exist. But it is the only thing that we can, properly speaking, *think* in the present. This temporality of thought as always necessarily a memory of a past that is not (has no being) in a present that has being, but is impossible to think, implies a vertiginous de-centering of thinking. Thought cannot return to itself, for itself, for Hobbes. We always think ourselves (the “I”) through two degrees of separation: first, as a sense-perception (memory) and as precisely the memory of a relation between our thinking and an object, not the thinking itself. In other words, there is implied the impossibility of “Man’s” ability to think “his” own thought *qua* one’s own thought. Frost correctly interprets this account of imagination and memory as implying that any ability to turn reflexively upon ourselves, for Hobbes is not “a vertical turn, as in the Cartesian thinking subject’s transcendent experience of

presiding over its own operations.” Rather, it is a “horizontal turn, a figurative backward glance by which the subject considers what is past... for Hobbes, self-awareness or self-knowledge takes the form of memory.”²⁷ Our finitude is here expressed in the impossibility of transparently thinking and mastering our own thought processes.

This notion of thought as memory is explicitly linked to what Hobbes takes to be our finitude. He writes in his chapter on the “train” of thoughts that “whatsoever we imagine is finite,” and that there is no idea of the infinite (as infinite magnitude, power, time, speed, force). This is because “man can have no thought representing any thing not subject to sense.” We always think of something as having determinate spatial magnitude in a certain place, at a specific time (III.12). We cannot think of, for example, infinite space because our thought of it can be nothing but a compounding of our finite memories of experiences of specific, determinate spaces that are projected without end. The term “infinite” here is classed as a negative name, grouped with “nothing, no man... three want four, and the like” (IV.19). In this sense the finite and infinite in Hobbes’s text mutually constitute each other as, respectively, being and non-being. What *is*, being, is established in contradistinction from what cannot be: infinity. Infinity is nothing, properly speaking, but is of use in “correcting of reckoning” about finite beings. What is implied in this use of negative terms as corrections is nothing other than an establishing of the limits of what can be. When Hobbes insists on the finitude of thought, he places it between two infinities (two nothings): God, whose omniscience and omnipotence—his infinity—makes him incomprehensible (XII.6), and nothing—i.e., what a thing cannot be.

²⁷ Samantha Frost, “Hobbes and the Matter of Self-Consciousness,” *Political Theory* 33 (Aug. 2005): 507.

In doing so, he places thought firmly in time, conditioned by constant motion of particular material bodies.

The finitude of thought is explicitly discussed in relation to time in Hobbes's critique of the scholastic definition of eternity as *nunc-stans* (the eternal now). Hobbes argues that eternity as the eternal present is unthinkable because it can only ever be thought in terms of a past moment, as a memory, or as a "standing-still of present time" (XLVI.22). To think of eternity as an eternal or infinite now is not to properly conceive eternity or infinite time, but rather to falsely abstract finite experiences of time and one's present situation as the vision of the eternal. Hobbes implies, in response, that the only viable definition of eternity is "an endless succession of time" (XLVI.22). Even here, however, we might push back against Hobbes with his own understanding of the materiality of thought, and note that even this definition, the endless succession of time, is itself merely the projection of the memory of past time into the future in the form of a repetition of the instant of the present. Thus temporal finitude implies not only the wrong-headedness of the scholastic *nunc-stans* but also any *a priori* attempt to define time in terms of infinity at all.

Hobbes's critique of the eternal-now leads us to the second expression of our temporal finitude: his understanding of the future and its relation to thought. Hobbes distinguishes humans from animals through a concern with the future. Thought is always in perpetual motion; the only thing that stops it is when an external force makes it stop (see VI.58, VII.2). Thoughts cannot really be seen as individuated data but rather as always following upon each other. This can be unregulated (mere association, random day-dreaming) or regulated in train. Here memories pass over into the present and are

directed toward an expectation of the future. This “regulation” of thought is divided into “two kinds.” The first kind is “when of an effect imagined, we seek the causes, or means that produce it” (III.5). This is not unique to humans, Hobbes writes, but rather is present in animals too: they too expect certain things given what has happened in the past. The second kind, characteristic only of humans, is when “imagining anything whatsoever, we seek all the possible effects that can by it be produced; that is to say, we imagine what we can do with it, when we have it” (III.5).

The distinction here is captured aptly by Michaelis in her article on futurity in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. She writes that this distinction follows in Hobbes’s understanding that only humans are capable of pleasures of the mind – pleasures that follow from “the expectation that proceeds from foresight of the end or consequence of things, whether those things in the sense pleasure or displeasure” (VI.12). Because humans are not trapped in the immediate sensuousness of pleasure but rather derive pleasure from the expectation of the presence of a pleasurable (good) object, their thought is fundamentally oriented toward the future in a more expansive way than animals. Our desire is not only of objects in the future, therefore, but in fact, of the future: Michaelis writes that the “chain of human desires reaches endlessly into the future,” so much so that “the future itself becomes an object of desire.”²⁸ While I will not and cannot in this context discuss the specific ways in which desire is articulated in Hobbes’s work, it is clear that for Hobbes there is something about human desire that orients our thinking toward the future; it is

²⁸ Lorelea Michaelis, “Hobbes’s Modern Prometheus: A Political Philosophy for an Uncertain Future,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40 (March 2007): 108-109.

because we have certain kinds of desires (i.e., those of the mind) that our thought must not only be a memory but direct this memory to the future.²⁹

Our orientation toward the future is an anxious one. Our ability to discern cause, and inquire into the beginnings of things (i.e., the cause of a thing's cause, and so on) engenders anxiety about the future. In other words, just as the human inclination to discern the totality of causes and consequences of a thing, such that we are able to use it and produce it in ways that are useful to us, gives us certain kinds of uniquely human desires, it also results in a uniquely human anxiety. Hobbes argues that insofar as human beings can discern that all things, in the past and in the future, have causes, "it is impossible for a man who continually endeavoureth to secure himself against the evil he fears, and procure the good he desireth, not to be in a perpetual solicitude of the time to come" (XII.5). This anxiety about the future, about securing ourselves in it, arises from the limitations of our knowledge of consequences. That Hobbes thinks this is evident from the fact that he draws from this anxiety the origin of religion: the positing of an omniscient and omnipotent God gives us an implicit knowledge of all causes, and an object to fear (XII.6). We can see here a curious circularity operating in the relation between anxiety and science (knowledge of consequences): the human capacity to discern causes reveals the finite nature of this capacity, resulting in anxiety about time to come; anxiety about time to come works back on us, imploring us to inquire into the nature of causes.

In this context, inquiring into the nature of causes is driven by nothing other than a desire to replace anxiety with fear. The classic psychoanalytic division between anxiety

²⁹ All of the passions in VI.12-48 are arguably future-oriented. They all originate in judgments about the future, i.e., what will be, and its (non-)desirability.

and fear is that anxiety has no object, whereas fear does. Anxiety is precisely a fear of nothing, of the nothing. We cannot objectify our anxiety *qua* anxiety. It can only be displaced or re-routed into an object of fear that is more manageable and less dreadful than an anxiety arising from within our psyche. Hobbes anticipates this analysis:

“perpetual fear...must needs have for object something” (XII.6). Hobbes lends us one potential object -- spirits (God, or gods) – and will eventually offer a more stable and sure one (the sovereign). However, we might want to ask here why it is possible to have anxiety about the future – for it seems that to have anxiety about *a* future is to place an object of fear in our horizon.

That anxiety is always of the future is possible and necessary due to a second (after the character of thought as memory) crucial aspect of the temporal finitude of thinking: the thesis that the future is *not*. Generally speaking, the orientation of thought toward the future takes two forms: “mere” prudence and ratiocination (scientific reason). It is in Hobbes’s discussion of prudence that we can find a clear articulation of the finitude of time, and the temporal finitude of thinking. Prudence, Hobbes writes, is the capacity to discern what will happen from what has happened in the past (III.7). It is a thought process that moves from experience to expectation. What Hobbes says here is that thoughts of the future are always projections of what has already happened into a non-existing future. In his discussion here he gives his definitive account of the ontological status of time: “the present only has a being in nature; things past have a being in the memory only; but things to come have no being at all, the future being but a *fiction of the mind*, applying the sequels of actions past to the actions that are present”

(III.7).³⁰ The future has no being in itself; we give it being through the presumption of it based on our memory in the present.

The implication of this structure of experience and expectation is that it orders our thinking not only of the future fulfilment of our desires but our very identity. The continuation of the “I” in the future is nothing but the presumption that the future will happen in such a way that the “I” will continue as the “I.” Despite the certainty of this expectation in many respects (the sun will rise, the dead will remain dead) the fictional character of the future remains, and we remain open to it. It is precisely this openness to the non-being of the future that enabled our thought in the first place, in the impression of external bodies onto our own. Deleuze writes quite aptly that here the “I,” the subject, is actually an activity of temporal synthesis, in which “from what is given, I infer the existence of that which is not given.”³¹ Hobbes says exactly this when he writes that prudence, as the basic expression of our temporally-bound thought, “is a presumption of the future, contracted from the experience of time past” (III.10). Human thought is therefore ordered around the possibility of thinking its own continuity, its own subjectivity, from within the given material that constituted it in the first place.

The mission then is to describe how “The given is no longer given to a subject; rather the subject constitutes itself in the given.”³² The subject, being immanent to the material temporality from which thought originates, must come to objectify this process for itself in some way in order to establish a mode of continuity for itself. However, the establishment of this continuity of self-identity is always marked by an original finitude

³⁰ My emphasis.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: an Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 85.

³² Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 87.

arising from the time-bound character of thought. Our knowledge and presumption of the future is never absolute. It is always conditional, because it is merely the tenuous tossing of the being of the present (memory) into the abyss of non-being that is the future. This Hobbes writes about in his account of the “Ends of Discourse,” i.e., our judgments about the future. He writes that judgment is nothing but “the last opinion in search of the truth of past and future.” It is nothing but opinion (VII.2). There is no necessary end to a train of thought; it only stops when an external body necessitates it. Even as opinions or judgments about the future may arise out of an ordered and well-reasoned chain of thoughts, the very constitution of those thoughts as open to an unknowable future means these opinions are always conditional and correlational: “no man can know by discourse that this or that is, has been, or will be, which is to know absolutely, but only that if this be, that is, if this has been, that has been, if this shall be, that shall be, which is to know conditionally” (VII.3).

In sum, Hobbes’s account of thought gives us two things to work with in regard to an understanding of temporal finitude. First, all present thought is memory, or more precisely, the decay of a past sense-perception (and not of the object of itself, but of the interaction of one’s body with the object). Second, the future, to which we are oriented by virtue of our human situation, is therefore nothing but a “fiction of the mind.” The future “has no being” and presents itself to us only as a projection of being (our present thought of past sense-perceptions) into this non-being. Our capacity to think ourselves, therefore, our capacity for self-identity and confidence in our continuity through time, is established not over and above time as if it is *for* us, but tenuously within time and subject to time. We are decentered in two directions: our present is nothing but the past

thought now, and thus itself contains nothing (to think our own thought *qua* that thinking would be to stop thinking); our future is itself nothing except our presumption of it through an imposition of memory in the form of expectation. And according to Hobbes, it is precisely our most promising response to the temporal finitude of thinking (naming and reasoning according to definitions) that leads us to the war that necessitates a sovereign power.

§2: *Finitude, Names, War*

From Hannah Arendt's writings on political action, freedom and history we can discern the following general hypothesis about Western thinking and the human condition: since we are conditioned (i.e., temporally finite) we devise ways to combat this condition. Every description of our finitude is correlated to a response and attempt to escape or confront this finitude. In *The Human Condition* Arendt discusses this in terms of labour, work, and action as three responses to three different manifestations of our finitude. Our condition as embodied creatures with natural needs implies a limitation on our capacity for action but also discloses our participation in the infinite immortality of the human species (labour). Our mortality, the fact that we must die, can be combated through the creation of works of art, literature, philosophy and architecture that maintain a durable world beyond an individual life (work). The futility of our political actions is combated by remembrance in story and history, and thus the continuation of our actions indefinitely through their inspiration of future actors (action).³³ Arendt calls these modes

³³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), *passim*.

of response to our temporally finite condition, following Aristotle, *athanatizein* (immortalization).³⁴

Hobbes's text displays the same dynamic of finitude and *athanatizein* in the account of language, names, and the science that consists of deducing the relationship between names. In this section I will show this in three steps. First, I will show that for Hobbes language is the way in which human beings can escape their temporal finitude by abstracting from the "here and now" in order to form definitions valid across time and space. In doing so, human beings can establish a conditional knowledge of the future by replacing temporal sequence with logical consequences. Second, I show that it is precisely this expansion of temporal reach that engenders conflict between individuals in the "state of nature" because words, despite their universality, still originate from and remain indexed to the individual experiences of those who use them. Here I follow in some ways the readings of Hobbes forwarded by Sheldon Wolin in his *Politics and Vision*, and Phillip Pettit in his *Made with Words*. Both emphasise the double role of language as both a constructive escape from temporal finitude and a cause of diffidence and conflict. Third, given the potential benefit, but inevitable conflict arising from the invention of language, I argue that for Hobbes, the sovereign emerges as the guarantor of the linguistic escape from temporal finitude.

It is tempting to analyze the state of nature as either an abstract analysis of natural rights, or as a game-theoretic analysis that distils human conflict to its basic components and actions. The war of all against all can be derived simply from a few facts about the "natural condition of mankind": first, the desire for and right to self-preservation, and

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1954), 46-7, 71.

second, the natural right to everything conducive to acquiring this (see XIV.1, 4). Given a universal endless desire for everything, war is inevitable unless the agents in the state of nature agree amongst each other to surrender their natural right to everything to one individual (the sovereign) in order to guarantee their natural right to self-preservation. This is necessary because of what Wolin calls the “logical absurdity” of our natural rights: it is precisely because everyone has a natural right to everything that our rights are unrealizable. We will all claim the same thing for ourselves and have no standard of judgment -- other than our individual private desires – to decide who has the right to what. Therefore, “the right that should increase my safety is part and parcel of the circumstances that make my situation very unsafe,” argues Wolin.³⁵ It is our natural rights, deduced from the natural state’s anarchy, that ultimately cause the war of all against all.³⁶ Indeed, it is a situation of common belonging, a universal claim or natural right to privately own the common, “the whole earth” – everything – that necessitates war given our equal capacity to kill each other, either by “secret machination, or by confederacy with others” (XIII.1).³⁷

I argue, however, that it is not enough to look simply at chapter 13 to discern the necessary consequences of our “natural condition.” Rather, the apparent logical necessity that makes Hobbes’s state of nature convincing actually arises from his articulation of temporal finitude. This is precisely because of the last point of my brief description

³⁵ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 235.

³⁶ Francois Tricaud, “Hobbes’s Conception of the State of Nature,” in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Rogers and Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 115. Tricaud provides a good analysis of the development of Hobbes’s notion of the state of nature. He is careful to note the state of nature’s character as hypothetical, and defined negatively against civil society. He also aptly and rightly argues that the state of nature is not a representation, therefore, of human nature, or even “nature” *per se*, but simply a condition in which contracts do not exist (108-111).

³⁷ See Tricaud, “Hobbes’s Conception of the State of Nature,” 116.

above: the lack of a standard of judgment. In the state of nature, we all judge in our own cases what has been, what is, and what will be. And ultimately, I think, this derives from Hobbes's analysis of humanity's primary tool for pushing against the limitations of temporal finitude: language.

For Hobbes, language – consisting of “names” and “signs” – is the way in which human beings escape the ontological condition of temporal finitude. He defines language – speech – as the “names and appellations, and their connexion, whereby men register their thoughts, recall them when they are past, and also declare them to one another for mutual utility and conversation” (IV.1). Hobbes's account of the uses of language is explicitly oriented toward a mastery of time, a way out of the dynamic of experience and expectation that characterizes prudence. It is therefore worth quoting at length in order to analyze the relation between temporal finitude and language:

“Special uses of speech are these: first, to register what by cogitation we find to be the cause of anything, present or past, and what we find things present or past may produce or effect; which in sum, is acquiring of arts. Secondly, to show to others that knowledge which we have attained, which is to counsel and teach one another. Thirdly, to make known to others our wills and purposes, that we may have the mutual help of one another. Fourthly, to please and delight ourselves and others, by playing with our words, for pleasure or ornament, innocently” (IV.3).

There is a double advantage acquired through speech: we gain mastery over the production of certain things via knowledge of past causes, and we can articulate to others both our judgments about the future and what we will do in the future in response to those judgments. The expansion of our temporal possibilities with language relies on others who will accept the meaning of our judgments about the future.

The utility of language for escaping temporal finitude lies in the capacity of language to express universality on the basis of particular observations, especially in syllogistic or geometrical reasoning. Hobbes's example is a triangle: we can deduce the nature of a triangle as an angular sum of 180 degrees, and recognize all triangles, on the basis of the necessary consequences of there being three straight lines and three angles. Language, in affixing a universal name (e.g. triangle) on the basis of an observation of a particular shape, allows the "consequence found in one particular...to be registered and remembered as an universal rule." This allows our thought to be abstracted from time and place, from mere sense-experience and temporal expectation, because it "makes that which was found true here and now, to be true in all times and places" (IV.9). The way in which we perform this abstraction is determined completely by our capacity to establish *for ourselves* the meanings of words rather than discovering a true nature. Language is our own invention and so has no natural goal. Hobbes writes that "in geometry... men begin at settling the signification of their words; which settling of significations they call definitions" (IV.12). It is by agreeing on common definitions that we can agree on common consequences of these definitions and properly arbitrate between competing claims to truth. For this reason, truth is not prior to speech or captured in a philosophical language that realizes the eternal *Logos*. "Where speech is not, there is neither truth nor falsehood." The standards of truth and falsity are established by the original definitions, which establish certain possibilities of logical consequence such that truth and falsity become clear (IV.11).

Wolin has argued that Hobbes's time was one in which philosophers and scientists had "taken a radically new look at the universe, shedding their preconceptions

and purging from their categories the vestiges of Greek teleology and Christian cosmology.” Philosophy then was to commence with a “‘privation,’ that is, an imaginative act of destruction”: the world of sense, the world to which we are bound by virtue of our temporal finitude, is destroyed. Wolin writes, “In wishing away the world, Hobbesian man announced his independence of pre-existent meanings and proclaimed his own right to re-create meaning.”³⁸ As Hobbes writes, reason here becomes “nothing but reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the marking and signifying of our thoughts” (V.2). Reason becomes a self-contained and abstractly established system of logical deduction, valid everywhere due to the universality of our first words used as definitions. It is this creation of definitions that establishes the possibility of human agreement on the truth, “For all men reason alike, and well, when they have good principles. For who is so stupid as both to mistake in geometry, and also to persist in it when another detects his error to him?” (V.16).

Thus, language, in creating the possibility of truths that transcend immediate experience, is the way in which we push the limits of temporal finitude and orient ourselves toward a stable future. Language allows us to extract universal rules and definitions from our time-bound experience. This has nothing to do with the nature of what confronts us: it is not, as it was for Aristotle, that the world was the field of actualization for the potentialities of our senses, naturally and purposefully knowable for us according to their essences. Rather, the act of reasoning has nothing to do with the sensual world. The world is a temporal flux in which the ontological condition of temporal finitude binds us to our senses and is nothing but a starting point to be erased

³⁸ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 220.

and replaced by an act of definition, from which a system of truths and logical consequences could be created. This initial creation would make possible certain knowledge of relational causes, and so make possible the arts and open new creative possibilities for the future. As Michaelis puts it, language, by giving us agreed-upon universal words, makes it possible to expand our “temporal reach into the future” by replacing temporal sequence with logical inference.³⁹

For Hobbes, the abstraction from time and expansion of our temporal reach into the future is possible because reason becomes the reckoning not of temporal consequences, but rather, the “reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of names” (V.2). We replace temporal consequences with logical ones. We can see this in Hobbes’s claim that scientific knowledge is always conditional: he writes that we can only know if this has been, that has, if this is, that is, if this shall be, that shall be (VII.3). He brackets the temporal sequence—if this is, this shall be. In the replacement of temporal consequence with logical consequence, the future, through language, remains a fiction of the mind, but a fiction of the mind made according to the creative power of reasoning with names and not according to an uncertain and tenuous grasp based on immediate desire and prudence. Science simultaneously shows us the fictional character of the future and destroys this character in order for us to make a future for ourselves given our knowledge of cause in the future. As Pocock has quite aptly put it, we can escape the “flux” of our time-bound thought and prudence with language and reasoning with names. We can do so, and “enter a world of scientific certainties, if we abandon our insistence on

³⁹ Michaelis, “Hobbes’s Modern Prometheus,” 112.

thinking diachronically and, instead of seeking to argue from moment to moment, occurrence to recurrence, reason from premise to consequence.”⁴⁰

Lund has argued along similar lines that Hobbes’s account of our temporal finitude, the immanence of time and human will, implies not a hopeless mechanical determinism but a temporal world of open possibilities to be taken advantage of by human beings. Hobbes’s account of our temporal finitude, the time-bound character of our thought and will, discloses “a world not where everything has its pre-ordained place but rather where anything can happen.”⁴¹ We exist in a world open to acts of our own willed creation through language and craft, which “extend the range of man’s desires and the temporal stage on which they are played out.”⁴² For Hobbes, language is part of our nature as artificers, as *homo faber*. Science, accordingly, is the art by which we create a world of linguistic and geometrical reason so that we can know and master this world according to rules of our own creation. For Hobbes, this is important because for him the natural world is not *per se* knowable; we know only (or rather, we know because of) our constructed and imposed deductions about the world according to names (V.17).

While language for Hobbes seems to help us escape temporal finitude through definition and universal names, it is also the source of conflict. Hobbes hopes to base his political philosophy on a form of reasoning akin to geometry: it is the creation of a system of rules by which we agree what is right and wrong, just and unjust. However, unlike in geometry, the use of words in political philosophy exacerbates the individuality of reason and causes disagreement because everyone has a varying interest in how the

⁴⁰ Pocock, “Time, History and Eschatology,” 159.

⁴¹ William R. Lund, “Tragedy and Education in the State of Nature: Hobbes on Time and the Will,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 401.

⁴² Lund, “Tragedy and Education in the State of Nature,” 404.

words are defined according to their varying desires (XI.21). This follows from the way in which our temporal finitude conditions our words and language and thus our reasoning. There is no “hypostasized reason,” reason being the reckoning of consequences. Reason is always established on the basis of definition and creation based on the consequences one experiences, and so for Hobbes “there existed only individual reason and individual experience,” and “consistent to the last, Hobbes distrusted individual reason as he had individual experience.”⁴³

The reason for Hobbes’s distrust of individualized reason, and the reason why language, despite expanding our temporal possibilities, in the short run creates an endless conflict that greatly reduces our temporal reach, is that words are derived from sense-experience. While they reach out of the here and now, they originate in it and bring it with them. We can see this in Hobbes’s discussion of the nature of universal names. There, he writes that universal names are “common to many things, as man, horse, tree.” These names, however, are not things proper but are simply names of particular and different individual things. That is to say, for Hobbes, “there [is] nothing in the world universal but names; for the things named are every one of them individual and singular” (IV.6). Universal terms are words imposed on things based on a shared characteristic or accidental quality. This follows from our temporal finitude: since the only things that can be thought are memories of sense-perceptions, it follows that the only things that names could possibly refer to would be a series of similar sense-perceptions (IV.7). It is impossible for us to experience “dog” or “good.” One might object that we can

⁴³ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 228.

experience “dog” in the form of the name “dog,” but this remains a particular, an instance of a sense-experience of a name, and not an experience of the genus “dog.”

In fact, it is precisely this problem, the fact that even our experience of universal terms is of particular instances of universal terms, that necessitates a certain conflict over the meaning of words. This is because with words such as “good” and “evil,” about things we want to happen and things we want to avoid, the terms arise out of particular individual experiences of these terms, and instances in which certain phenomena have been named “good.” The necessary disagreement follows from the fact that words, despite their origin in particular, diverse experiences, carry a universal reach, independent of space or time. In other words, the “good” for one person, and what one thinks one should fear, is different for others, but the word signifies the same thing. This is the ethical consequence of Hobbes’s initial thesis that the passions are the same in every human but the objects of passion necessarily change because they arise out of an individual’s distinct experience (Intro.3, VI.7). We can agree on the universal reach of the word, but inevitably disagree about its specific content. Pettit quite nicely captures this problem by naming it one of “indexicality”: words depend on a “personal” and “temporal” index yet reach across time and place. This causes conflict because “we each mistakenly take ourselves to be making...nonindexical judgements” when we make judgments using words that are in fact limited by the individualized contexts of our past experiences.⁴⁴

Hobbes, *contra* Aristotle, believes that it is precisely because we are *zoon logon echon* that we are naturally apolitical rather than political animals. In response to the

⁴⁴ Pettit, *Made With Words*, 86.

question of why animals seem to be able to live well together and are naturally sociable despite their lack of language and capacity to reason scientifically (XVII.6), Hobbes writes that they are able to do so because of this lack. Humans, on the other hand, are naturally driven toward conflict by their engagement with language: the “art of words” allows humans to represent to others what they take to be good or evil, but also allows them to distort the magnitude of these goods and evils, disagree about the proper referent of good and evil, and deceive one another. They can “represent to others that which is good in the likeness of evil” (XVII.10). Our temporal finitude implies that “good” and “evil” are nothing but words applied to individual experiences and desires. Their universal force, as words to help us expand our temporal reach, is always conditioned and limited by this fact. A future cannot be established through political definition and political language unless there is basic agreement as to what the definitions of words are, i.e., what political words refer to. Thus, as Pettit has cogently argued, because words not only give us greater temporal reach and mastery but also “warp” our appetites, giving particular, private feelings a reach that extends universally, they are a “mixed blessing.” Indeed, Pettit quotes Hobbes himself, who says “By speech man is made not better...but only given greater possibilities.”⁴⁵

Our invented capacity to use words as aids to memory and reckoning of consequences for the future is useless in the absence of agreement as to the meaning of those words. In the absence of a standard judgment about the meaning of moral and political words, we will take our private experience, our opinion, to be the manifestation of a universal conscience (the “good”). This for Hobbes seems to be the cause of

⁴⁵ Hobbes, *De Homine*, X.3, quoted in Pettit, *Made with Words*, 97.

religious civil war, to which Hobbes's text surely replies. Koselleck rightly notes that the conversion of conscience into private opinion is for Hobbes both the explanation of civil conflict and the condition for its resolution in peace.⁴⁶ How could it be, one might ask, that so many people acting on their conscience could act so violently toward each other and be unable to resolve their conflict, if not for the fact that their so-called conscience was not the manifestation of some universal and eternal good but rather derived from their individualized experience and education? Hobbes answers in the affirmative in his argument that "they that approve a private opinion, call it opinion; but they that mislike it, heresy; and yet heresy signifies no more than private opinion" (XI.19). If conscience, ideas about the just and unjust, good and evil, what the future ought to be like, and so on, were merely private opinion, there could be nothing gained from giving these opinions public credence other than more conflict.

This contradiction between inner conscience and outer violence constituted what Koselleck calls a "fatal dialectics of conscience and deed."⁴⁷ Conscience is merely for Hobbes a word for "secret facts and secret thoughts" that is meant to conceal "opinions" as true or irrevocable (VII.4). It is for this reason that human government is not natural, but "artificial," and it is for this reason that we must give up all our private judgements as to the justice of what has been, is, and will be, to a public reason, to a sovereign will. The solution, here, the establishment of a sovereign in order to create a civil state, is therefore

⁴⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 26

⁴⁷ Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 26.

for Hobbes presumed in the very description of the problem: i.e., the use of universal words for private opinions.⁴⁸

The sovereign here becomes the condition of possibility for a political geometry, the coercive guarantee for artificial agreement on the first principles of political life, the basic definitions from which we will derive necessary consequences. In politics, the best principles originate from the first law of nature ascertainable by reason, namely that we ought to seek peace. This natural law passes over into the civil, for no civil law can conflict with the natural law because it is civil law that establishes the peace that natural law commands. The basic natural law commands individuals to transcend nature in a language, but this natural law does not oblige but only suggest what is conducive to peace. This is because it is the civil law itself that obliges us to follow this natural law, by establishing artificially the meanings of words and obliging our agreement about them through coercion and the threat of civil war in its absence. The sovereign is, as Wolin writes, a “Definer.” The sovereign, in light of the anarchy of meanings that characterizes our “natural” condition, becomes “unchallengeable master of a system of rules or stipulative definitions fundamental to political peace.”⁴⁹ The words just and unjust, for instance, have no meaning outside of the state. They are artificial creations: “before the names of just and unjust can have place, there must be some coercive power to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants” (XV.3).

Any claims about a “natural” justice, or a natural right other than that to our self-preservation, are constitutively unjust precisely because they challenge the peace established through the moment of definition by positing definitions outside of the

⁴⁸ Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 24.

⁴⁹ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 238.

artificially established system of political language. Hobbes's goal is to ostracise those who would elevate "private reason and experience above the settled judgments of society's spokesmen."⁵⁰ To do so always threatens to reverse time, pushing us out of civil peace and back into the state of nature. Here the state of nature exists as a disciplinary mechanism, the threat of which disciplines subjects into rationally limiting their discourse to the terms of political debate and behaviour established by civil law and bracketing their conscience as opinion. The civil state, embodied in the contractual establishment of sovereignty, replaces our fears of God with a new sanction and fear, namely, "the fear of anarchy, danger, and the subsequent return to the state of nature that would be possible were fear not to be permanently located in a common power."⁵¹ The replacement of the fear of spirits with the fear of a temporal power aims to prevent the religious conflict that originates from acting on "conscience."

In light of the mortal threat of the dissolution of the state, and the return to an anarchical conflict of meanings and violent death, acting on conscience becomes a foolhardy, irrational and vainglorious act rather than the duty of the pious. This is nothing other than the transformation of "the moral alternative of good and evil into the political alternative of peace and war."⁵² In this alternative, acting out of conscience and out of religious duty is to confuse the timeless and the temporal. It is to "repeat in another form the error of the nunc-stans"⁵³; that is, it is to repeat it in a political way, such that

⁵⁰ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 231.

⁵¹ David Campbell, *Writing Security: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 57.

⁵² Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 25.

⁵³ Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology," 196.

one confuses the timeless kingdom of God with the “kingdom of glory,” imposing one’s time-bound vision of faith or the good on others at the risk of creating war.⁵⁴

§3: Political Fiction: Sovereignty and the Poetics of Time

As I showed in the second section, Hobbes’s view is that language and names simultaneously offer an escape from our temporal condition and threaten to bring us back into this condition insofar as we inevitably disagree about the meaning of indexical words. The sovereign then, as Wolin writes, is a “definer.” I argue that the sovereign state, through its coercive power, establishes a stable horizon of expectation and (conditional) knowledge of the future by representing and generating the future for subjects. This understanding is made possible by the milieu of scientific revolution in which Hobbes existed, in which there was a mathematization of nature, and reorientation of knowledge away from nature, toward what we generate ourselves through operative activity (definition and logic). In other words, the sovereign state is the political condition of possibility, in Hobbes’s text, for the modern transformation of time from a condition of finitude into an epistemological object for a finite subject. There is, therefore, a *poetics of time* at work in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*: through the founding of a civil state we create a future by establishing regulations for actions and their consequences.

First I will discuss the way in which Hobbes carves out a space for his civil science as an ahistorical political geometry: his reduction of religious truth to historical belief, which follows from the reduction of conscience to opinion. Hobbes writes that faith, far from being the ingress of the eternal in the temporal, is nothing but faith in other people’s words about God, God’s existence, or God’s will, not faith in the actual Being of

⁵⁴ Ibid.

God (VII.7). Religion is not faith in the eternal but credit in the words of other individuals, guaranteed by nothing but one's own conviction. For Hobbes, Pocock writes, "the whole structure of faith and salvation has been reduced to a system of statements in and about time."⁵⁵ Given that Hobbes has reformulated faith as faith in words said historically—merely the private or collective belief that certain things said by historical individuals, "the whole body of our faith is reducible to the construction of a system of authors and of authority, existing through time and resting on the statements they transmit."⁵⁶ Temporalities are reversed through the reversal of religious faith and political thinking from their previous orientations.

Quentin Skinner captures this reversal aptly when he sets Hobbes's theory of political obligation and sovereign founding in the context of the "engagement" controversy, wherein subjects in England were required to give an oath of allegiance (i.e., "engagement") to the new government after the civil war and removal of the king. Skinner shows that many advocates of the engagement, including Rous, Nedham, and Ascham, tried to justify obedience to the new government (after the king was executed), with its revolutionary and violent character, in terms of God's will: one should accept the powers that be as the result of divine ordination and providence.⁵⁷ Hobbes, however, despite taking cues from the secular elements in these arguments, went farther and denied the requirement for any divine ordinance for obedience to one's sovereign.

He took up an argument from Ascham, namely, that one should obey the sovereign precisely because one, in receiving life and liberty under a sovereign (even a

⁵⁵ Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology," 185.

⁵⁶ Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology," 166.

⁵⁷ See Skinner, "Conquest and Consent: Hobbes and the Engagement Controversy," in *Visions of Politics, Volume III: Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 291-302.

conqueror) has consented to this rule and disobeys at the cost of sacrificing this protection of life and liberty (Review and Conclusion, 7).⁵⁸ Indeed, Hobbes was no royalist – at least not in principle -- Hoekstra writes. Even if his sympathies might lie with the royal lineage he would only support the royalists insofar as the king continued to provide protection. When this was overturned for a new government, Hobbes could no longer support it: any support for royalists was not based on royalist principles but a principle of natural law—namely, the right to self-preservation and the natural law to seek peace above all—such that whoever had power, and to whom one could reasonably consent, was justified in holding power.⁵⁹ Only consent (even consent under fear) to accept protection for obligation could provide a timeless justification for the civil state.

The implication for civil science’s relation to religion here, for Hobbes, is that the truth of religious doctrine, as a merely historical system of credit, is subordinate to the sovereign power and thus civil law: true doctrine is conducive to peace, false doctrine repugnant. The sovereign ultimately decides on the truth of doctrine because disobeying the sovereign’s pronouncements on the content and practice of faith is not conducive to peace (XVIII.9). Religious doctrine is, under civil laws, at its most fluid extreme, a system of historical credit, and at its most certain and hardened extreme, a matter of contract: “words (and consequently the attributes of God) have their signification by agreement and constitution of men” (XXXI.38).

The constitution of religious doctrine as transformed into certainty through agreement and sovereign declaration brings me to the point of this section: to give an

⁵⁸ Skinner, “Conquest and Consent,” 304-6.

⁵⁹ Kinch Hoekstra, “The de Facto Turn in Hobbes’s Political Philosophy,” in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Sorell and Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 55, 60. Hoekstra emphasizes, contra, he believes, Skinner, the crucial role that consent plays in Hobbes’s theory of obligation-protection. It is not mere power, but consent according to the natural law to seek peace that establishes the rule for obligation.

account of the temporality that Hobbes establishes as a response to the condition of temporal finitude. This second temporality is, not, *stricto sensu*, a temporality but rather the spatial representation of time. To take up Koselleck's terminology, the Hobbesian sovereign establishes a stable "horizon of expectation," expanding the "space of experience" possible for subjects who, otherwise in the state of nature, would be condemned to immediate conflict. Koselleck forwards the argument that one's space of experience establishes a horizon of expectation (which, of course, includes expecting the unexpected): "the space of experience, open toward the future, draws the horizon of expectation out of itself."⁶⁰ The modern period, however, for Koselleck represents one in which the relationship between experience and expectation (past and future) was no longer apparent.⁶¹ This is, of course, true of Hobbes's outlook as well, as I have shown in section one.

Covenants are the way in which, through language, we establish what will happen in the future given other events; they are the political version of geometrical reasoning in the sense that they establish that given that something is, another thing shall be. They establish a clearer, more stable horizon of expectation. However, of course, for Hobbes, "covenants without the sword are but words and of no strength to secure a man at all" (XVII.2). The fear of death, the end of one's time, becomes the condition whereby one agrees to establish a coercive power to ensure a future. By guaranteeing covenants—through the prospect of violent punishment, and by defining the meanings of words for

⁶⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: Essays on the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 275.

⁶¹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 280.

the covenanters—the sovereign establishes a future that is, rather than one that is simply non-being.

Indeed, it is the prospect of fear of death, oriented toward a single point (the sovereign) that some have argued grounds the possibility of a clear, linear temporal trajectory for subjects. Frost argues that one aspect of what I call the temporal finitude of thought is the ambiguity of causality: embedded as we are in the world, we have access to causation not in a clear, efficient trajectory but rather as a complex, multifaceted patchwork: “rejecting a unilinear and cumulative conception of causality, Hobbes explains [in *De Corpore*] that the ‘sum of all things’ is not ‘one simple chain or concatenation, but an innumerable number of chains, joined together...’”⁶² As I have hinted above, our anxiety about the future exists in a feedback loop with our desire to know causes: we want to know the causes of things because we want to secure our future against fear of death and the unknowable, and knowing the causes of things makes us anxious about the causes of future things (XII.4-5).

Fear here performs the function of disciplining and reducing the complexity of Hobbes’s “innumerable” chains of causation and contexts. Fear is the mechanism by which we establish the fiction of the future: we project the potential for hurt and displeasure into the future from memories of these affects. In doing so we simplify causal chains by ascribing the origin of the feeling to an object and locating the feeling in our sense of self: fear is constitutive of our existing as self-identical subjects through time and through memory.⁶³ The fact that Hobbes calls fear “aversion” itself implies the

⁶² Samantha Frost, “Fear and the Illusion of Autonomy,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Coole and Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 161.

⁶³ Frost, “Fear and the Illusion of Autonomy,” 169.

agency of a subject to avoid the aversive object (VI.16); we project ourselves into a future, making it a place in which we act rather than an abyss that we cannot and do not know. Fear replaces the complex and obscure feeling of anxiety with an object—namely, death. As Frost writes, there is a “recursive temporal movement around fear’s object” that “enables the subject to confront a field that is impossible to master and yet act as if she were nonetheless a masterful agent.”⁶⁴ This is because we posit for ourselves a future that is ours, that we will experience, and in which causation is fictionally simplified such that we can decide how to avert an object or not.

As Frost herself notes, the sovereign is necessary for this “recursive” temporality, which establishes a linear horizon of expectation. She refers to Hobbes’s claim that the criminal, under civil laws, will, before committing a crime, see the consequences: (he “re-cons” what will follow upon committing the crime: “the crime, the officer, the prison, the judge, and the gallows” (III.7). This shows that “In regularizing actions and their consequences, the sovereign’s laws serve as the material for an imagined future that itself gives the subject a basis for choosing and acting.”⁶⁵ Of course, we can just as easily apply Frost’s reasoning to the use of covenants as an establishment of what will be. Covenants are always and only about the future, for Hobbes—they are promises of what one will do, if other things happen, and establish the results of failing to do so (XIV.11, 24-25). In both cases, fear as a tool for establishing linear time is maintained by concentrating the fear of subjects in an Archimedean point—the sovereign.

Indeed, it is precisely because we ourselves make a future with covenants, and through the contract to transfer our rights mutually to a sovereign that we create, that we

⁶⁴ Frost, “Fear and the Illusion of Autonomy,” 170.

⁶⁵ Frost, “Fear and the Illusion of Autonomy,” 172.

have a linear temporality of causation. However, this is hardly, as Frost argues, an “illusion” that we disavow.⁶⁶ Rather, we consciously make a future and know it because we make it. For Hobbes, this is the condition of all knowledge: we do not know nature itself, or things in themselves, properly speaking, but idealizations and figures that we produce and agree about, from which we can deduce logical consequences. Hobbes writes in an epistle dedicatory that geometry and political science are demonstrable forms of knowledge because “the lines and figures from which we reason are drawn and described by ourselves” and “because we make the commonwealth ourselves.”⁶⁷ We might argue, *pace* Michaelis, that this is not an illusion (at least in the sense that Frost means it as a disavowal of something we do ourselves as autonomous). Rather, it is a result of a vision of science that “is not so much predictive as it is proscriptive... such a science does not make the future more transparent but it does make it more available as an object of planning and control.”⁶⁸ We assure ourselves of a predictable, and manageable future by making it an object for our consciousness; we do this by making it in geometrical terms, from first principles. And we guarantee these first principles—the meaning of words such as just and unjust, and the coercive guarantee of covenants—by transmitting our rights to a sovereign who can guarantee our declarations about the future. Our declarations therefore become not mere promises but creative acts—expressing one’s will becomes a temporal *poiesis* whereby one creates the future.

With this *poiesis* Hobbes’s orientation in a milieu of scientific revolution after (e.g.) Galileo is evident. Galileo’s famous metaphor of a “book of nature” written in the

⁶⁶ Frost, “Fear and the Illusion of Autonomy,” 173.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Pettit, *Made With Words*, 19-20. See also *Leviathan*, XX.19.

⁶⁸ Michaelis, “Hobbes’s Modern Prometheus,” 122.

language of mathematics was not just a re-description of Nature, knowable in itself, but rather reoriented the relationship between humans and the nature they studied: a book of nature must be (re)written in a legible language—mathematics—before it can be read. Galileo did not simply discover that nature was mathematical but carried out, as Husserl writes, a “mathematization” of nature: “nature itself is idealized under the guidance of new mathematics.”⁶⁹ *Mathemata* itself is a word meaning known prior to experience.⁷⁰ Nature is posited as mathematical, in terms of an ideal “ground-plan,” the adherence to which becomes the measure of exactitude.⁷¹

The positing of a mathematical nature is made possible by an idealization of imperfect, empirical shapes in what Husserl calls “the intuitively surrounding world.” We move from typical shapes (almost perfect lines, circles, triangles) to intuitions about their approximating the “perfection” of ideal geometrical shapes.⁷² This is “a completely new kind of inductive prediction” that replaces the induction of mere prudence described by Hobbes: instead of expecting based on experience, “one can ‘calculate’ with compelling necessity, on the basis of given and measured events involving shapes, events, which are unknown and never accessible to direct measurement.”⁷³ This induction, Husserl contends, is made possible by turning the geometrical idealization and mathematization of nature back onto the empirical world by generating the empirical world from mathematical axioms. Thus, “knowing the world in a seriously scientific way,

⁶⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 23.

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” trans. William Lovitt, in *Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 118-119.

⁷¹ Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” 120.

⁷² Husserl, *Crisis*, 25.

⁷³ Husserl, *Crisis*, 33.

‘philosophically,’ can have meaning and be possible only if a method can be devised of constructing, systematically and in a sense in advance, the world.”⁷⁴ This is based on the argument that in accepting the first principles of geometrical reasoning—line, point, plane—we can discern the infinity of possible shapes that follow from them, at least as an infinitely unattainable *telos*.

Husserl argues that through this idealization, and our turning it back onto the empirical world, “we attain an identical, nonrelative truth” to which anyone, given the first principles and method, can agree.⁷⁵ This is exactly the move that Hobbes describes in his account of words and geometry: in accepting the idealization of an empirical shape as a triangle, we escape the here and now to “all times and places” (V.9); geometry, the only true science, begins with settling on definitions (IV.12), and thus in doing so establishes the conditions for any non-relative truth discerned from the consequences of definitions; for, as Hobbes writes, “all men reason by nature alike, and well, when they have good [or, in Latin, “true and clear”] principles” (V.16). This is not attained by nature---neither our own nature, nor Nature as receptive to us. Rather, it is attained by “industry” and the “apt imposing of names” (V.17). We impose names onto the world, making the world a product of our reason rather than simply an object in itself. Everything in the world of experience and prudence, Husserl writes—and, I think, Hobbes would agree—is based on induction and is inherently predictive; however, it is incomplete insofar as one does not posit the world, create it, as it is predicted.

Thus, leaving Husserl behind for now we might simply summarize and say that the reason why geometrical reasoning, and the mathematization of nature as something

⁷⁴ Husserl, *Crisis*, 32.

⁷⁵ Husserl, *Crisis*, 29.

generated by our operative reasoning, establishes a kind of sure knowledge is that in the modern worldview we know better those things we create for ourselves. We posit our method—geometrical reasoning on agreed-upon, socially constructed principles—as “true being.”⁷⁶ This style of reasoning manifests itself clearly in Hobbes’s account of sovereignty and the origin of the state. Not only does the sovereign establish the condition of possibility for science (agreement on the meaning of words) but the reasoning by which one generates the principles of civil science is also constituted by a mathematization, a positing of a world such that it will be known according to Hobbes’s method. As Sorell has written, geometry, being “perfectly informed about the human activities that produce its effects” is a sure science, and “Hobbes adds, civil philosophy is like geometry” in the same way—we produce its objects and its effects.⁷⁷ This is clear in the case of the state of nature: the state of nature is not part of Nature, but rather is the product of hypothetical, deductive reasoning—it is a tool for establishing *agreement* about first principles, rather than the description of an actual natural condition. We see this also in the “theorems” of natural law, which are not, properly speaking, aspects of our nature or the nature of the world but are produced as principles on the basis on potential agreement; further, natural law ultimately passes into and is justified recursively by civil law, for obedience to civil law is exactly what is commanded by natural law.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Husserl, *Crisis*, 51.

⁷⁷ Tom Sorell, “The Science in Hobbes’s Politics, in *Perspectives on Hobbes*, ed. Rogers and Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 71. We might even conjecture that political science is even more “sure” of a science than geometry for Hobbes—not only because science is only possible in the civil state, but also because geometry for Hobbes remains a materialist science of bodies whereas it is not clear that political science does. See Jesseph, “Hobbes, Galileo, and the Book of Nature,” *Perspectives on Science* 12 (2004): 202. Jesseph argues that Hobbes’s geometry still remains tied to the science of bodies, such that lines have breadth, points have extension, and so on.

⁷⁸ Perez Zagorin, *Hobbes and the Law of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 46, 31.

Nature itself, in relation to political science, for Hobbes, is nothing but a production of those already in civil society.

Sovereignty ultimately comes, I conclude, to be the *arche*, the fundamental principle that determines what doctrines, what principles, and what definitions will be *axios*—worthy—and posits a world of *mathemata*—events unknown to experience but known to subjectivities—by actively generating these. Hobbes’s sovereign, in guaranteeing the future, mimics the idealization and return to the empirical world performed by Galilean geometry. It is the mechanism by which we settle on the definitions of words of a political sort: justice and injustice have no meaning outside of the social contract and are artificially created with the *Leviathan*. They have no place before there is a “coercive power to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants.” (XV.3). In these acts, political truth, a political truth that is valid not only here and now but in all times, is created. Truth, including truth about the future, is a political creation, established and maintained by the generation of words we agree upon: “where speech is not, there is neither truth nor falsehood” (IV.11). And in the case of civil science, this agreement is not established based on mathematics and scientific agreement but rather a coercive power, because the interests of individuals more thoroughly taint their capacity to create universal names in the political realm. It is established, generated, by an act of self-creation: individuals create the sovereign, that “artificial man” (Introduction, 1), and in doing so transform themselves from a divided multitude into a united people beholden to civil laws (XVI.13), establishing a set of rules about behaviour and expectations about future events grounded by the violent “terror” of

the sovereign (XV.3). The future is made—and its creator is the sovereign state, through its guarantee of future action.

Conclusion: Making Time, Taking Place

In this chapter I have advanced the basic thesis that Hobbes gives an account of the temporal finitude of thought, and that his demand for state sovereignty follows from this account. While human beings might attempt to escape the limits of temporal finitude through the abstraction enabled by language, such abstraction is always caught in the indexicality inherent in temporal finitude: this is true of all words, but especially politically and morally relevant words such as good and evil, just and unjust. The sovereign, I argued, acts here as a definer, as the coercive guarantor of an escape from time: by guaranteeing the meaning of words for a people, the sovereign prevents deadly civil conflict, and by guaranteeing citizens' words about the future, the sovereign in effect “makes” time. The sovereign enacts a poetics of time that replaces the “fiction of the mind” that characterizes our condition as finite thinkers, and replaces it with a political fiction, a fabricated future made up of words about it.

The individual, and the multitude of individuals, are gathered from generic individuals into a particular people with idiosyncrasies and particular laws, but in a way that follows a mathematical (i.e., learnable prior to experience) and thus universal way. Indeed, this is carried out with respect to temporal finitude as such: the political subject comes to take a place precisely by representing time to itself, by transforming the condition of temporal finitude, in which we are immanent to the material flux of time, into an epistemological object of representation that we make through our words about the future guaranteed by sovereign power. In other words, the taking of place, and the

making of time, is made possible through the sovereign's guarantee of an escape from time. We can only have time 'in front' of us as an object of representation (in numerical, spatial, or historical terms) when we have escaped it, have come to take place by taking a place. Taking a place happens through making time as a political fiction held in common. In sum, finitude is transformed from a condition of temporal immanence into a finitude established through the creation of a political place or perspective that the subject inhabits. In chapter 2, I will investigate the event in which this transformation is, for Hobbes, to occur, and the hinge upon which this distinction between two kinds of finitude, and indeed nature and the political, rests: the origin of the commonwealth.

Chapter 2: Miraculous Origin, Scientific Machine: Hobbes's Impossible Politics of Origins

“Nature loves to hide”

– Heraclitus

“The whole method consists in the ordering and arranging of the objects on which we must concentrate the mind’s eye if we are to discover some truth”

– Descartes

Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is a text about beginnings, about origins. Both the political science it inaugurates and the political founding it sketches are posed as radically new inventions. This beginning, however, is characterized by an initial tension in the introduction to *Leviathan*. On the one hand, the text is describing an act of quasi-theological creation: “the pacts and covenants by which the parts of this body politic were first made, set together, and united, resemble that *fiat*, or the *let us make man*, pronounced by God in the creation” (Introduction, 1). A philosopher, and especially a political philosopher, must in thinking “imitate the creation.”⁷⁹ On the other hand, this creation cannot be the theological, unpredictable and utterly omnipotent act of voluntary will, for Hobbes’s account “admitteth no other demonstration” (Introduction, 4). On the one hand, the novelty and power of the act of creation is neutralized into a necessary process, and on the other, the calculable, logical consequence of Hobbes’s science is premised on an act of theological creation and unpredictability. This tension amounts to the question of whether Hobbes is simply describing a given ‘reality’ or ‘nature’ that is governed by necessity and regularity, or whether Hobbes is in fact producing a reality

⁷⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, in *The Metaphysical System of Hobbes: Twelve Chapters from Elements of Philosophy Concerning Body*, ed. Mary Whiton Calkins (La Salle: Open Court, 1948), 5.

over and against any given reality. Spragens has emphatically asserted in his *Politics of Motion* that Hobbes is doing the former—and therefore inherits the Aristotelian presumption of a whole Nature that can be known, albeit known in a different way.⁸⁰ Karena Shaw, on the other hand, has noted the way in which Hobbes is not merely describing facts and truths but actively producing them, and so reveals the way in which knowledge is always-already bound up with particular political projects.⁸¹

My view is that Hobbes is not doing one or the other, but both: he must both create a reality from nothing and establish it with a regularity that cannot be denied. His account of political origins, I argue, establishes both a polemical rejection of history as a source for political knowledge—clearing the ground and effacing foundations—in order to establish and project his own account of origins. In doing so, he demands the necessity of the impossible. My central claim in this chapter, then, is that Hobbes establishes an apparently necessary and indubitable foundation and origin for his political thought on the basis of precisely the impossibility of foundations. First, I show how his account of an impossible and circular contract disciplines political discourse by portraying concern with history as fundamentally dangerous, separating political philosophy from the empirical and historical world. Second, I show how this enables the generation of an origin on the basis of a science akin to geometry, in which the process of scientific production and generation is transformed into a statement of what is. This, third, I call Hobbes's project or projection, which simultaneously neutralizes

⁸⁰ Thomas A. Spragens, *The Politics of Motion: The World of Thomas Hobbes* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973), 97-99.

⁸¹ Karena Shaw, "Knowledge, Foundations, Politics," *International Studies Review* 6 (2004): 9-12.

unpredictability and opens itself to a demand for the radically unpredictable, incalculable event. This opens critical possibilities that I will take up in chapter three.

§1: Effacing the Origin: Hobbes's Impossible Contract and the Polemic against History

A commonwealth, for Hobbes, is the only solution to the irreconcilable disagreement and conflict of the state of nature. The only way to escape the temporal finitude of the state of nature is to establish agreement on the meaning of words. Only then can we separate ourselves from the uncertainty of temporal sequence and take residence in the sovereign abode of geometrical reasoning. The primary and original agreement is what allows for the ratiocination and calculation of the necessary and indisputable consequences of those definitions (V.16-17, XXXIV.1). This original agreement would be the original contract in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. The founding gesture in Hobbes's text is a "covenant of every man with every man," who would say to each other "I authorise and give up my right of governing myself up to this man...on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize his actions in like manner" (XVII.13). That is, we mutually give up our second natural right, to judge everything and anything necessary for our self-preservation in order to fulfill our first natural right to self-preservation. In doing so, individuals in the state of nature "confer all their power and strength upon one man" such that they "submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgments" (XVII.13).

It seems at first glance that Hobbes is describing something that happens in temporal sequence: pre-political human beings contract at some time to give up their right to everything in order to live together, and then live together. They move from one

condition to another. However, any such linear account of origins is unsettled by a series of circularities in Hobbes's account that would make any temporal ordering of Hobbes's original contract impossible.

The circularity of Hobbes's contract occurs on two levels. First, the relation between contract and coercion is circular. Hobbes maintains that contracts of mutual trust—in which one person performs on the condition that the other covenanter will perform later—are void in any condition under which one can reasonably suspect the other party will not perform (XIV.18). Hobbes explicitly names the natural condition as one in which this suspicion necessarily takes hold, writing that covenants are guaranteed by a common coercive power and void in its absence (XIV.19). As Hobbes writes, “Covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all” (XVII.2). However, this common coercive power that would guarantee contracts by keeping a group of individuals commonly “in awe” is only established through a contract (XVII.12), through a contract of “every man with every man” (XVII.13). This contract, then, under the conditions of Hobbes's own reasoning, would then be void and strictly speaking impossible. One could not make it as a contract without it being instantly void because in principle this original promise must be made in conditions under which promising is impossible. As Bernasconi aptly puts it, the original contract is “a promise to keep one's promises,” such that the “bond” that guarantees one's words “arises only through the social contract, the original contract that first makes possible contracts as such, but which for that very reason is impossible.”⁸²

⁸² Robert Bernasconi, “Opening the Future: The Paradox of Promising in the Hobbesian Social Contract,” *Philosophy Today* 41 (1997): 80.

Bernasconi further deepens this analysis, claiming that this paradox emerges on a second level, that of language. Language, for Hobbes, is not a natural characteristic of “man” but an invention (IV.1). Yet, Bernasconi asks, if language is something invented, is it not plagued by the same circularity as that between coercion and contract? Namely, how could language emerge except if there were already some kind of social intercourse like language available? Language, indeed, is the condition for society for Hobbes: without speech and letters “there had been amongst men, neither commonwealth, nor society, nor contract, nor peace, no more than amongst lions, bears and wolves” (IV.1). Bernasconi takes up Pufendorf’s criticism of Hobbes, arguing that “there must be a contract prior to the contract.” There must be an (at least “tacit”) agreement on the meaning of words before a contract can occur, but this itself would amount to presuming the possibility of agreement in the absence of contract.⁸³

Much ink has been spilled elaborating on the logical coherence or incoherence of Hobbes’s hypothetical argument from the state of nature.⁸⁴ The impossibility of the origin, however, is not a result of logical incoherence, and thus cannot be saved or denied on the basis of its incoherence. The real work of this, I think, is not to establish a specific logical argument about origins but to establish the supremacy of logical argument over historical argument. Hobbes does this in order to neutralize any politics that might

⁸³ Bernasconi, “Opening the Future,” 81-82. See also Matthew Kramer, *Hobbes and the Paradoxes of Political Origins* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997), 125-131.

⁸⁴ A classic account is Howard Warrender, who is, I think, mistaken, and refuted aptly by Nagel, and Lebuffle. Other classic works in this literature are Hampton’s, Gauthier’s, and Kavka’s. In this chapter my claim of impossibility is not meant as a counter-claim to these accounts, which all aim to prove the logical inference of sovereign power from the state of nature. Rather, I am simply establishing the founding event’s impossibility qua historical event, or something that can be understood in temporal terms, in order to open a space of questioning about what the relationship is between the hypothetical deduction and the “real,” or the historical. Most scholars of Hobbesian contractarianism, Springborg writes, spend too much time interrogating Hobbes’s logic and not enough time thinking about the role of logic as such and its relation to the world Hobbes is dealing with.

premise itself on history, on historical origins, and the potential justice or injustice of founding moments. As de Vries puts it, “the problem of foundation is solved through a circularity that simultaneously founds authority and renders impossible the (temporal) origin of state power.”⁸⁵ Circularity leads not to philosophical incoherence but temporal indeterminacy: the circularity of founding effaces the temporal ordering and historical placement of the contract such that it cannot be determinately located in time. If time is considered a series of calculable, divisible and finite instants, this series of instants is manifested through motion: time is seen through the moving of things in space.⁸⁶ An instant, then, and instantaneous motion, is impossible.⁸⁷ Yet, by making the *loci* of the movement of founding—namely, coercive power and contractual promising—paradoxically co-determinant, the movement and therefore the time of founding is effaced. The contract, like an instant, is impossible and therefore escapes the constraints and determinations of time.

Hobbes argues in *Leviathan* that everything in the world is finite body, located in space and time.⁸⁸ Then, he claims that he is going to provide a demonstration of the generation of commonwealths—the origin of political community. Why, then, would his text efface the origin as a concrete historical sequence? The reasons, I think, are political and scientific.

The main political reason comes to us from Hobbes’s “Review and Conclusion” to *Leviathan*. He writes there that “I put down the most effectual seeds of the death of

⁸⁵ Leonie Anselm de Vries, *Re-Imagining a Politics of Life: From Governance of Order to Politics of Movement* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 3.

⁸⁶ See Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 47 for Hobbes’s definition of time in this way.

⁸⁷ Geoffrey Gorham, “Descartes on Time and Duration,” *Early Science and Medicine* 12 (2007): 29

⁸⁸ See Chapter 1, Section 1 of this thesis.

any state that the conquerors require not only a submission of men's actions to them for the future, but also an approbation of all their actions past (when there is scarce a commonwealth in the world whose beginnings can in conscience be justified)" (Review and Conclusion, 8). What Hobbes is pointing to in this passage is his thesis that political judgments premised on historicity and memory, that is, on the basis of our judgments of actions in the past, are fundamentally dangerous. And the reason for this is that the history of any political community, for Hobbes, begins not in the discursive agreement of the contract but the silence of violent threat.

Joan Cocks aptly describes the violence of founding as violent to the past and to the future. Founding is violent first, to that which came before. The founding of a new order must always be premised on the erasure and destruction of what preceded it such that it can be erected. Erasure precedes founding.⁸⁹ For Hobbes, this violence takes a much larger picture: in some sense, the universe has become fundamentally violent after the destruction of a finite (basically Aristotelian) Christian view of the *cosmos*. From the point of view of Aristotelian science, motion can be violent or natural. Natural motion is a motion of a thing toward the place that resonates with its essence, and violent motion is motion that directs a thing—"violently"—away from its natural place.⁹⁰ For Hobbes, for whom nature is nothing but matter in motion, motion is in a sense always violent. The old order, too, is then unmasked as entirely violent. From a more specific view, the simple point is that all commonwealths are ultimately founded in a violent act of "creative destruction" wherein the old order, like the closed world of medieval life, is

⁸⁹ For a survey of canonical literature in light of contemporary Canadian settler-colonialism, see Joan Cocks, *Sovereignty and Other Delusions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 47-53.

⁹⁰ Some also translate these terms as natural and unnatural motion. See Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 230a18-231a2. Also see Alexandre Koyre, "Galileo and Plato," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (Oct. 1943): 408.

dissolved.⁹¹ The act of creation that would succeed this dissolution would be a violent fabrication and delimitation of the inside and the outside of a political community. And insofar as this constructed order is the only measure or framework in which the legality or legitimacy of violence can be judged, it necessarily follows that whatever violence preceded its establishment, even the violence that worked to establish it, is at best neutrally anomic and at worst unjustifiable.⁹²

This latter problem, the retrospective legitimacy of founding, is a specifically “modern” problem insofar as it arises from the fact that legitimations of violence, indeed, order as such, can only be established through acts of human creation. Machiavelli is an absolutely crucial figure here, for he introduces (canonically) the possibility of founding “completely new” orders and he does so in an account of politics that happens entirely in time.⁹³ He has to grapple with this problem of violence: how can one minimize the delegitimizing effects of the violence of founding on the orders that are created? Machiavelli’s answer is that one must compress the temporal extension of violence. He argues that “cruelty well-used” is sudden, instantaneous and swift. Virtuously executed cruelty will leave witnesses and victims “stunned and stupefied,” in other words, shocked into submission and a forgetting of violence. Cruelty is therefore best “carried out in a single stroke.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 220.

⁹² Cocks, *Sovereignty*, 50. See Also Jacques Derrida’s “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority,” *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1990).

⁹³ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bonandella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7. See also R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38-40.

⁹⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*: on “stunned and stupefied,” 27, on “cruelty well-used,” 33.

From the point of view of Machiavelli's difficult, even tragic position, the impossibility of Hobbes's contract is a geometrical perfection. He reduces the duration—and thereby the violence—of founding to the infinitesimal by rendering it outside of the flow of time. Indeed, he conceals the violence of political founding by conceiving of the founding event as arriving *ex nihilo*: “the pacts and covenants by which the parts of this body politic were first made, set together, and united, resemble that *fiat*, or the *let us make man*, pronounced by God in the creation” (Introduction, 1).

Foucault captures the general purpose, then, of Hobbes's impossible contract when he writes that “In a word, what Hobbes wants to eliminate is the Conquest, and also the use that was being made, in both historical discourse and political practice, of the problem of the Conquest.”⁹⁵ What Foucault is talking about here is the use, in Hobbes's time, of the discourse of historical justification, and historical memory of conquest and violence, in discerning the authority of the state and one's political obligations. Indeed, in his reading of Hobbes's history of the civil war, Kraynak points to some “enemies” of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, two of which Hobbes says played a direct role in igniting the English Civil War.⁹⁶ The problem with them is that they used the discourse of historical sequence rather than ratiocination based on definition.

The first were Presbyterians who preached that one could disobey authority if it conflicted with one's conscience.⁹⁷ Conscience threatens authority and sparks civil wars because it mistakes historically-grounded private opinions of certain authorities for eternal truths. Conscience is nothing but a reverent name given to historical opinions by

⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, “*Society Must be Defended*”, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 98.

⁹⁶ Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 37.

⁹⁷ Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes*, 40-41.

those who “pretend to know they are true, when they know, at most, but that they think so” (VII.4).⁹⁸ Following one’s “conscience” is “repugnant” to peace because there is such diversity in “private consciences.” The principle of conscience amounts to naming each and every individual the judge of eternal good and evil for himself—when, of course, these are mere names for what we desire individually: “private opinions” (XXIX.7). The way in which these private consciences are sparked is not only pretence of the superiority of one’s opinion but a fear of the “ghostly” power of God. The crux here, though, is that this ghostly power comes not from God Himself. It comes from authoritative credit in preachers whose “spiritual power moveth the members of the commonwealth (by the terror of punishments and hope of rewards, which are the nerves of it),” “suffocates their understanding” with strange nonsense words, and so “needs thereby distract the people” casting the commonwealth into the “fire of a civil war” (XXIX.15).

The second group was the “democratical gentlemen,” who saw in the origin of sovereignty the loss of a republican, animated vision of freedom that was supplanted by domination and the rule of one by another—in other words, a kind of slavery.⁹⁹ Hobbes sees historical study, and historical discourses, as threats to a “proper signification” of liberty. He derives this primarily from the study of Greeks and Romans among these gentlemanly democrats: “by reading of these Greek and Latin authors men from their childhood have gotten a habit (under a false show of liberty) of favouring tumults and of licentious controlling the actions of their sovereigns... with the effusion of so much blood as I think I may truly say: there was never anything so dearly bought, as...the

⁹⁸ See also chapter one of this thesis for a discussion of conscience as a source of conflict.

⁹⁹ Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes*, 50-53.

learning of the Greek and Latin tongues” (XXI.9).¹⁰⁰ By excavating ancient histories and philosophers, democrats sought ways of thinking liberty otherwise than Hobbes’s systemic, materialist definition—“the absence of opposition” (XXI.1). In doing so, they took an historical definition—mere credit in other men, such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Socrates—for a rational, natural idea of justice that exceeded existing legal power. Hobbes’s problem with this is not the specific content of the ancient authors but the hermeneutic principle of the democrats: namely, that one can take historical writers as sources of definitions of the essence of political words.

Both these factions show how looking to history in search of political knowledge threatens Hobbes’s account: both look to historical systems of authority to criticize “the alleged heresies and injustices of established authorities,” by pretending these historical opinions are natural and ideal.¹⁰¹ The appeal to history, so attractive after a loss of a world that could be known according to our nature such that moral norms would be easily discernible, in fact gives us mere prudence, expectation based on past experience. Judgments based on this prudential gaze toward historical practice and historical origins would be akin to noting that “in all places of the world men should lay the foundation of their houses on the sand,” and inferring that “it ought to be” so (XX.19). There is no point of looking to the practice of “wise men,” as Strauss notes, because the whole effort of political judgment must be aimed at erasing the influence of the uncertain

¹⁰⁰ See Quentin Skinner, “Classical Liberty, Renaissance Translation and the English Civil War,” in *Visions of Politics, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 312-343, for an account of Hobbes’s critique of ancient liberty and a vindication of Hobbes’s claim that the Greeks and Romans’ vision of liberty played a key role in the English Civil War in the 17th Century. For Hobbes’s critique of scholastic and Aristotelian political philosophy, see chapter XLVI.32-35, wherein Hobbes asserts that Aristotle’s moral philosophy defines “Good and evil by the appetite of men,” elevating private judgment as the measure public good and evil, and critiques all commonwealth’s other than popular ones as tyrannical, being ignorant of civil war consequent to disobedience.

¹⁰¹ Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes*, 55.

“circumstances” in which a “wise man” might make a judgment.¹⁰² As Hobbes writes, “The skill of making and maintaining commonwealths consisteth in certain rules, as doth arithmetic and geometry, not (as tennis-play) on practice only” (XX.19). A “method” is required to establish a political geometry that is based on the reason of logical consequence—valid everywhere—instead of temporal sequence. Reason for Hobbes is always conditional: “no man can know by discourse that this or that is, has been, or will be, which is to know absolutely, but only that if this be, that is, if this has been, that has been, if this shall be, that shall be” (VII.3). What is bracketed here is the historical derivation of judgments, which would rely on a logic of “if this has been, this is, if this is, this will be,” i.e., one of temporal sequence. Here the humility of rational argument is posed against the vainglorious hubris of historical argument, which presumes itself as absolute knowledge of fact and the capacity to derive logical consequences from fact.

Here Hobbes neutralizes a certain democratic politics precisely by a democratic principle of equality—he exposes what Derrida has called the “autoimmune” character of democracy as always destroying—or producing—itsself through the contradiction of an unlimited *demos* with a forcefully bound *kratos*.¹⁰³ Hobbes, precisely by invoking the equal finitude of human reason in time, undoes the claims of democrats and Presbyterians to have discovered previously lost democratic principles as new ideals. He renders any attempt to do so a presumption of one’s intelligence over others when one has no right to do so, presuming oneself the “judge of good and evil actions,” reducing obedience to a mere choice as opposed to an obligation (XXIX.6). He renders the historical search for

¹⁰² Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: its Origin and its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 101.

¹⁰³ On autoimmunity and the tension between democracy as the unlimited *demos* and necessarily limited *kratos*, see Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale Anne-Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 35-36, 44-45, 71-73

democratic principles, as Strauss aptly puts it, an attempt to resurrect the (in fact) aristocratic “difference between an unwise majority and wise minority.”¹⁰⁴

Here Hobbes’s impossible contract, as a principle opposed to history, aims at what Baumgold calls a “pacified” society: a society in which would-be members promise non-resistance as a condition of citizenship.¹⁰⁵ Insofar as Hobbes’s sovereign establishes the possibility of talking, of telling origin stories, and of reason, any position one might take on the history of the commonwealth, and thus any resistance based on history, would be established within the commonwealth’s system of reasoning, or radically excluded as irrational. As Schmitt notes, a stance outside, a “point of departure for a right to resist,” is effaced in the *Leviathan*, because positions and points of departure for action are made possible only by the state.¹⁰⁶ The reason of state is so minimal, we might say, that to contradict it is to necessarily contradict oneself as a reasoning subject by implying that one wants to return to a state of nature, a state of war.¹⁰⁷ Non-resistance here is established based on a crucial conflation by Hobbes of the Grotian concept of “private warfare” (i.e., violence on one’s private behalf, rather than in the name of the polity of which one is a member) and political resistance. Hobbes further pacifies the potential for political resistance through a corollary distinction between individual self-defense (a natural, inalienable right) and the political defense of others threatened by sovereign

¹⁰⁴ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 102.

¹⁰⁵ Deborah Baumgold, “Pacifying Politics: Resistance, Violence, and Accountability in Seventeenth-Century Contract Theory,” *Political Theory* 12 (Feb. 1993): 12.

¹⁰⁶ Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 16.

¹⁰⁷ See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 219.

violence.¹⁰⁸ We might resist, alone, in the silent struggle against violent punishment and war, but we cannot resist in language with others.

Grounding our political judgments on the credit of historical authorities, on stories about the origins of the commonwealth in history, is nothing other than the elevation of finite prudence to a principle of reason. This can only, for Hobbes, lead to civil war and irreconcilable factionalism, a war of all against all. Hobbes's objection to the historical arguments of the Presbyterians and the gentlemen is not that they got their histories wrong. The problem is the very connection of history to logical reasoning. For Hobbes—for political and epistemological reasons—the earthquake of modernity cracks open an abyss between history and political science. The “historical origin of States” gives “no answer to the only important question, which concerns the right order of society.”¹⁰⁹ Political judgment is a political geometry—not mere “tennis-play.”

Thus Hobbes eschews historical reasoning by cutting the world in two: the historical, real, and “concrete” is opposed to ideal, geometrical, and systemically rule-bound reasoning. The more Hobbes can reject the usefulness of history except as a tool for showing why history ought not to be used in judgment, the more ideal and more perfect the architecture of his political science can become. Yet, Kraynak offers an important objection when he asks how Hobbes can hope to do so and not imitate the pernicious and vainglorious error of the Presbyterians and “democratical gentlemen”—namely, elevating one's historically and temporally bound prudence as an ideal

¹⁰⁸ Baumgold, “Pacifying Politics,” 15.

¹⁰⁹ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 103. See chapter three on the ambiguity and undecidability of the ‘ideal society’ in Hobbes. Hobbes is not, as Strauss thinks, working with a ‘model’ but instituting a sovereignty that undoes the very idea of a model into which we must shape the world.

principle.¹¹⁰ Indeed, I think this question goes to the very heart of Hobbes's political theory: how can we think and explain—scientifically, indisputably, convincingly, as an object of knowledge—the *very relationship between our theoretical disposition and the concrete, prudential world of life* that both grounds, and is pushed aside and replaced by, scientific and theoretical reasoning?¹¹¹

One answer is found in the very formulation of the founding moment, the origin of the commonwealth, in Hobbes's text: the generation of the commonwealth occurs through “covenant of every man with every man, in such manner *as if* every man should say to every man I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man...on this condition, that thou [do so] in like manner” (XVII.13, my emphasis). An “as if” is inserted into the origin that slices it from the world into the hypothetical, into the fictional. What is established is nothing less than what Plato called the *chorismos*, the separation of the world of *episteme* from the world of *doxa*. Through the insertion of the “as if” into the origin, not only a commonwealth is originated but a *knowledge* of the commonwealth that operates on the terrain of the as if, radically opposed to and separated from the world of becoming, and indeed, a knowledge that constitutes itself precisely in the *heteron*, the difference it has from the world of becoming.¹¹² . As Cassirer writes,

¹¹⁰ Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes*, 62-63.

¹¹¹ Husserl is, of course, lurking behind the formulation I give here. He formulated the problem this way as a prelude to an offering of a science of the lifeworld from which science emerges—a science called phenomenology, which would scientifically describe the origins of theoretical subjectivity and objectivity and thus ground and assure the infinite progress of the sciences, restoring to them a sense of the responsibility for existence that called for them in the first place. Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 123-124, 127-8 for discussions of the basic impetus of the Husserl's distinction (mirroring Hobbes's) between the life-world of concrete prudence and the theoretical disposition of objective science.

¹¹² See Cassirer on this development in the Renaissance neo-Platonism (especially that of Cusanus) that would influence the modern science that undergirds Hobbes's text. Ernst Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Dover, 1963), 17-19.

the “separation, the *chorismos*, of both worlds is irrevocable,” the real of becoming never approaching the knowledge of logical connection.¹¹³ Yet, *chorismos*, in Plato and in Hobbes, is inseparable from *methexis* (participation), the taking part of the real in the ideal insofar as the ideal shines through (*ekphanesthai*) the real. The geometrical rules of political reason are re-imposed on the world of life, of history, of becoming. The intelligibility of the world according to the ideal is a kind of infinite relation between the finite world and the infinite, impossible perfection of geometrical science. The difference, *heteron*, of the real and the ideal, becoming and being, presupposes and implies a relation. Yet—and this is the crux—the separation remains, such that “this mediation cannot, in turn, mean that the infinite, the absolute being stands in some relation to the finite, empirical consciousness...we still cannot jump over that abyss.”¹¹⁴ What is required here then is an analysis not only of the *chorismos* of the “as if” that grounds the neutralization of the violent politics of history, but the way in which the *methexis* of the geometrical and the historical takes place in Hobbes’s thought.

§2: Writing the Origin: Modern Method and the Necessity of the Impossible

Hobbes writes that the founding of a commonwealth and the foundations of philosophy and science are intimately linked: “Leisure is the mother of philosophy; and Commonwealth, the mother of leisure” (XLVI. 6). The impossible foundation of the commonwealth establishes “leisure,” insofar as it stamps out the source of civil war—historical knowledge. Yet, this science, I will show here, works to justify and legitimate the very political founding that enables it by demanding the necessity of the impossible

¹¹³ Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, 17.

¹¹⁴ Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, 39.

origin. Only because the impossible origin separates us from the world in a Hobbesian *chorismos* is a *methexis* or participation of the world and scientific knowledge possible.

Strangely enough, despite the impossible, miraculous and even quasi-theological character of Hobbes's account of political creation, this impossible creation functions as merely one cog or wheel in a machine that proceeds according to automatic necessity.

William Connolly presents an apt description of what it is like to read Hobbes's text: "the reader of a text by Hobbes...is first drawn into a definitional web and then squeezed into a Hobbesian universe of rules and implications. By controlling the definitions Hobbes controls the implications to which the reader consents. In this sense he is a textual bureaucrat."¹¹⁵ If we attend to the way in which Hobbes's definitions are set up in a way such that they necessitate certain conclusions, to which any rational human being is led, we can see the way in which Hobbes's text does not merely describe the ways in which commonwealths come into being or fade away. In fact, it *does* something: it performs *operations*. Hobbes's *Leviathan* is, like the Leviathan it describes, a machine. Indeed, it is a text-machine. Its function is not to describe the origins but to produce them precisely so we can know them.

Hobbes's statements on the nature of philosophizing and knowledge in his *De Corpore* are instructive here. He writes that a philosopher must "imitate the creation." He even goes so far as to say that one imitates the very program of God's creation: one must first create light—the condition of knowledge—such that the rest of the world can be revealed in it once it is created.¹¹⁶ This creation, however, is not aimed at actually

¹¹⁵ William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (New York: Basil-Blackwell, 1988), 34.

¹¹⁶ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 5. Here the resonances between Hobbes's geometrical tendencies with Plato's *chorismos* can be seen again—Plato considers the good to be like a source of light that makes things intelligible.

making something but at revealing the necessary conditions under which and processes through which things must be generated. He writes that scientific knowledge is “knowledge we acquire, by true ratiocination, of appearances, or apparent effects, from the knowledge we have of some possible production or generation of the same.”¹¹⁷ Philosophy, likewise, is aimed at the same “so far as matter and human force permit,” and “as human life requireth” (XLVI.1). In light of this, we ought to read *Leviathan* as exactly this: a source of knowledge about commonwealths derived from the production of a commonwealth before our eyes, as it were, in thought. For Hobbes, knowledge is certain only insofar as it is of things we have made for ourselves.

Insofar as political theory is like geometry, governed by necessary rules, it is—like geometry—knowledge acquired through a process of resolution and composition (XX.19). We know the nature of a figure precisely because we drew it ourselves, and reverse engineered the rational and necessary processes by which one could reproduce it; this enables the easy and rational reconstruction of the geometrical object. As Sacksteder rightly puts it, “the converse movements of analysis and synthesis of geometrical reasoning are always exactly or perfectly inverse.”¹¹⁸ The analysis—the resolution into parts—of a shape can be absolutely complete and precise because we know every part, every process that goes into the creation of a geometrical object. The first move of geometry is to declare, “Suppose such and such a construction to be possible.”¹¹⁹ The commonwealth, likewise, is scientifically established first and foremost with an “*as if*,” an assertion and injunction to act as if such a thing were possible, to the

¹¹⁷ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 18.

¹¹⁸ William Sacksteder, “Three Diverse Sciences in Hobbes: First Philosophy, Geometry, Physics,” *Review of Metaphysics*, 45 (Jun. 1992): 766.

¹¹⁹ Sacksteder, “Three Diverse Sciences in Hobbes,” 767.

exclusion of all its conditions of impossibility. We saw in section one how this exclusion is established precisely by the impossibility of the origin in the “real” world of prudence and time, because its circularity renders the relationship of cause and effect inscrutable in terms of temporal sequence.

This erasure of time enables the transformation of cause and effect into non-temporal categories. In “strict science...the order of antecedent to consequent, though causal...is rather a structure of composition and containment than a sequence in any temporal sense.”¹²⁰ Cause and effect are rendered part of a synchronous system of logical links and connexions. The construction and reconstruction of a geometrical object, and a commonwealth, are reversible because they do not admit of any temporal sequence at all that might even *be* reversed.¹²¹ As Strauss aptly notes, in its “resolutive-compositive” method the science of politics becomes a technical science that starts from the reverse-engineering of a state and is potential for breaking down and stopping. Hobbes’s sees the ingress of historical discourse into the political debates of his time as akin to a broken gasket, or blocked pipe, that needs to be discovered by tearing apart—in thought—the entirety of the machine.¹²²

Here we can see how the *chorismos* established by the “as if” also enables the machine-like and necessary character of Hobbes’s text. Only by separating our thought from the rest of the world, with all its idiosyncrasies, contingencies, and histories, can we finally establish the Leviathan through an experiment in writing. Scientific knowledge

¹²⁰ Sacksteder, “Three Diverse Sciences in Hobbes,” 747.

¹²¹ On the link between perfect knowledge and reversible geometrical construction, see also Douglas M. Jesseph, “Hobbes and the Method of Natural Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77.

¹²² Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 152.

can have nothing to do with experience or prudence for expectation and experience will “frustrate the expectation of the most prudent” (XLVI.2).

Therefore the concern with knowledge as production—as a process of rational, logical demonstration rather than the apprehension of a given Nature—is inextricably linked with a certain alienation from the world. I described the intricacies of this alienation and the resulting “temporal finitude of thought” in chapter one, but one crucial way in which it is described in Hobbes is at the very origin of all thinking: we never think of something “itself,” or a body in the external world. We only think of the relation of that body to our senses, its impression upon us. We neither think only ourselves, nor the thing itself. We always experience the world by a degree of separation (I.2). As Richard Tuck puts it, what one perceives bears no relation of “verisimilitude to the external world,” such that one is “effectively a prisoner within the cell of his own mind, and has no idea what lies outside his prison walls.”¹²³ This is a characteristically modern conception of the relationship between thought and world: only after the “Closed World” of the scholastic and Aristotelian cosmos is destroyed by a combination of theoretical controversy within theology and empirical discoveries as a result of new technologies is thought finally utterly separated from the world. As Harries writes, as moderns, we “no longer experience the world as a well-ordered cosmos, resembling a house that shelters and grants us place.”¹²⁴ Koyre, likewise, argues that the scientific revolution—

¹²³ Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 40.

¹²⁴ Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 5.

inaugurated by Cusanus, Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton—results in a “destruction of the cosmos and the geometricization of space.”¹²⁵

Blumenberg captures and radicalizes the consequences of these interpretations of modernity by claiming that modernity is first and foremost characterized by a loss of the world. It is not that the world is now understood differently, or that we are no longer at home in it. Rather, it is that the world as such is now inaccessible to us. He writes of how Descartes rejected the astrophysics of Kepler and Tycho not because they described reality incorrectly but because these thinkers still aimed at a description of the “facts” of the world. They make the fundamental, and basically conservative, mistake of aiming at “an actual state of affairs” accessible by the understanding capacity of “man.”¹²⁶ Thinkers such as Descartes and Hobbes reply that moderns are no longer confronted with “the cosmos of the ancient world and of the metaphysical tradition.” What lies before thought is no longer a reality that is “already ‘finished,’” such that “all one can do is either adapt oneself to this order or violate it.”¹²⁷ What is there, instead, is no world at all other than that which we can generate or posit for ourselves in thought. The world, here, is not outside of us as something to which we either are or are not adequate, but rather a hypothetically posited, “unfinished” world made up of matter that we know precisely because it is we who have placed it there as it is. This is why, Arendt writes, “The modern astrophysical world view, which began with Galileo, and its challenge to the adequacy of the senses to reveal reality, have left us a universe whose qualities we know

¹²⁵ Alexandre Koyre, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), 2. See also 221-234 on this dynamic in Newton.

¹²⁶ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 206.

¹²⁷ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 215.

no more than the way they affect our measuring instruments, and instead of nature or the universe...man encounters only himself.”¹²⁸

Here, Hobbes’s description of thought as merely matter in motion paradoxically and perversely works to establish ideal thought’s separation from the world. The materialist description of “man” is here a hypothetical postulate of what Blumenberg calls modern “self-assertion,” the will to construct an ordered world for oneself in thought when there is no world as such. It is a “measuring instrument” for political science, aimed not at discovering the world but at an attempt to “read thy self” (Introduction, 3). The chaos of the state of nature is not a description of the world but rather the postulation of a “perfect chaos.”¹²⁹ It is *perfect* because we ascertain it through a scientific process of analysis and resolution of an ideal commonwealth into its constituent parts and processes, which include, as part of a closed field of political knowledge, the notion that human thought is utterly material. In Blumenberg’s terms, the “zero point of the disappearance of order and the point of departure of the construction of order are identical; the minimum of ontological predisposition is at the same time the maximum of creative potentiality.”¹³⁰ The chaos of matter is not a natural discovery but simply a postulate, a clearing upon which Hobbes can erect the edifice of political science as a perfect thought. Anyone can derive the first principles of political science from the “analytic method,” because they will eventually arrive at the state of nature and therefore deductive knowledge of what follows from it—as long as one is willing to

¹²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 261.

¹²⁹ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 219.

¹³⁰ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 220.

“examine his own mind.”¹³¹ Hobbes’s materialism here does a double work as a necessary supposition for the generation of a commonwealth and as a postulation of “man’s” separation from the “real” world. That is, it functions simultaneously as a postulate *and* a vindication of the use of postulates. Indeed, even in regard to the situation in the natural condition, it is precisely because, as in science, “there is no fact of the matter” in “doubtful cases,” that we require the imposition of a sovereign power.¹³² The epistemological separation is intimately linked not only with the form of Hobbes’s analysis and synthesis of a commonwealth, but also its content as a conflict over unknowable cases.

The fundamental point here is that the *chorismos* of Hobbes’s text is not a Platonic one that would lead us to discover a true reality hidden behind the world’s becoming. Instead, what is established through the *chorismos* is a pure chaos in the face of which we face a maximum of both creative freedom and alienation. The ideal realm of reason is not something ascertained by us, but generated by us. The closed system of ratiocination enabled by the *chorismos*, indeed, the separation itself, is posited through the establishment of the meanings of words, which, once established, allows us to unfold the indisputable logical relations between words. Once we posit words for ourselves, we can “reckon the consequences” of these names perfectly in abstraction from worldly contingency. The lack of any universals in the world—the only thing universal being names (IV)—is not a limitation on thought but enables thought’s freedom from the shackles of essences and Nature. Medieval nominalism was an anxious thinking insofar as it plunged human thought into a “chaos of individual beings,” wherein every word we

¹³¹ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 26

¹³² Tuck, *Hobbes*, 65.

use, every extra term, is another step away from the reality of particular things.¹³³ Hobbes sees this not only as a hindrance but also as an invitation to establish his own reality in an act of creative self-assertion, and for human beings to establish a political community on a purely artificial, and thus purely free, basis. Hobbes's *chorismos* of the origin is an act of creative destruction that enables, therefore, the postulation and writing of a new origin as a purely artificial, and indisputable, origin.

Thus the *methexis*, as the participation of the "world" in this ideal construction, can only be the re-imposition of the generations of science onto the world as what *is*. Such is revealed in the incredible influence of Galileo on Hobbes, from whom Hobbes discovered the fact that the world is "nothing but matter in motion." Husserl's analysis of Galileo is instructive here in light of the analysis of Hobbes's political science as an act of self-assertion. Husserl writes that when as post-Galilean thinkers we posit the world as mathematical, we "mathematicize" the world. In this "geometrical and natural-scientific mathematicization, in the open infinity of possible experiences, we measure the life-world—the world constantly given to us as actual in our concrete world-life—for a well-fitting garb of ideas, that of so-called objectively scientific truth."¹³⁴ This garb of ideas is not an idea about reality. It is method itself, a process of generation founded by an act of postulation that *orders* reality as such.

For Hobbes himself, scientific method is characterized by beginning from the "settled definitions" of words from which we begin reasoning, and "proceeding...to assertions made by connexions of one assertion to another, till we come to a knowledge

¹³³ Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008), 29.

¹³⁴ Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, 51.

of all the consequences of names appertaining to the subject at hand” (V.8,17). This method is not merely discovery but generation: the consequences, “syllogisms,” are not (as in Aristotle) proofs or confirmations of what we must already know but the discovery of the new. We proceed from known names to the unknown through computation and generation.¹³⁵ This unknown to which we proceed, however, is not a series of propositions about the “real” world that would “have to compete with a traditional truth,” but a “postulate of reason assuring itself of its possibilities in the world—a postulate of self-assertion,” in Blumenberg’s terms.¹³⁶ This postulation, this result of methodical generation, is read back into the world as what really is there in the Galilean gesture of mathematicization: as this method, the way (*met’hodos*) through which we approach the world, is not a traditional forest path carved by travellers since time immemorial but a new road, planned, declared and constructed by us for ourselves. When we erect this method in the world as the principle of knowing the world as such, we dress the world up in it, in the garb of ideas. In doing so, we “take for true being what is actually a method.”¹³⁷ In other words, the fundamental gesture of Husserl here, and Blumenberg, is to show that the generation of ideal knowledge is written back into the world as reality itself. We take the generative process of methodical creation and construction—a performative establishment or postulation of truth—for a constative, descriptive explanation of reality. The text-machine, *Leviathan*, both generates a commonwealth and re-writes it into the world as the world itself.

¹³⁵ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 9, 37 on demonstration as generation “before one’s eyes.”

¹³⁶ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 209-210.

¹³⁷ Husserl, *Crisis of the European Sciences*, 51.

Hobbes modern political science, then, like modern science in general, is characterized by an undecideable relationship between performative generation and constantive signification. It is unclear, for example, whether the “people” of the commonwealth is referred to, or generated by the contract. Derrida has discussed this as the very condition under which contractual political thinking can work: the fact that it is unclear whether a constitution—or a text of political science such as *Leviathan*—describes or generates the origin is exactly what is required to “produce the desired effect,” namely, the establishment of a polity guaranteed by the consent of some subject that undergirds it.¹³⁸

We can elucidate this undecideable relation between production and explanation, and the impossible “as if” and the historical world, more clearly by attending to Hobbes’s distinction between commonwealths by “acquisition” and “institution.” Hobbes claims that commonwealths by institution are founded “when men agree amongst themselves to submit to one man, or assembly of men, voluntarily.” In other words, commonwealths by institution are created through the impossible contract of the “as if” of mutual agreement. Commonwealths by acquisition, apparently in contradistinction, arise through “natural force, as when a man maketh his children submit themselves...as being able to destroy them if they refuse” (XVII.15). Foucault has challenged this clear distinction, claiming that in fact, empirically, all commonwealths originate in conquest, and that Hobbes’s goal is to efface the conquest.¹³⁹

Indeed, I think Foucault is right to say that, given Hobbes’s claim that “there is scarce a commonwealth in the world whose beginnings can in conscience be justified,” it

¹³⁸Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” *New Political Science* 7 (1986): 9.

¹³⁹ Michel Foucault, “*Society Must be Defended*”, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).

seems obvious that Hobbes himself thinks that all commonwealths, properly speaking, are commonwealths by acquisition in some sense. Hobbes's text, indeed, is, given his discourse in the "Review and Conclusion," aimed entirely at discerning the obligations subjects have to conquerors, and what they should do given that they already live under conquerors who gained power through natural force: Hobbes's political science aims to teach us at "what point in time it is that a subject becomes obliged to the conqueror" (Review and Conclusion, 6), namely, "that point wherein, having liberty to submit to him, he consenteth... to be his subject."

What this avowedly historical and temporal goal shows, however, is that all commonwealths by acquisition are also commonwealths by institution. Indeed, Hobbes claims in the generation of commonwealths by institution and by acquisition individuals submit "for fear" (XX.1). This conflation of acquisition and institution according to fear is enabled by Hobbes's thesis that contracts that proceed from fear are valid because I still will to covenant, even if motivated by fear (XIV.27), just as "when a man throweth his goods into the sea for fear the ship should sink...nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to do it if he will" (XXI.3). Thus, the fact that both proceed from fear also means they both proceed from free covenant. Even in commonwealths established through force and victory, "it is not therefore the victory that giveth the right of dominion over the vanquished, but his [the conquered's] own covenant" (XX.11). Commonwealths by acquisition are established, just as those by institution, by a contract among a multitude to submit mutually to a conqueror. And the consequence Hobbes draws out of this coincidence of acquisition and institution is that the "rights and consequences" of "despotical dominion are the very same with those of a sovereign by institution, and for

the same reasons” (XX.14). In sum, a commonwealth by acquisition must also be a commonwealth by institution, the only difference being that one results from a conquest and not a dangerous state of nature. In this, the contract of the “as if,” separated from the world through its impossibility as a temporal or historical event, is written back into the world, such that subjects can discern the proper moment in which they *must have* already submitted, in a perfectly impossible contract, to the sovereign under which they live, because otherwise they would live in perpetual fear, or be dead.

This curious superimposition of the impossible ideal of Hobbes’s geometrical political science onto the historical world is revealed in a more stark and obvious way by his discussion of paternal power. There, he claims that the dominion of a parent over his or her children is not through generation. Children do not owe their parents obedience because their parents created them and are the principle of their very being. Hobbes shatters any idea of organic familial wholeness and claims that authority over children follows “from the child’s consent, either express or by sufficient arguments declared” (XX.4). The child must consent out of fear, just as the vanquished do: “Seeing the infant is first in the power of the mother, so she may either nourish or expose it, if she nourish it, it oweth its life to the mother, and is therefore obliged to obey her rather than any other, and by consequence the dominion over it is hers” (XX.5). In other words, the infant, because it would otherwise die without surrendering to the mother, submits in fear before it is factually possible for an infant or child to give even tacit consent. As Curley notes, this requirement of consent is “difficult to reconcile with the child’s immaturity in its earliest years.”¹⁴⁰ Yet this reconciliation lies at the heart of Hobbes’s political theory:

¹⁴⁰ Edwin Curley, note to Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 128.

the impossible contract cannot happen, especially not between an infant and its mother, whose nourishment saves it from death. But this contract must happen, must have happened. A child cannot consent, but will, and must have, to continue to live.

This double writing of the origin as simultaneously a contingent, free contract and the only possible contract is what Baumgold has aptly called “paradoxical contractarianism.” She contends that contract theory became philosophical and logical only at the expense of “advancing the paradoxical position that human beings would choose to have the relationship with their rulers that must exist between them.”¹⁴¹ This paradoxical position for Baumgold amounts to a depoliticization, insofar as the particular content and origins of commonwealths are replaced by the logical necessity of a commonwealth coming about, a logical argument that can be repeated to anyone, in any context, that works not to convince or persuade but to “discipline the will” by escaping into “introspection.”¹⁴² Baumgold aptly captures here the double dynamic of escape into introspection and a re-writing of the origin according to repeatable necessary principles.¹⁴³

This depoliticization is made possible by Hobbes’ reading of the geometrically generated commonwealth into the historical and political world as the condition whereby the world is intelligible at all. The method of contract by institution is taken for true being; Hobbes stitches a garb of ideas with his circular, impossible and ideal

¹⁴¹ Deborah Baumgold, “Hobbesian Absolutism and the Paradox of Modern Contractarianism,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 8 (2009): 219.

¹⁴² Baumgold, “Hobbesian Absolutism,” 222.

¹⁴³ Here I hope to have expanded on Baumgold’s already excellent account by showing the ways in which this paradox arises from Hobbes’s specific understanding of science and his response to modern alienation. In the conclusion to this chapter and in the next chapter I hope to point to ways in which this paradox not only reveals problems with Hobbes’s account but points beyond it; I am indebted greatly to Baumgold’s excellent formulation of the paradoxes of Hobbes’s contract.

commonwealth by institution and dresses the historical world in it. The “as if” becomes the principle by which we come to understand and know the world precisely because Hobbes posits the “as if” as what is really there, as the real itself. What Alexandre Koyre remarks about Galileo’s *Two New Sciences* could then easily be said of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, namely that it is an “amazing attempt to explain the real by the impossible—or, which is the same thing, to explain real being by mathematical being.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, just as for Galileo “bodies moving in straight lines in infinite empty space are not *real* bodies moving in *real* space, but *mathematical* bodies moving in *mathematical* space,” Hobbes’s impossible contract is not a real contract happening in real time but a generation of geometrical thought, posited back into the world as the *measure* of the real. Hobbes’s self-assertion here comes to its apogee, in that the impossible, perfectly generated commonwealth in writing is posited as the world itself.

Like Galileo’s *New Science*, Hobbes’s political science is an assertion, rather than a discovery, that *a priori*, geometrical knowledge is prior to and determines the character of the world: “it is ‘imaginary’ concepts which enable us to understand and explain nature,” and indeed, the political world as well.¹⁴⁵ Precisely because we produce and generate a commonwealth in writing, according to its internal principles of production and coming to be prior to experience, “out of that we can presently do, we know how to do something else when we will, or the like, another time...when the like causes come into our power, we see how to make it produce the like effects” (V.17). Only by writing the ideal—the impossible—into the world as the only possible generation of a commonwealth can we prevent the “imperfect generation,” and ensure an

¹⁴⁴ Koyre, “Galileo and Plato,” 418-419

¹⁴⁵ Alexandre Koyre, *Galileo Studies*, trans. John Mepham (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 37.

“absolute and arbitrary legislative power” that is guaranteed according to rational necessity (Review and Conclusion, 8). The *chorismos*, the separation of the “as if” from the historical and prudential world, is inextricably linked to a *methexis*.

We can summarize this dynamic of separation and connection in the hypothesis of the origin by simply pointing to the *double work* of the hypothesis. On the one hand, to speak hypothetically is to abstract from the concrete world of experience and contingency and establish repeatability. This separation, therefore, the “as if,” works to ensure the perfect closure of a rational and geometrical system of necessary consequences and causes: precisely because it is radically separated from the world of change, circumstance, and contingency, the impossible contract “constitutes the rigorously limited, closed, and original autonomy of a field.”¹⁴⁶

On the other hand, this delimited field of rationality read back into the world, posited as the world, in the second work of the hypothesis. As Derrida writes in his analysis of hypothesis’s relation to political power, the hypothesis “will have signified before all else the base or basis, the infrastructure posed beneath or at the bottom of a foundation.”¹⁴⁷ To hypothesize is to “put under,” *hypothēmi*. The *arche* is first “command and commencement,” authorization and beginning, but is secondly inextricably linked to the archive, the *archeion*. It is “the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded,” Derrida writes.¹⁴⁸ What Derrida’s admittedly strange allusion to *arche*’s relation to the place of power, as opposed to

¹⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, “The Linguistic Circle of Geneva,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 145. Although Derrida is discussing Rousseau’s account of the origin of language, he deals with a structurally similar circularity in the modern story of origins to the one I discern in Hobbes’s account of the origin of political community, precisely because the question of the origin of language comes down to the origin of society: see page 144.

¹⁴⁷ Derrida, *Rogues*, 136.

¹⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* 25 (1995): 9.

merely the beginning and commandment that is traditionally associated with *arche* (e.g., in Arendt's analysis of action), tells us is that the hypothesis does not only abstract but places, *posits*.

This paradoxical topology of the *hypothesis*, of effacement and postulation, of escape from and return to the world, allows Hobbes to render the world as calculable and predictable on the basis of an unpredictable, miraculous event of creation. Precisely because we escape the world through the *chorismos* of the "as if," we can establish perfect control and understanding of the world we confront as otherwise contingent and unpredictable.

§3. The Calculable and the Incalculable: Heidegger, Derrida, and Hobbes's Project

We need to understand Hobbes's political science first of all as a *project*—as, so to speak, a *projection*. Hobbes's political science, as a peculiarly modern science, "demands a fundamental representation of things that contradict the ordinary."¹⁴⁹ It demands, as a first principle, a perfectly impossible and non-existent contract, knowable only a priori by a kind of self-assertive reasoning. Like Galileo, Hobbes's political science is mathematical: it proceeds from a mathematicization of nature, a positing of nature according to what we always and already know from the generative power of logical consequence independent of whatever is "there." Given Hobbes's claim to establish a political science whose certainty is akin to the geometrical perfection of mathematics, I will here, with reference to Heidegger, discuss the meaning of the mathematical as it pertains to Hobbes's account, and adumbrate its consequences for political judgment.

¹⁴⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1993), 289.

Heidegger's first thesis about modern, "mathematical" science is that it is premised on a mode of thought, a determination of and approach to things that is "not experientially derived from the thing[s]," and yet makes them possible, "making room for them." The mathematical proceeds in such a way that we learn what we already, prior to experience, know: "The *mathemata* are the things insofar as we take cognizance of them as what we already know them to be in advance." Mathematical learning is "a taking of what one already has."¹⁵⁰ A mathematical science approaches the world against experience, gathering instead what is already had, what already is known, from what is. Thus, in Heidegger's example, three apples do not tell us anything about "three." "Three" as such is already-known, the very condition, prior to experience, that always-already allows the fact that the apples are three to approach us.¹⁵¹ The specifically modern mode of the mathematical, as I hinted in section two, however, is generated by us, postulated and generated through the thought of a subject, rather than a discovery of ideal forms that are always-already there—even if we sometimes take our own generations for transcendent ideas. However, as Heidegger is quick to note, although we privilege number as the paradigmatic form of the mathematical, the nature of the mathematical is simply the "always-already-known," that which is projected into the world and allows the world and things in it to come to experience for a subject.¹⁵²

Heidegger argues that while modern thought and modern science tends to use quantity and numbers to understand the world, this is only a secondary effect of a primary establishment of the world according to what one already knows—a projection.

¹⁵⁰ Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," 275.

¹⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 119.

¹⁵² Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 119-120

Therefore if physics, for example, or political science, is mathematical, what is meant by this is that “something is stipulated in advance as what is already-known,” *before* one comes to experience the world at all. This stipulation is what Blumenberg, I think, would call self-assertion, the creation of a world to be known by modern subjects. What is at work, in other words, is that what is posited is “nothing less than the plan or projection of that which must henceforth, for the knowing of nature that is sought after, be nature”—in the case of modern physics, “a self-contained system of motion of units of mass related spatiotemporally.”¹⁵³ A “fixed ground plan” is written into the world as the world itself, such that the events with which we are confronted in scientific experience are already projected and known; we do not discover the new but take what we already have. Only in this can modern science “make secure for itself its sphere of objects within the realm of being.” In other words, faced with the loss of a world and what Gillespie calls the “chaos of particular beings,” only through the projection of a ground-plan of what is according to what we already know can we experience the world as ordered and knowable. This, then, is the more exact understanding of exactitude: exactitude is not accuracy in computation but accuracy in one’s adherence to one’s projected ground-plan.¹⁵⁴

Thus, in the case of the Galilean science that had such a profound impact on Hobbes’s thinking, one thinks, ahead of experience, “in my mind of something movable that is left entirely to itself.” This nascent law of inertia is thought in the mind, such that

¹⁵³ Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 119.

¹⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 120. For example, Heidegger writes that the historical sciences require rejection of numerical calculation for proper exactitude in relation to scientific procedure.

“there is a prior grasping” of the world and of bodies in the world.¹⁵⁵ The equality of all bodies to other bodies in an infinite, geometrical universe is not a discovery of fact but a postulation of reason: it is for this reason that Galileo’s opponents were perplexed by his continuing to hold his view on inertia and the equal velocity of falling bodies despite a slightly different falling-time.¹⁵⁶ Modern science does not proceed from things but determines and comports the things to a grasping projected ahead of time. This is why it is held onto precisely against the evidence of experience, of qualitative and contingent differences in the real as opposed to the ideal: because the real is always and already measured by the impossible ideal, worked out in thought.

According to Heidegger, only according to this projection of the world can we arrive at any sort of predictable calculability. This is because the modern ground-plan of physical science presupposes the world as a self-contained system of units, of bodies that are all alike, differentiated from one another not by what they contain or their essences, but instead by the way in which they move through space, i.e., where they are related to one position or another. Only when everything can be reduced to a single plane, a single level, can one properly calculate the movements and relations between each thing. This is because only when there is no longer a distinction between various levels of the universe—say, between the earthly and the celestial¹⁵⁷—that would enable a hierarchy of being, can we finally establish a measure common to all of them, namely, number or quantity itself.

¹⁵⁵ Heidegger, “Mathematics, Metaphysics, and Modern Science,” 291

¹⁵⁶ Heidegger, “Mathematics, Metaphysics, and Modern Science,” 290.

¹⁵⁷ Heidegger, “Mathematics, Metaphysics, and Modern Science,” 286.

Hobbes himself establishes this as a postulation about nature: his first philosophy concerns “cause,” “quantity,” and “place” in themselves, without differentiation. He posits logical cause, quantity, and position in space as the condition of possibility for things to be individuated and appear as things. This is because they are the most common “accidents.” Because they are common to everything, they must also be present for everything to be.¹⁵⁸ In *Leviathan* he claims that everything in the universe is body. In light of Heidegger’s analysis we can see that this is, given his sceptical argument about experience in chapter one of *Leviathan*, not an observation but a postulation prior to experience. Indeed, first philosophy, the projection of the world prior to one’s experience of it in the various sciences, for Hobbes “provides those bare parameters under which specific quantities or magnitudes are to be noted or compared or calculated with precision.”¹⁵⁹

However, precisely because quantity, “body,” or number itself is most universal and undifferentiated (being the condition for differentiation) it cannot be known or discerned by looking to particular things. Knowledge of them can only be arrived at through an uncaused postulation. As Hobbes writes in his *De Corpore*, “In the teaching of natural philosophy, I cannot begin better...than from privation; that is, from feigning the world to be annihilated.” For, “after the destruction of all things, I suppose man still remaining, and namely that he thinks, imagines, and remembers.”¹⁶⁰ In this remembering we remember things, surely, but also can deduce, for example, pure space, a “phantasm of a thing existing without the mind simply,” i.e., that which is purely external but in

¹⁵⁸ Sacksteder, “Three Diverse Sciences in Hobbes,” 758.

¹⁵⁹ Sacksteder, “Three Diverse Sciences in Hobbes,” 755-6.

¹⁶⁰ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 43-44.

which things have not appeared.¹⁶¹ Since space always appears with things in it, this is a mere postulation not deducible from experience; however, it forms the uncaused and indisputable principle of all things that we come to know.

Likewise, time is a “phantasm of a before and after in motion,” or “a measure of motion,” which itself is not deducible from our experience of motion but must be posited beforehand, after a clearing or “annihilation” of the world, such that we can actually perceive motion as motion in time at all.¹⁶² As Heidegger writes, the essence of positing is the “proposition,” “I posit”: in the “I posit” what is left untouched is the capacity to posit itself. The postulation of the world’s fundamental characteristics “does not depend on something given beforehand, but only gives to itself what lies within it.”¹⁶³ The certainty of the capacity of “man still remaining” constitutes the basis upon which Hobbes can postulate a world through self-assertion.

Only, now, when we have considered the way in which an incalculable annihilation of experience and projection of the world precedes and makes possible the calculability of the world are we in a position to understand the way in which Hobbes’s political science is exact, and the consequences this exactitude has for political judgment. Hobbes’s political science is not a discernment of what is from things, but a project that circumscribes the world before we meet it in experience. The perfect generation of a commonwealth in thought is that which we already “have,” and that which we will apprehend in the world. Just as in the modern procedure of science, whereby a ground-plan of nature projects all “events” as the movement of bodies in an infinite system of

¹⁶¹ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 45.

¹⁶² Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 47.

¹⁶³ Heidegger, “Mathematics, Metaphysics, and Modern Science,” 302.

space, in Hobbes's geometrical procedure of political science we render political origins as the result of inevitable free consent and an impossible, ideal contract. Just as early modern scientists following Galileo had to expel unquantifiable qualities such as colour from properly scientific knowledge as merely subjective and unknowable, Hobbes expels the vicissitudes of historical events, opinions, and religious conscience as merely subjective, private judgments that tell us nothing about the principles by which a commonwealth is generated. The "sphere of being," that Hobbes circumscribes is not discovered but posited prior to and against our concrete experience of the world. The concrete experience of the world cannot be accessed any longer except by means of a postulate of self-assertion.

The result is a *capture of the event* through self-assertion. The events that scientific subjectivity confronts are always-already construed as part of a ground-plan that delimits the world in terms of calculability. Hobbes's avowed aim in his political philosophy is to provide a scheme of political judgment that would work mechanically and automatically, without regard for the contingency of the historical or spatio-temporal situation in which one judges. He writes in his *Elements of Law* that "were the nature of humane Actions as distinctly knowne, as the nature of Quantity in Geometrical Figures," we would enjoy an "Immortall Peace."¹⁶⁴ This calculability is established by the political postulation and creation of a "right reason" by which we might judge any particular political event. In thinkers such as Aristotle, right reason (*orthos logos*) was, while rational, also particular to the circumstances in which one judged and the norms,

¹⁶⁴ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, quoted in David Johnston, "Plato, Hobbes and the Science of Practical Reasoning," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990), 46.

traditions, and exemplars one might imitate.¹⁶⁵ For Hobbes, however, the finitude of human thought reveals the absence of a “right reason in nature.” In the absence of this natural right reason, we establish for ourselves a measure of right reason, called sovereignty.

The sovereign, precisely through its fundamentally arbitrary judgments about our disputes, provides, according to Hobbes, a rational and agreeable measure of political judgment. In its absence our “controversy must either come to blows or be undecided” (V.3). The postulation of a right reason in the form of sovereign power establishes truth; the truth about which we can necessarily agree, and which all human beings can deduce for themselves in political judgment, is established through the necessary logical consequences of sovereign judgments and the necessity of sovereignty *per se*. Hobbes’s political science, by annihilating the world and redrawing it in thought, reveals that we can only have reason at all if a sovereign exists. This establishes the measure, quantity itself, number itself, for political calculations: political science becomes reduced to a calculus aimed at ensuring the perfect functioning of the state, which we can derive from Hobbes’s preliminary generation of a commonwealth on paper. Chapter XXX of *Leviathan*, on the dissolution of a commonwealth and those things that weaken it, provides a preliminary look at the particular manifestations of this calculus: what things weaken sovereignty and what things ensure its rational functioning? In all of them, what is crucial is that, as Johnston writes, “The reason of the person or persons who possess

¹⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport: Focus, 2002), 1140b20-30. “Right reason,” in political matters is always for Aristotle bound up with the proper behaviour in particular circumstances, with one’s judgment of the concrete situation in relation to one’s being as a whole. In other words, it was not a technical application but a question of wisdom, of what kind of person one should be or aspires to be. Thus there are no theoretical truths that guarantee that one acts *kata orthos logos*.

sovereign power supplies the place of right reason.”¹⁶⁶ Hobbes’s science of political judgment would not therefore be, as he hoped, perfectly quantitative, but it would be calculative, an act of “adding and subtracting,” dividing and composing the premises and results of sovereign reason in abstraction from the contingency of judgment. The events of political life with which we are confronted are first and foremost projected and understood in light of a “form or constitution,” a projection of the perfect, impossible commonwealth and its origins onto the world. This gives subjects encountering the world a mastery over the new, such that what comes to us is always rendered as something we already have known, as a mathematical truth. This, of course, is the sense in which Hobbes’s political science is exact. It is exact not because it uses number and quantity but because it is mathematical: it adheres—exactly—to a ground plan that circumscribes the realm of political life, securing a “sphere of being.”

What is lost in this calculative practical reasoning founded upon a postulation of the world—a postulation of knowledge as what we make for ourselves—is the event *qua* event. I would say that Derrida, taking up Heidegger’s own concept of the “event” or *Ereignis*, characterizes the event as having three basic elements. First, the event is bound for Derrida also to the arrival of the “Other,” and is thus *radically different and heterogeneous*: in *Aporias* he writes that any event “worthy of that name,” any event that “most arrives...does not simply cross a given threshold. [It] affects the very experience of the threshold...does not cross a threshold separating two identifiable places.” The event arrives from a place of “non-identity,” indeed, does not have an identity.¹⁶⁷ It arrives, but not as movement: movement over a predetermined threshold would not be an event but

¹⁶⁶ Johnston, “Plato, Hobbes and the Science of Practical Reasoning,” 48,

¹⁶⁷ Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 20-21.

motion between two spaces of identity. Second, therefore, the event is *incalculable*, an “unforeseeable and incalculable irruption,” precisely because it cannot be foreseen on any horizon, or rendered measurable by a third term—history, logic, being—that would identify a connection between the event and to what or to whom it arrives.¹⁶⁸ Third, the event is, given the structure of what is, *impossible*. Especially relevant here for the interpretation of Hobbes is Derrida’s claim that invention is an event. An event, Derrida writes, is impossible: “invention is an event...it’s a matter of finding, of bringing out, of making what is not yet here come to be. Inventing, if it is possible, is not inventing.” In other words, “If I invent what I can invent, what is possible for me to invent, I’m not inventing...if the structure of the field [of possible knowledge and activity] makes an invention possible,” then it is not properly an invention.¹⁶⁹

In other words, the event is that which is in excess of the project of modern science—namely, what cannot be expected. If modern self-assertion is manifested here first of all in the “power to foresee events, to anticipate them, to alter or produce them,” the event is that which arrives on no horizon or according to no measure. For the Hobbesian subject, the event as that which cannot be foreseen is a kind of abyss, which inaugurates the original anxiety that drives the human subject to project an edifice of rational deduction that escapes temporal sequence (XII.4-5). The entirety of Hobbes’s account is aimed at the perfect generation of a commonwealth, and a reading of the world in light of this perfect generation, such that it is the only possibility. Here Hobbes’s politics of origins works to determine the sense of the future, and not only the past:

¹⁶⁸ Derrida, *Rogues*, 128.

¹⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” trans. Gila Walker, *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007): 450.

precisely because we project the world as resulting from an origin, a miraculous and impossible contract, we can render all the events with which we are confronted in the future in terms of a calculus of sovereign power.

Yet, the imposition of the impossible onto the world as the only possibility itself necessitates the postulation of the impossible. The impossible event of founding is, in Derrida's sense, an event. It is the impossible itself: that which, in the very conditions in which it must happen, is impossible. The original promise, Hamacher writes, can only be a "wild promise": what the covenanters give "must be a promise before any order in which this gift would be knowable or recognizable as a promise and could be perceived and answered as such. No promise would be necessary, if there were already a social, linguistic and symbolic order that could secure for the promise continual stability and unambiguity."¹⁷⁰ The original promise is exactly that—original. It brings into being, miraculously, that which was not before. As the "measure" of "real" political origins, this abyssal, impossible, incalculable promise must have been, and must be. Hobbes's thought, precisely by postulating the impossible as the necessary condition for a separation from the world, and for a machine-like system of logical consequence, also reveals the incalculable event that exceeds this system. The invention of society, the invention of justice, truth, and reason, can only be an impossible event. It can only happen—as an invention, as what it must be—under conditions in which it is in principle excluded as a possibility.

¹⁷⁰ Werner Hamacher, "Wild Promises: On the Language 'Leviathan'," *CR: Centennial Review* 4 (2004): 222.

Heidegger concludes his essay on technology by investigating the logic of the gigantic—the logic, we might say, of the monster, of the Leviathan. He writes in an enigmatic passage that

“As soon as the gigantic in planning and calculating and adjusting and making secure shifts over out of the quantitative and becomes a special quality, then what is gigantic, and what can seemingly always be calculated completely, becomes, precisely through this, incalculable. This becoming incalculable remains the invisible shadow that is cast around all things everywhere when man has been transformed into *subiectum* and the world into picture.”¹⁷¹

The encounter with the world as basically calculable makes appear the “gigantic” in a certain way, which both reveals and conceals: an airplane is “gigantic” for Heidegger in the sense that it makes the seemingly gigantic disappear. The gigantic is, in fact, the incalculable, rather than simply “the endlessly extended emptiness of the purely quantitative.”¹⁷² This gigantic incalculability is concealed yet revealed by the conquering of the calculable (thus only seemingly gigantic) gigantic space. In other words, mastery of extensive calculable space both conceals the incalculable by seemingly showing the gigantic to be conquerable through technology but also makes possible the incalculable—the airplane’s capacity to alter the experience of time and space—which is hidden by calculation in the form of a shadow. It is hidden as the “shadow that is cast around all things everywhere” because all one can think of are the ways in which the incalculable is hidden by the calculable and thus seen in its hiddenness. The impossibility of the contract is gigantic in this sense.

¹⁷¹ Heidegger, *On the Question Concerning Technology*, 135.

¹⁷² Heidegger, *On the Question Concerning Technology*, 135.

Likewise, the incalculable event, for Heidegger and for Derrida, strikes us only in withdrawal. As Heidegger writes, “what must be thought turns away from man. It withdraws from him.” The incalculable is concealed in the modern project of scientific procedure—but this concealing, this withdrawing, is also a touching. “Withdrawal is not nothing. Withdrawal is an event.” Heidegger argues that the withdrawal of the incalculable—the excess, that which escapes capture—may concern a thinker more than anything “present that strikes and touches him.”¹⁷³ The very withdrawal of that which refuses arrival allows it to strike us as present in its absence. “Man is debarred precisely from what concerns him and touches him—touches him in the surely mysterious way of escaping him by its withdrawal.”¹⁷⁴ This is, I think, the only way to think the impossible, to think the event that Hobbes’s political science must capture as the only possibility, but which ultimately escapes ratiocination. While the impossibility of the contract establishes the calculability of the world as it appears to us, and precisely because it does so, it is itself incalculable and unthinkable as such. It can only be thought in the ways in which it is concealed and obscured by the very calculability it founds. It thus resembles the shadow at the edge of calculability that, precisely in its darkness, testifies to a hidden light.¹⁷⁵ In Derrida’s terms, we are here speaking of something that “can only exceed (and must exceed) the order of theoretical determination, of knowledge, certainty, judgment...in other words, more generally and essentially, the order of the present and of presentation.”¹⁷⁶ Hobbes’s thought here does not only offer a closure, a pure thought of

¹⁷³ Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking?” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 374.

¹⁷⁴ Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking?” 374.

¹⁷⁵ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 154.

¹⁷⁶ Derrida, *Aporias*, 20

absolutism, but the injunction to postulate and create according to the impossible, the impossible that in principle always exceeds our thought as the un-thought in all thought.

Conclusion: Aporetic Origins, Impossible Politics

What I have shown here is that Hobbes's account of political origins first and foremost works to separate thought from world, as an escape hatch from the vagaries and limitations of history's influence on political thought. This separation also, however, is a connection: a connection whereby the impossible contract, and thus the perfect geometrical construction of the commonwealth governed by the "as if," is projected back into the world as the principle by which the political world can appear at all. However, this seemingly clear separation and relation of *chorismos* and *methexis* is unsettled by the way in which the incalculable and calculable pass into each other in Hobbes's thought: the origin must both be rendered as absolutely necessary and a miraculous, impossible creation. Thus, the origin is first and foremost confronted in Hobbes's thought as an *aporia*, an im-passe. An *aporia* is not simply confusion, or a perplexity; it is a situation in which we can go no further. It is not that we cannot go further because something stands in our way. Rather, what stands in the way of thought is the fact that the very boundary between the possible and the impossible, the calculable and the incalculable, the world of predictable events and the miraculous moment of founding, is not a boundary between two spaces that stops movement but rather a "milieu [that] does not allow for something that could be called passage." The *aporia* "stems from the fact that there is no limit. There is not yet, or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable, and indeterminate."¹⁷⁷ The

¹⁷⁷ *Aporias*, 20-21

boundary between the light of calculable reason and the incalculable shadow it casts is itself an incalculable abyss, revealed only in its concealing of what is incalculable.

Yet, it is only in a situation of utter *aporia*, of impossibility, that thought can surprise itself, and that politics as event can occur. The aporetic circularity of origins is not a matter of logical incoherence but a specifically modern existential situation that opens us to the impossibility of ever fully shielding ourselves from the impossible.

As Derrida writes, it is only because there is an undecidable relationship between the incalculable positing of the world and the calculable signification of it that there can be justice: “justice [as] the experience of absolute alterity is unrepresentable” as calculative and knowable, but “it is the chance of the event and the condition of history.”¹⁷⁸ The incalculable excess, the necessary possibility of beginning something absolutely new and impossible, is the very condition for an “interminable politicization.”¹⁷⁹ Only in the face of the aporetic overlap between the calculable and the incalculable in projection can the excess of the impossible, in its very withdrawal, drive us to think and create the new, to demand the politicization of what is deemed apolitical. Hobbes’s modernism—his alienation from a world he himself posits—is not merely a violent destruction of organic wholeness but the opening of a field of play and change through which we come to be otherwise than we are. Hobbes’s thought therefore provides a site in which we can carry out what Derrida calls the “thought of the future,” or the thought through which we can have a future at all: namely, to think the machine and the event—automatic repetition and miraculous irruption—together as “indissociable concepts,” such that the machine is

¹⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law,” 971.

¹⁷⁹ Derrida, “Force of Law,” 973.

always disrupted by the event of that which cannot be thought or predicted precisely in its machine-like character.¹⁸⁰

Thus, if what Hobbes offers us is a kind of political telescope, much like Galileo's—a technology of political discovery—his challenge to us is this: do we have the courage to look? Do we have the courage to look into the telescope and find not the world in relief but only ourselves, transformed? Do we have, then, Hobbes says, the courage to look into his new political machine and find the impossible, the unthinkable, and thus find ourselves “in a place where everything is different, so different that it strikes us as strange”?¹⁸¹ Or will we reject it because it represents to us a monument of violence and destruction?

¹⁸⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Typewriter Ribbon,” in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 72.

¹⁸¹ Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking?” 387.

Chapter 3: (Un)Making Sovereignty: Fabrication, Finitude, and the Politics of Hesitation

“I love you, my Work, when you are truly mine. You, whom I recognize through all your changings. You alone, indeed, are truly I, when I master the living system of my nerves or of my thinking forces, when I feel myself enter by swiftest paths into my own durations.

I possess me if you possess me, I am the master if I am your slave and tool...

- Paul Valery, “Work,” *Poems in the Rough*

“We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity.”

- Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

In the last chapter I tried to show that at the root of Hobbes’s thought are a loss of world and projection of a world, of knowledge of politics and origins, in the face of a unworldly homelessness. In the face of the reduction of the closed universe of Aristotelian and medieval scholasticism into the mere chaos of particular existents, we face a nature that is ‘nothing but matter in motion’ (Galileo); this matter is not ‘there’ but projected such that we can discern what we know already in it. Paul Valery’s poem above captures aptly the allure and cost of this projection by formulating it in terms of work. The projection gives us sovereign mastery over our thinking and our acting, discerning ourselves in all the change of the world. Hobbes’s political science is an instance of modern self-assertion and self-making in the face of a senseless world. Yet, this comes at the great cost of being thrown, ourselves, into this projection, being mastered and caught in the sway of calculative predictability and in the demand for a final ‘Work.’ Just when the “Art” of the commonwealth bestows upon us a sovereign freedom of self-making, it subjects us to the machinery of sovereign making. The *aporia*

of projection can be played out, then, politically, in the problematic of modelling politics on fabrication and self-making.

The basic aim of this chapter, then, is to take up the provocation with which I ended the last chapter: that the impossibility of the origin is simultaneously the source of a violent fabrication of the origin of the political, and the event in which we glimpse the possibilities for self-transformation. It is my argument that in Hobbes's political thought, this projection is undone in his account of politics as 'work,' or fabrication: sovereignty takes the logic of fabrication to its limit by being simultaneously the product and the work of fabrication, undoing the model or idea toward which the projection of work aims. Precisely because sovereignty becomes a fabrication without model, it implodes on itself, amounting to nothing. Hobbes's thought itself discloses the way in which the certainty and the temporal closure of resolution and composition is shattered such that we no longer inevitably move from the 'individual' to the sovereign (and back again) in a process of teleological self-making that characterizes Hobbes's political science. The scattered bricks of the architectural edifice of the commonwealth are not, then, a series of atomistic individuals that one can perfectly reassemble, but fragments that no longer correlate to a lost totality. The work of sovereignty implodes at its limit into the politics of hesitation, which premises itself on the affirmation of the 'unworking' enabled by the loss of the model at the limit of work.

First, I take up the analysis of Hobbes as a theorist who models his thought on fabrication, and point to the ways in which his specific utilization of the metaphor of work comes to undo the very sovereignty of work. Second, looking to the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy, I argue that this undoing, this auto-immunity, reveals the inverse of

sovereignty's self-institution and creation *ex nihilo*: namely, the abandonment to existence without essence, and the irreducible plurality of origins in co-origination. Third, I claim that this inversion of sovereignty's self-institution into the groundless ground of abandoned being opens the possibility for a politics of hesitation, a politics that affirms the inoperativity of unique beings. That is, because sovereignty undoes the Presence of the idea to which work must operate, it opens the way to a politics that affirms a hesitation in the face of the unique event of being.

§1: Composition: The Work of Sovereignty

Richard Flathman, in his analysis of Hobbes, has argued that Hobbes is “first and foremost” a theorist of making and unmaking. He writes that for Hobbes, “confronted by a densely material universe pulsating with energy and movement but largely lacking in humanly intelligible or serviceable order or purpose,” human beings “must themselves give form and course to the opaque and often resistant materials that are their experiences and lives.”¹⁸² In the face of a loss of a world that might be a given home for us, we face the task of fashioning one for ourselves through self-making. Here the problem of epistemological projection in Hobbes's political science is embodied in a political project modeled on fabrication. It is a process of production according to a model or *eidos*. Yet, Hobbes, I will argue here, precisely because he no longer works with a given world, or a given model, deconstructs the very possibility of the surety of work by rendering it groundless and without orientation.

Hobbes therefore provides an interesting foil to Hannah Arendt and Kojin Karatani's arguments that the tradition of political thought has been, in the West,

¹⁸² Richard E. Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality, and Chastened Politics* (London: Sage, 1993), 1-3

dominated by a “will to architecture.” Both locate in Plato the origin of a series of attempts to “find theoretical foundations and practical ways to escape politics altogether” by bringing to bear on “the realm of human affairs the solidity inherent in work and fabrication.”¹⁸³ As Karatani writes, the will to architecture replaces an understanding of the “world as becoming” with a disposition that “understands the world as a product of making.”¹⁸⁴ The key point here is that the will to architecture is a will to mastery and control: if the world is a product of making, and not a flux of becoming, it can be reproduced, and events can be repeated with exactitude.

Indeed, we can see the apparent mastery bestowed by work in Arendt’s description of “Work” in *The Human Condition*. One of the main features of work is that it has its principle or *arche* outside of itself. As Arendt writes, the “work of fabrication is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed,” and which is “outside the fabricator and precedes the actual work process.”¹⁸⁵ The fact that a blueprint or model precedes and exceeds the process of work gives work its characteristics as predictable, and thus as a possible source of mastery. Because an idea guides the work process but exists outside the work process, the process can be characterized by a teleological and linear temporality, wherein events can all be judged according to their being conducive (or not) to the end of the model. This time is not an open one. Since it is guided by a model, it is closed and predictable: “to have a definite beginning and a definite, predictable end is the mark of fabrication.”¹⁸⁶ Work, as

¹⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 222.

¹⁸⁴ Kojin Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 6.

¹⁸⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 140.

¹⁸⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 143.

a reification of idea in the matter of the world, enables a certain reification of time as such. Time becomes, in work, a linear process of unfolding toward an idea, such that one must judge all temporal events in light of this process: “*homo faber* judges and does everything in terms of the ‘in order to.’”¹⁸⁷

This is why, then, modeling politics on work is taken up as an escape from the frailty and unpredictability of the world of “human affairs.” For work here is not understood through a description of a factual worker but through an idealization of work. As Karatani writes, Plato, who originates the will to architecture and work, despises actual architects because they are “fully exposed to contingency” through accidents, the environment, and events of negotiation.¹⁸⁸ It is not the actual process of work, but its idealization that makes it so attractive as a fantasy of escape. As Karatani argues, the will to architecture always “betrays a state of emergency: one was in peril, one had only choice: either to perish or—to become absurdly rational [Nietzsche].”¹⁸⁹ The will to architecture is just that—a will, or postulation of the world as a product that can be unmade and remade. This is why *homo faber* is also sovereign, because *homo faber* no longer needs to respond to the world’s demands and contingencies, and instead, in the fantasy of purified fabrication, is alone in a workshop “with his image of the future product.” *Homo faber* confronts the world as a sovereign master whose creations are perfectly reversible: “*homo faber* is free to produce, and again facing alone the work of

¹⁸⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 154.

¹⁸⁸ Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*, 126.

¹⁸⁹ Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*, 7.

his hands, he is free to destroy.”¹⁹⁰ *Homo faber* exerts this control through the capture of events in a process of making.

Here we can see the link between work and projection: work allows a ground-plan, a model and process in which events can be captured and judged accordingly. The origin, the “definite beginning” of work, and its “definite, predictable end,” are nothing but the process of coming to know what one ‘already knows.’ The world of becoming, of unpredictable events of politics, is replaced by a teleological creation of the political according to a future that is projected—indeed, fabricated—as a political fiction. Work allows for the *poiesis* of time described in chapter 1. Indeed, it is what crucially links Hobbes’s conception of political science to his political project as such, for the metaphor of architecture and work is just that—a metaphor. It ‘carries-over,’ *meta-pherein*, the fantasy of perfect generation and production by a sovereign maker into the world, remaking the world according to this metaphor. The work is the demand for the “realization of the impossible,” the imposition of a fantasy of making onto the world.¹⁹¹

Hobbes obviously models his own thought on this fantastical ideal of fabrication. His thought is characterized by a method of reversibility: the “resolutive-compositive” method works precisely because the process of political founding is reversible such that one can discern the constituent parts of a commonwealth from existing ones, and in this discern a perfectly generated commonwealth. Indeed, to the objection that one cannot find “Principles of Reason for Absolute Sovereignty,” Hobbes claims that one can discern these principles even in the imperfect and tenuous constructions of commonwealths. He writes that just “as the art of well building is derived from principles

¹⁹⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 144.

¹⁹¹ Karatani *Architecture as Metaphor*, 13.

of reason, observed by industrious men that had long studied the nature of materials and the divers effects of figure and proportion, long after mankind began (though poorly) to build, so, long time after men have begun to constitute commonwealths, imperfect and apt to relapse into disorder, there may be principles of reason found out by industrious meditation” (XXX.5).¹⁹² What Hobbes means by finding out these reasons is analysis: one must reverse the process of political fabrication to discern the larger and more adequate process of making that underlies it. Here we can see the hallmark of the will to architecture: the replacement of becoming—the historical attempts to create stable and peaceful polities—with a making that the world is always reaching for asymptotically. Hobbes projects work back onto the world as the principle by which we understand it.¹⁹³

The metaphor of fabrication governs the entirety of Hobbes’s text: the commonwealth is a work of “Art,” which imitates “that rational and most excellent work of nature, man.” Sovereignty is an “artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body.” Indeed, he writes that the matter and the maker are both “man” (Introduction, 1-3). This metaphor of work is, however, most clear in Hobbes’s discussion of the fifth law of nature, complaisance. Complaisance is the injunction that “each man strive to accommodate himself to the rest,” to the aim of endeavoring peace. Hobbes writes here in terms of an extended architectural metaphor:

“For the understanding whereof we may consider that there is, in men’s aptness to society, a diversity of nature rising from their diversity of affections, not unlike to that we see in stones brought together for building of an edifice. For as that stone which (by the asperity or irregularity of figure) takes more room from others than

¹⁹² See also, Spragens, *Politics of Motion*, 155-157.

¹⁹³ See chapter 2 section 3 of this thesis.

itself fills, and (for the hardness) cannot be easily made plain, and thereby hindereth the building, is by builders cast away as unprofitable and troublesome, so also a man that (by asperity of nature) will strive to retain those things which to itself are superfluous and to other necessary, and (for the stubbornness of his passions) cannot be corrected, is to be left or cast out of society as cumbersome thereunto” (XV.17).

Here Hobbes’s architectural metaphor is, as Campbell puts it, put to work to “discipline the Self” by excluding and taming difference.¹⁹⁴ The commonwealth subjects those who fail to accommodate themselves, from madness, vainglory, or from concern about the world of history as opposed to concepts, to expulsion and war.

We should not think of this taming of difference only as a certain understanding of the relationship between identity and difference, though. Rather, it is possible only because the will to architecture undergirds Hobbes’s text. That is, only because the capture of time enabled by work governs Hobbes’s text can we begin to think how he legitimates this disciplining of difference. As Arendt writes, work exacts and legitimates a double violence. First, matter is violently wrought from nature: “Material is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location...this element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication.”¹⁹⁵ Second, this matter, itself the work of human hands, is formed and carved into a shape that embodies a model or idea: the end, or model, does not only justifies the means but “produces and organizes them.”¹⁹⁶

We can see here the way in which the temporal closure of work enables and legitimates

¹⁹⁴ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 58.

¹⁹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 139.

¹⁹⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 153.

the violence of fabrication: the end not only justifies the violence of fabrication but also produces the very material out of which it will compose something. It legitimates certain materials only at the expense of others precisely because it organizes the means.

Hobbes's architectural metaphor above plays out this double violence: Hobbes does not, as we know, 'find' natural 'man' as a given, and then wrest him out of his natural habitat. Rather, Hobbes postulates natural man as the resolution of a commonwealth, as the necessary point of origin for an act of self-making that perfects itself in the institution of sovereignty in the original contract. The sovereignty of the commonwealth organizes the means by throwing away irregular 'stones' but also produces the means, produces the very multitude out of which it will be created. Hobbes legitimates the disciplining of difference embodied in the natural law of complaisance and the violent metaphor of fabrication and the fittingness of stones because, in work, "everything is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and for nothing else."¹⁹⁷ If, as Arendt thought, the replacement of politics with work in Marx and Hegel rendered human beings no more important than nails and wood to the production of chair, in Hobbes human beings become nothing but the stones out of which an architectural edifice will be made, material for a final end or idea.¹⁹⁸

A problem, though, confronts anyone attempting to think about Hobbes's politics as work. Arendt herself interprets Hobbes as a figure who replaces politics¹⁹⁹ with

¹⁹⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 153.

¹⁹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, (New York: Penguin, 1954), 78.

¹⁹⁹ It might be useful to note at this point the difficulty of analyzing this replacement without presupposing a more 'proper' or real politics than that of making. Of course, this is the entire problem of this thesis: how can one imagine a different politics when there is no given, no real to which we can have recourse in our critique of (say) Hobbes's theory of political origins? Certainly Arendt gives an extensive account of 'politics' and 'political action' as a space of appearance in which one acts for and with others in speech. Yet, from the point of view of Hobbes's thought this can only be seen as a vainglorious grasp on the

making. However, what is different about Hobbes as a specifically modern thinker is that he no longer has, so to speak, an *eidōs* or given ideal against which he can measure the world. He instead posits it, generates it according to a geometrical operation. She writes that in Hobbes, “The rules and standards by which to build and judge this most human of human ‘works of art’ do not lie outside of men... They are, rather, inclosed in the inwardness of man, open only to introspection.”²⁰⁰ In this thesis I have followed Arendt’s analysis so far; indeed, Hobbes posits only what he already knows. We have political knowledge only because in having it we return to our own act of postulation. His thinking is an experimentation, in which we imitate artificially the process of making “by which a natural thing comes into existence.”²⁰¹ Yet, it is precisely this inwardness and self-production of the idea that seems to undermine the analysis of work as a teleological justification of violence, for what Hobbes knows are only idealized perfections of movements in a world of matter, and not final ends or models. As Arendt claims, “Processes...and not ideas...become the guide for the making and fabricating activities of homo faber in the modern age.”²⁰²

Both with and against Arendt, I argue that this lack of a model and the prioritization of process, arises from the fact that sovereignty comes to envelop time as and in work. That is, Hobbes has no given ‘model’ because his model is sovereignty itself, the maker itself. The process of sovereign making and the end of a sovereign

historical as opposed to the conceptual, a threat rather than a potential for freedom. Indeed, one might even say that despite her persuasive account Arendt still suffers from the same circularity as Hobbes: where there is no space of appearance in which to act, one cannot act; but where there is no action, there is no space of appearance.

²⁰⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 299.

²⁰¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 299.

²⁰² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 300.

commonwealth become identical: indeed, this is sovereignty as such, a self-postulation or self-making. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes in his analysis of modern sovereignty, sovereignty is “the power of execution or the power of finishing as such, absolutely so and without any further subordination to something else (or another end).”²⁰³ Likewise, there is—contrary to what Strauss implies in his comparison of Hobbes to Plato—for Hobbes no ‘ideal city’ to which all means and material must be subordinated in a process of creation. Hobbes’s project is a self-execution or self-finishing that at once captures the process and end of work in an act of projection. Hobbes imposes the temporality of fabrication and finishing onto time as such, completing and freezing it in a closed circle of abstraction. The rights of the sovereign are both what must be realized, and the condition of their realization. Sovereignty must create its own time of development in self-making and self-finishing.

We can see the synchrony of end and origin in Hobbes’s description of the incommodities of the state of war. There he writes that among these incommodities is that there is “no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society” (XIII.9). It is crucial that he links the lack of an account of time to a lack of society and the absence a sovereign power. An account of time is only possible when sovereign power can guarantee our agreement upon it, and impose a stable horizon of expectation. Sovereignty imposes the time that leads to its own creation of time. The origin and end are crafted at once in a closed circle, in a synchronous tableau. Sovereignty constitutes itself, for Hobbes, as the unity of work and product, of origin and

²⁰³ Jean-Luc Nancy, “War, Right, Sovereignty—Techne,” in *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Richard D. Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 120.

end, of an origin in which the end is already present and an end that has always-already appropriated an origin as its necessary precursor. Indeed, time itself is a work. Hobbes sacrifices the ‘now’ to a stable synchrony, the present to a peaceful future. The finite, calculable time of Hobbes’s science reveals itself here as part of the ‘work’ of the political, insofar as “the present in chronology has no real significance except as a step between past and future” and is “glossed over by an imposed chronometric operativity.”²⁰⁴ Hobbes’s thinking here conceptualizes the temporal present only as a material element for the finished self-presence of sovereignty.

Sovereignty, by no longer imitating fabrication in the world of politics but instead folding work in on itself in an act of self-making that appropriates the work to the product, represents both the foundation of Hobbes’s thought and the impossibility of foundations as such. The self-postulation of sovereignty, not only the sovereignty of the state but the self-instituting sovereignty of Hobbes’s text that originates itself, “insofar as it is not given, but posited...also contains the principle of its own deposition.” This is because “it cannot presuppose anything like a cause (nor thus therefore like an end) or like a production, without also extending, correlatively, the limits of the world.”²⁰⁵ What Nancy is arguing here is that because sovereignty is not based on a given natural ‘man,’ but instead posits natural ‘Man’ retrospectively as an origin that is simultaneous and synchronous with the *telos* toward which it must lead, it must undo the ground of sovereignty. Sovereignty does not have a ground but is a groundless ground. The postulation of ground upon nothing, out of nothing—which amounts to nothing but the

²⁰⁴ Verena Andermatt Conley and Irving Goh, “Introduction,” in *Nancy Now* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 4.

²⁰⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or Globalization*, trans. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 71.

very definition of sovereignty as a self-working and self-finishing *techne*—contains both the “entire program of onto-theology with respect to the ground and...the auto-deconstruction of this ground, that is, in respect to the inconstructible.”²⁰⁶

Indeed, in the self-institution of the work of sovereignty, as an act of creation or fiat, “the infinite as nothing (infinite = no thing) passes into the finite.”²⁰⁷ Sovereignty is ‘nothing’ precisely because it is a process of self-identification: an “exercise” which is “nothing other than the establishment of the State and of its law, or of the law that makes a State” that “supposes that nothing either precedes it or supersedes it.”²⁰⁸ The self-production and self-identity make it nothing insofar as it cannot be a ‘thing’ that is distinct from other finite things; this is the sense in which the infinite—the impossible—passes into the finite and the possible. This is why, despite the fact, as Nancy writes, that this “infinite institution” of itself must contain inevitably the “imperious necessity of the finite moment of its institution,” this finite moment (the historical or empirical founding) is itself captured in the infinite ‘no-thing,’ the incalculable projection of all possible finite things and events. In this projection sovereignty is, Nancy writes, “delivered over to itself, insofar as precisely, the ‘itself’ neither precedes nor founds it but is the nothing, the very thing from which it is suspended.”²⁰⁹ It can only come from nothing if it is to be sovereign. It is precisely at this point that sovereignty is simultaneously invigorated and undone in the face of its own nothingness, its own groundlessness. Sovereignty, precisely because it is nothing—because it imitates no model, no final work other than

²⁰⁶ Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, 71.

²⁰⁷ Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, 72.

²⁰⁸ Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, 99.

²⁰⁹ Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, 103.

the figureless finality of self-identity—it opens an “empty place of sovereignty,” an evacuated space of thought in which thinking must take place without a model.²¹⁰

§2: *Decomposition: The State of Nature and Abandoned Being*

The revelation of sovereignty as nothing, precisely because it makes itself as itself, as a groundless ground, allows us to take Hobbes’s method of resolution and composition to its limit, namely, by decomposing or analyzing the very generation of the commonwealth down to the ground upon which it lies, which amounts to a groundless ground. This amounts to nothing less than “deconstruction”: namely, to “disassemble what has built upon the beginnings in order to expose that which burrows beneath them.”²¹¹ What is exposed here is not another ground, but an act or event. This is what Derrida means when he says that deconstruction becomes possible when the “event” or “rupture” of thinking the “structurality of structure” begins.²¹² In this “event” the thinking of the structure of structure, the form of form, the model of model, the work of work itself, dissolves the identity of form into the emptiness of the origin from nothing. The structure of structure is nothing, an arrival out of nothing. Whereas Derrida locates this ‘event’ in Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics, Freud’s discovery of the unconscious, and twentieth century structuralism, it is here evident already in Hobbes’s early modern account of sovereignty.

If what lies at the heart of the state of nature is not a description of a given ‘Natural Man’ but instead a postulation and assertion of what must be in the face of a loss of world—a loss of foundation or ground—the decomposition of the state, taken to its

²¹⁰ Nancy, “War, Right, Sovereignty--Techné,” 136-7.

²¹¹ Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, 82.

²¹² Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Routledge, 2001), 353.

limit, results in nothing. The sovereignty that governs Hobbes's text is not only the sovereignty of a state but also the sovereignty of a self-identical postulation that asserts itself as its own ground. Hobbes's state of nature, his account of origins, and the new God that flashes before us, the sovereign, are not 'there' for us to discover through political science. They are postulates that must be so that we might be together in peace. Who is it, though, that postulates the world?

We cannot name the 'thing' from which the world is generated and made in postulation. This is because it is not a 'something.' The political creation that is also the creation of scientific knowledge arises from nothing. As Hobbes writes, "the pacts and covenants by which the parts of this body politic were first made, set together, and united, resemble that fiat, or let us make man, pronounced by God in the creation" (Introduction, 1). More specifically in Hobbes's text, the commonwealth, sovereignty, and its origin, arise from a nothing in the sense that society must be invented, and not created "autopoietically" "according to the Aristotelian model." Instead, "a nothing-of-society creates society through a removal of its nothing."²¹³ The commonwealth, despite the ratiocination devoted by Hobbes to the origin, is based on nothing in the sense that there is no given substance, ground, or foundation upon which it can be erected.

Indeed, from the perspective of the commonwealth, the "multitude of men" that covenant with each other in the original contract are nothing: the commonwealth does not represent a multitude, but rather a 'one,' a single voice. In the *Leviathan*, "it is the Unity of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented, that maketh the person one" (XVI). The artificial person of the state is the 'one,' the unity, that emerges from nothing and

²¹³ Werner Hamacher, "Wild Promises: On the Language 'Leviathan,'" *CR: Centennial Review* 4 (2004): 221.

represents nothing that was ‘there’ or given because what it represents is created through itself. There is no multitude and no ‘people’ aside from their being attested to by the sovereign *persona*, as the necessary before to the present of authorization and representation. Sovereignty—“the community, the state, politics—is a mask in front of nothing...A speech mask before ‘natural’ silence.”²¹⁴

The ground upon which the commonwealth erects itself is not, then, an abstract, atomized and natural individual. It is nothing—groundlessness. The commonwealth, like Hobbes’s political science, can only be a postulation, a performative self-creation in the face of nothing. The person of the Leviathan “does not speak for pre-existing others, but produces them according to its singular face...the Leviathan populates, but he also ‘personifies’ a nothing.”²¹⁵ The Leviathan produces, from nothing, the something—individuals—from which it must be created in a performative event. The chaos of the state of nature is not, so to speak, nothing, but is produced by the Leviathan as something from nothing. But how, then, can we begin to think about this ‘nothing,’ and what might we say about it? What is the place in which sovereignty ‘takes place’?

We can think about this simultaneity of taking place and the placeless character of the origin by thinking about the ‘autoimmunity’ of the creation from nothing. The creation *ex nihilo* of political authority is autoimmune in the sense that creation *ex nihilo* must necessarily destroy and dissolve the creator. Jean-Luc Nancy’s analysis is apt here. He writes that when something is created “*ex nihilo*,” this “does not signify that a creator operates ‘starting from nothing.’” Rather, it “signifies that the ‘creator’ itself is the *nihil*,” and that this “*nihil* is not, logically speaking, something ‘from which’ what is created

²¹⁴ Hamacher, “Wild Promises,” 230.

²¹⁵ Hamacher, “Wild Promises,” 230.

would come, but the very origin and destination of some thing in general and of everything.”²¹⁶ In Nancy’s view then, sovereignty, as a creation or institution premised on nothing and out of ‘nothing,’ is the place at which onto-theology—the thinking of Being as a ground—implodes. For the creator and the *nihil* disappear—leaving only the “*ex*.” The nothing becomes the space between a coming of being as an event of existence that is a creation that “takes place everywhere and always.”²¹⁷ Things no longer originate from Being, but expose the way in which being must be plural: the exposure of being, then, “does not have a final fulfillment any more than it has a point of origin. It is the originary plurality of origins and the creation of the world in each singularity.”²¹⁸ There is only a “sharing” of the *ex*, the origination or event of arrival of a thing that can only exist here, and now, that cannot be traced back to an original *arche* or foundation. Sovereignty as a unified origin gives way, precisely because its self-institution undoes it as a creator prior to its creation, into the nothing that traces the space between beings that simply exist together, with no foundational ground or unifying work ordering them.

We might call the self-transformation of the self-instituted ground of sovereignty into the groundless ground of the mere exposition of existence without essence “abandonment.” As Nancy puts it, “abandoned being is abandoned to the *pollakos* [i.e., the many].”²¹⁹ Aristotle claims in the first sentence of his *Metaphysics* that Being is said in many ways (*pollakos legetai*): that is, Being is manifested and attested to by beings insofar as they are beings. Modern abandonment, the abandonment to existence without

²¹⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Being Singular Plural,” in *Being Singular Plural*, 16.

²¹⁷ Nancy, “Being Singular Plural,” 17.

²¹⁸ Nancy, “Being Singular Plural,” 5.

²¹⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Abandoned Being,” in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 37-8.

given essence, pulls this formulation inside-out. Being is not Being as One or *Hen*, which gives birth as an origin to all beings. Being is rather utterly plurivocal, the bare multiplicity of being in its diversity, which *is* only in the multiple and variegated ways in which it is said and lived, in the circulation of beings. Abandoned being is, then, not a single, mute, and immobile ‘*is*.’ It is no longer the ground, which goes by the names of “God, Nature, History, Subject, Illusion, Existence, Phenomenon, Poiesis, Praxis.”²²⁰ This ground is shattered and flees from us. Hobbes himself confronts this loss of ground head-on: he relentlessly criticized the notion of essence,²²¹ claiming that existence and essence are indistinguishable, writing that “the essence and existence of being are identical.”²²² While his reasons for maintaining such a principle are different than, say, Nancy’s, he likewise opens the critical possibilities of a plurality of existence as opposed to the ground of essence.²²³ We face the chaos of particular beings, related without relation, which we must name if we hope to access them, but which always escape the names we give them. We are left with “a subtraction,” or the “remains of a fragmentation” that might “leave something to keep hold of.”²²⁴ Being is ‘said in many ways’ not because it disseminates itself in many parts, but because it is exposed *partes extra partes*.

²²⁰ Nancy, “Abandoned Being,” 38.

²²¹ See, for example, his criticism of Aristotle and Scholasticism in the latter half of *Leviathan*, especially chapter 46.

²²² Quoted in Gianni Paganini, “Hobbes’s Critique of the Essences and its Sources,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 345.

²²³ Hobbes’s reasons derive from two main sources, discussed elsewhere in this thesis: first, Hobbes saw the idea of separated essences as a vain philosophy that would lead others to sacrifice safety for apparently true moral essences and ideas. Second, his thesis that the universe is body does not allow for the idea of separate essences; to do so given this first principle would be to confuse substance and accident—that is, it would take the accident (say, whiteness) as an essence separate from the existent body when in fact the body, the existing thing, is its essence (hence the identity of existence and essence).

²²⁴ Nancy, “Abandoned being,” 39

Abandoned being is thus an account of being in fragments, fragments not of a lost or future whole, nor fragments sovereign unto themselves as absolute individuals.

‘Fragmentation’ here neither fractures a whole nor allows the fragment to collect “itself into itself,” into a “new type of autonomy.”²²⁵ The fragmentation of being made possible by abandonment is one of a fragment that cannot be returned to a whole—one that appears and is present only in its fragmentation and division, its sense against other fragments. It thus no longer allows, without a violent work, the process of decomposition and re-composition enacted in Hobbes’s text from commonwealth to multitude to commonwealth.

Decomposing the commonwealth therefore results not in a gathering of a multitude in an original flash but the scattering of the origin into the groundless ground of plural origins, or rather, origination. For Nancy, this abandonment is oblivion of the beginning, of our origin: “Of the fact that being was abandoned, that it is abandoned, and abandons itself, there is no memory.” Abandoned being is “neither author nor subject of embodiment,” but the *there*—the being-there—of abandonment.²²⁶ Hobbes’s thought expresses this in its demand that we postulate and make our own origin, rather than simply come to know it. One way of thinking this through is by thinking, as Nancy does,

²²⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 124.

²²⁶ Nancy, “Abandoned Being,” 40. The word ‘oblivion’ in this paragraph is not used in its more technical Heideggerian sense (which is also adopted by Nancy). In the more technical sense the oblivion of being is the forgetting of the ontological difference, the difference between Being and beings, which leads (according to Heidegger) to a forgetting of the question and meaning of being. This question is replaced by a simple opposition between the question of inquiring into Being as ground (as God, basically) or as the manifold totality of beings (i.e., the natural and artificial world of juxtaposed, material beings). See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). The ontological difference is obviously part of Nancy’s analysis here as well. His re-interpretation of community is aimed, just as Heidegger’s re-interpretation of Being, beyond thinking being (here being-with, or being-in-common) beyond or ‘after’ metaphysics, the belief in Being as Ground. However, we might also want to point to the ways in which Nancy himself acknowledges the debt of his thinking of being as being-with and as a circulation of plurivocal being to Derrida’s *différance*.

through the way in which abandonment is abandonment of and to time. In abandonment, not only Being but also History as idea or ground is abandoned by history, undone by the interruption of any complete history with the multiplication of histories. Here, Nancy writes, time is not a thing that moves or ‘is’ at all: “One cannot even say the transition, the flow, the flux, the duration.” Instead, time flows, having its fixity only in a constant vanishing. As Nancy puts it, “Time does not fly, but a flight constitutes time.”²²⁷ Time appears to us only in an incessant flow of becoming and vanishing, such that the present is not a liminal slice or ‘now,’ but a stretched view of movement with no clear boundary. It is, in other words, no longer directed toward a final presence or completion, because it is no longer grounded or directed by a single essence that could act as origin or *telos*.

The abandonment of being to existence without essence undoes the closed limits of calculable time only through an exposure of the subject to a finitude or limit that it cannot appropriate or clearly discern. We are, for example, abandoned by birth and at birth insofar as birth is a limit that we cannot appropriate for ourselves but instead exposes us instead to a lack of memory and beginning that we find only in the words of others. Likewise, we cannot live through death by interpreting death within the horizon of a History, either of Humanity, or of the Nation. Without the ground of the subject (either the individual subject, or the communal subject), we cannot freeze time and represent it as a thing with a beginning and end for a subject, as Hobbes does in his work of sovereignty, which establishes, through the perpetual immortality of the artificial person of the sovereign, an “artificial eternity” (XIX.14). The fixity of the concept ‘time’ crumbles into multiple times, a ‘spacing’ of time from itself, in which time is always

²²⁷ Nancy, “Abandoned Being,” 42.

presented to us in our being outside ourselves.²²⁸ That is, time is not unified by an overall work or process of making by which the present is operated into a whole, but is merely the circulation of events of sharing and existing together.

Indeed, our birth and our death are only announced by others. Abandoned being is being-in-common or community. And community, conversely, is nothing but the exposure of our abandonment to and with others. Community is not a substantial Being in which I participate or the mere connection of atoms through contract. For Nancy, community names that which “Present[s] to me my birth and death,” and thus “my existence outside myself.” It is birth, and the death of others, that show me not my origin and my end in clear relief, but instead the “impossibility of reliving [birth], as well as the impossibility of crossing over into my death.” The bare being-with of community described by Nancy does not “sublate the finitude it exposes.”²²⁹ It is simply nothing, the space of nothing that is, paradoxically, only exposed through others, through connection, a connection that Nancy, attempting to avoid the language of organic life, calls “sharing.” Death and birth are both ‘nothings’ that reveal to me both my limits, the nothing into which my being is abandoned—for I was born and will die—and the way in which these limits are not ‘mine.’ The ‘I’ cannot live past death, or relive its birth: as Nancy writes, “The ‘I’'s inability to say ‘I am dead,’ to live through a death that only it can die, means that it is not—am not—a subject.” That is, abandoned being is not a subject because its limits are not delimited by it in such a way that it can live beyond them—no one can live

²²⁸ For Nancy’s discussion of the ‘spacing’ and difference of times, see Jean-Luc Nancy, “Finite History,” in *The Birth to Presence*, 164.

²²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 26.

past death.²³⁰ This is why Hobbes, in order to pose the question of community as a self-making of ‘man’ into an artificial man and citizen, must postulate the subject. It must make the subject—the political subject and the scientific subject—new through an act of self-assertion and generation.

Community, for Nancy, is nothing but being-with as this exposure to our own limits through the limits of others. There is, for abandoned beings, no community constituted through the “alchemy of subjects,” in which our being-with would be transformed into a common substance. There remains only a dynamic of “surfaces of exposition,” where the limit and finitude—the birth and death—of each singular being is exposed through contact with others wherein inside and outside play off one another, never hardening into clear boundaries of separation that might be maintained or overcome through communal fusion.²³¹ Abandoned being is communal not in the sense that there is an entity called a community to which we naturally tend or to which we must belong, but in the sense that being can, as abandoned, only and always be being-with. Being can only “compear” as the tracing of the limits of singular beings. Singularities, Nancy writes, are not individuals or communal entities that might provide a unified ground of Being. Rather, the co-appearance of singularities in their being-with can only be a “‘Groundless ground,’ less in the sense that it opens the gaping chasm of an abyss than that it is made up only of the network, the interweaving, and the sharing of singularities.”²³² This community is revealed only in our abandonment to others, in the death and birth of others through which we are revealed as beings who are always caught

²³⁰ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 15.

²³¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Of Being-in-Common,” in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. the Miami Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 4.

²³² Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 27.

in the in-between, constantly and irreparably transformed in mourning.²³³ Abandoned beings, as the groundless ground of community, do not stand in relief from the world, rising above or sitting in front of the undifferentiated material of the world. They appear instead as “finitude itself,” in being exposed to an outside, indeed, exposed *as* this outside, which is constituted only by the play of other singularities and finitudes. Nancy here conceives of abandoned being as a sharing of being, as the ‘in’ of being-in-common, where being has no essence or ground other than the exposure of a common *lack* of essence.²³⁴ What we hold in common is nothing but the fact that existence is our essence. We share “nothing, sharing the space between.”²³⁵

And it is precisely in this nothing, which occupies the “empty place” of sovereignty when it is seen to be “NOTHING,” that enables another politics, not an anti-sovereign politics, but a politics of being sovereign otherwise.²³⁶ Abandoned being demands and arises out of an “abandoned sovereignty,” which arises only when we begin to ask “How to think, how to act, how to do, without a model? This is the question that is avoided, yet posed, by the entire tradition of sovereignty.”²³⁷ It is posed because the ‘nothing’ of sovereignty and the ‘nothing’ shared as abandoned being are two sides of the same coin. As Marie-Eve Morin has claimed, the closure of sovereignty into “nothing” opens us to “an ‘unworked’ politics of knotting and tying.” The loss of final End opens

²³³ However, it is not just the deaths of those we identify with, but deaths of all those who form the background for our existence, who, precisely in the concealment of their deaths, make possible certain visions of community. On this, see Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 4 (2003): 33. For an account of how self-sacrificial death can transform finitude into communal fusion, see Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Sovereignty, Identity, Sacrifice,” *Social Research* 58 (1991): 551.

²³⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, “*La Comparution/The Compearance*,” *Political Theory* 20 (Aug 1992): 374.

²³⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Love and Community,” Interview, August 2001 with Avita Ronell and Wolfgang Schirmacher. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-luc-nancy/articles/love-and-community/>.

²³⁶ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 107-109.

²³⁷ Nancy, “War, Right, Sovereignty—Techne,” 141.

not only to a politics of sovereignty but to a politics that never ends, opening a political sphere that is like a knot tied and untied endlessly with no finality.²³⁸ Hobbes's thought thus opens us to an abandoned being that might open our thinking to the abandon of a politics of transformation.

§3. *Fragments: Uniqueness and the Politics of Hesitation*

Because sovereignty, pulled inside-out, implodes into the abandonment of being, it reveals a sovereignty that is sovereign only in its denial of being 'worked,' of the subordination to a final work. This is possible precisely because sovereignty already contains the seed of its own unworking, because its model is nothing: a self-institution that amounts to an institution of nothing in the face of nothing, because it cannot be 'something' that causes a self-causing thing. In the face of its undoing, we can adumbrate a transformative politics that might amount to a way of being sovereign otherwise, a sovereignty of un-working, of rejection of the working of an essence from existence, of a future finishing from the uniqueness of the present. This politics would be a *politics of hesitation*. I argue that I am not so much discovering something new here as gesturing toward a whole series of attempts to theorize on the premise of uniqueness. We might find this in the thought of Hannah Arendt, Adriana Cavarero, and Judith Halberstam: all of them aim to save the fragment from its subsumption into a whole or reduction to an atom, in favour of the inoperative disclosure of uniqueness.

Jean-Luc Nancy, for his part, therefore claims that politics as such arises from the impossibility of the model, i.e., from the impossibility of the 'work.' Because sovereignty has no model, it opens the possibility that there is nothing that community

²³⁸ Marie-Eve Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 107-8. My analysis of Nancy's ontology and political thinking has benefitted immeasurably from Morin's lucid analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy.

ultimately tends toward, or into which it might be fabricated. Rather, it communicates, to be precise, nothing: it communicates only what lies between, the exposure of the difference traced between the limits of singular, finite beings. It affirms the unique against work in an event of ‘unworking,’ an event that discloses the impossibility of finally making a complete work of the relation between beings, precisely because there is no given aim or model for them. Community “takes place in... ‘unworking,’ referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension.”²³⁹

This ‘unworking,’ exists at the limit of the activity of self-making as a model for politics. That is, it is only when the sovereign fantasy of pure self-institution without an ‘other’ against which it is one is understood as ‘something,’ fails or is disclosed as impossible. These are the events or moments in which it is shown that “we cannot not compear.”²⁴⁰ It is at the very moments in which we think we have lost what is in common—namely, a working into the same political community, or our belonging to a unified group—that one notices that we cannot “lose community.” Community is not a thing, an entity, or hypostasis. Rather it is an event, an event of resistance to the will to “immanence” that presents itself in all attempts to be fully self-identical—i.e., sovereign. The political, according to Nancy, would be the event of a “community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication...a community consciously undergoing the

²³⁹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 31.

²⁴⁰ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 35.

experience of its sharing.”²⁴¹ These events are ones of interruption or hesitation, in which the operation of time into a finality or *telos* is interrupted and unsettled.

The kind of politics that emerges here is neither one that premises itself on a universal category, nor a particular, but instead on the uniqueness of an activity that cannot leave itself. A politics that is sovereign otherwise (than Hobbes) would be one that does not make the nothing of abandonment into a potential work but instead exposes it as a space between unique beings through a “workless and inoperative activity.”²⁴² Nancy compares this politics to a rope drawn in and out of a knot. Both the sovereign work of the political and the politics of incompleteness hold in their hands the same rope: the nothing. Either the former stretches this rope taut, leaving us with a “multitude of men,” or it guides this taut rope to its inevitable finality in a projected knot of sovereign finishing. The latter opens this resolute-compositive closure into “a politics of the incessant tying up of singularities with each other, over each other, and through each other, without any end other than the enchainment of (k)nots...without any possibility of calling any single (k)not or the totality of (k)nots self-sufficient.”²⁴³ The inoperative activity of politics here aims to unveil the claim to totality as nothing but a violent disavowal of the fact that the “totality” can only be “the enchainment itself,” the inoperative activity that never finishes itself.²⁴⁴

The politics of hesitation is first of all constituted by a refusal to be a subject, to work the originary being-with of existence into a completion or delimitation. It amounts to an “auto-rejection,” a rejection of self (of an ‘individual’ or a ‘collective,’) as Irving

²⁴¹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 40.

²⁴² Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 35.

²⁴³ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 111.

²⁴⁴ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 112.

Goh puts it, or, as Nancy writes, a “resistance to its own gathering.”²⁴⁵ Being-in-common exposes a politics of ‘nothing’ in the sense that one takes up the abandonment of sovereignty, the empty place, as a place without model, a place to demand a politics that is not bound to gathering and self-presence but to an openness and un-working of the closure of sovereignty.

Nancy articulates what it might be to be “sovereign otherwise” by affirming the sovereignty of being-in-common against subjectivity, against work, against closure, through a demand for self-rejection. This would be enacted in a “seizure of speech”: the exposure of a chain of “sense-effects,” exposures of unique beings against one another in “the cry, the call, the complaint as much as in theoretical discourse, the poem, the song, along with the gesture and even silence.”²⁴⁶ A seizure of speech aims to disclose only the voice, the uniqueness of each existent, against any attempt to close off the ‘with’ into a common meaning: it is not a seizure “of multiple wills competing to define a Sense, but of each one who makes sense.”²⁴⁷ It is, fundamentally, the affirmation of the sovereignty of a fragment, sensed with and against other fragments, against its being brought into a finished meaning or whole.

It is unclear, though, exactly what kind of political theory this might be. Further, Nancy’s rhetoric seems to imply a quasi-Messianic passivity in his politics that Elliot, for example, claims cannot answer the exigencies of sovereign violence or resist the exploitation of late modern capitalism.²⁴⁸ So, instead of belabouring the ontological point

²⁴⁵ Irving Goh, “Sovereignty Without Subject,” in *Nancy Now*, 164.

²⁴⁶ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 115.

²⁴⁷ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 115.

²⁴⁸ Brian Elliot, “Community and Resistance in Heidegger, Nancy and Agamben,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37 (2011): 263.

in Nancy's work, I will simply gesture toward the work of three theorists who, despite not being the only ones who do so, advocate for something akin to a politics of hesitation premised on the unique, affirming the sovereignty of the insufficient fragment against the sovereignty as/of work. These theorists are Hannah Arendt, Adriana Cavarero, and Judith Halberstam.

Hannah Arendt's alliance with a politics of hesitation is probably the most obvious, because she explicitly claims that any attempt to impose the activity of fabrication on knowledge and politics will be "forever defeated by the actual course of events, where nothing happens more frequently than the totally unexpected." She writes that Hobbes's account of reason as geometrical reckoning of logical consequences is merely an attempt to "leave out the unexpected, the event itself" in the face of a reality constituted precisely out of a texture of radically unexpected events.²⁴⁹

What are these 'events'? They are nothing other than the disclosure of un-working, the affirmation of the impossibility of working particular beings into a complete totality. She is referring, of course, to her account of political action as analogous to birth, as something that appears to be a miraculous improbability. It is miraculous and improbable because it is absolutely unique. Each action—even if, for all intents and purposes, it is exactly the same as another—is unique because it discloses the "who" and not the "what." Speech and action in the face of others—not in an abstract sense but in the concrete, material sense of a 'here' and 'now,' of speaking and moving with others—"disclose" the plural singularity of human beings as fundamentally distinct from one

²⁴⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 300.

another, and equal only in this distinction.²⁵⁰ In human action, the uniqueness of a human being as opposed to all others is disclosed as this uniqueness in distinction from all others with whom he or she acts. It is, as she writes, an “insertion” of oneself, but it is only an insertion of one’s unique ‘who’ insofar as there are others against whom and for whom this ‘who’ extends itself and exposes itself. Uniqueness must necessarily be relational in the sense that it can only be extended against other unique beings. Arendt’s disclosure of the ‘who’ traces the line between singular beings, exposing their limits in the space between—a nothing—that she calls “the space of appearance.” This space only exists insofar as the uniqueness of each being is tracing itself out against and with others.²⁵¹

This is an infinite improbability because it is, in a sense, not appropriable by the actor and speaker, but can only be exposed provisionally and against *what* one is: “the manifestation of who the speaker and doer unexchangeably is, though it is plainly visible, retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward a unequivocal verbal expression.”²⁵² Here the sovereignty of the unique asserts itself: one cannot subsume the ‘who’ into any concept, any “what” that might give us mastery over the ‘who’ and direct it in a larger work, project, or totality. It escapes, ineluctably, but also cannot resist disclosing itself to us in its obvious tangibility and materiality, in the very motion and voice of the actor. The politics of action is not merely a description of all political action, but the affirmation of the action itself over any project toward which it aims, and the affirmation of the speaker and saying over the said, which, for Arendt, works to un-work forms of action modelled on fabrication, in which action is “no less a means to an end

²⁵⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

²⁵¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.

²⁵² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 181.

than making is a means to produce an object.”²⁵³ Action thus extends itself through others not in an attempt to complete itself and finish, but only to perpetuate its own extension in time by inspiring others who might continue it.

As Arendt writes, the tradition of thinking about action is shot through with a double meaning of beginning—*archein*—and carrying-out—*prattein*.²⁵⁴ This *prattein* is not the sovereign finishing that completes the initial action; indeed, this is precisely what is excluded as impossible because the beginning is not the origin to something, but the beginning, the insertion of the unique that cannot be anywhere else and is unrepeatable. To continue the action can in no way complete anything, because action, as unique, does not tend toward any given end. Just as a unique being is born each time one of us is born, each action begins something radically new, which cannot but change the world irreversibly, and which can in no way begin a teleological process, but only open the unpredictable exposure of one’s being against an unknown amount of others.

Action has a “tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries,” and an inherent unpredictability such that one never knows whether it will continue forever or fade away instantly.²⁵⁵ Because action is not a ‘work,’ it cannot be judged according to whether it is adequate to a *telos* that it originates, or according to a universal scope of time and history. Instead, one must attend to the singularity of each action, each time and in each place, for itself. Ronald Beiner, in his interpretation of Arendt, clearly links the politics of incompleteness to a desire to save the particular event from the universal of work or of totality. He writes that for Arendt, by embracing a

²⁵³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 180.

²⁵⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 189.

²⁵⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190-1.

totality to which particular events might be linked, we surrender the “dignity that comes from judging the particular in itself.”²⁵⁶ The politics of hesitation aims only at embracing the particular event of disclosure in itself, without working it into something final, without letting the particular be “swallowed up” by universals or generalities.²⁵⁷

This is why Cavarero claims we must radicalize Arendt’s thesis, and privilege a politics of the voice over the said. Only by doing this can we attend to the singularity of relational exposure as sovereign against the sovereignty of work. For Cavarero, this exposure of singularity against and with the limits of other singularities is quite literally embodied in the voice. She writes, “the political essence of speech consists in revealing to others the uniqueness of each speaker,” against the ideal abstractions that might be signified by what is said.²⁵⁸ This uniqueness for Cavarero is less exposed in a semi-mystical ‘who’ than in the materiality of the voice. We must understand political speech as “sonorous speech,” which exposes not a tendency toward a final meaning about which we must agree, but instead discloses “the plurality of singular voices that convoke one other in a relation that is not simply sound, but above all resonance.”²⁵⁹ The space between, that “in-between” in which singularities are exposed along the nothing, or the space of appearance, is primarily a space of the traversal of sound, which discloses the unique character of each voice regardless of what they say and signify.

This space undoes time as a fixed and complete whole in which events can happen and be worked, because the voice—speaking—is “always bound to time,” and

²⁵⁶ Ronald Beiner, “Interpretive Essay,” in Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 130.

²⁵⁷ Beiner, “Interpretive Essay,” 151.

²⁵⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 189.

²⁵⁹ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 179

“does not know in advance where it is going,” because sound reaches into the ear regardless of the will of the speaker, and regardless of the meaning of what is said. The material disclosure of the ‘who’ in the unique voice thus requires the ear of the other to be heard and noticed.²⁶⁰ And in this, time is disclosed immanently through the materiality of the voice. Time becomes flight, insofar as it is constituted through the flight of multiple voices, plural and singular—i.e., unique. As in Arendt’s disclosure of the ‘who’ and Nancy’s “unworking,” time is not operative but simply the spacing of finitudes against one another in their exposure against each other. By undoing the work of time, rendering it only the circulation of meaning and the disclosure of the unique through the materiality of the voice, the politics of the voice enacts “as a preliminary act” the “deconstruction of belongings, the marginalization of qualities, and the depoliticization of the what.”²⁶¹ The politics of hesitation attends to the unique, to the ‘here and now,’ ‘each time,’ every time. It is, for Cavarero, addressed to a “local, contextual space” made up of the resonance of voices.²⁶²

By militating against the work of time by affirming the spacing of nothing enacted by the voice and the unique, Cavarero claims that this politics first of all opens what she calls “the horizon of the absolute local.” This term embodies the transformation of sovereignty enabled by the ‘nothing’ at the root of sovereignty: it is an absolute local not in the sense that it is separate, but in the sense that it is irreducibly local, such that the local is “immediately everywhere.” The local here is not opposed to a global but intricately linked to the global in the fact that it is always-already open and available in

²⁶⁰ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 174.

²⁶¹ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 205.

²⁶² Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 205.

speech. The openness of the local is what makes it absolute: it has no absolute separation because it is the absoluteness of relation and sharing that cannot be cut off. It is local in the sense that it is embodied in the materiality of the flesh that touches and is revealed only through the sense of touching: it announces a bare relation that is “rooted in the always embodied singularity of an existent that convokes the other with the rhythmic and sonorous breath of his or her mouth.”²⁶³ It is absolute in the sense that we can never lose this community of vocal resonance, insofar as we are born as creatures of vocal resonance first of all and brought into the world of signification only through the exposure to others’ unique voices. It is always-already there in every attempt to close meaning in the work of signification and sovereign definition, enacted in the resonance that exists alongside and in excess of Meaning, which can never capture the saying in the said. Cavarero puts forward “an ontology of vocal uniqueness” in which the uniqueness of the voice undermines attempts to work each unique person into a larger totality or finality.²⁶⁴

Here the loss of a model enabled by the limits of Hobbes’s work of the political opens the way to thinking through a kind of political speech that discloses something that is ineffable but nonetheless tangibly disclosed in sense. Speaking is not an order of signification that uses the voice as an instrument: this is only a transformation and ‘working’ of the inoperative circulation of sharing the space between, the nothing. No—for Cavarero, speaking “has in the voice the sense that was maternally destined to it,” maternal in the sense that “the scene of infancy is...the site of an imaginary that gives us an opportunity to rethink the maternal link between speech and voice.” I am not here

²⁶³ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 200.

²⁶⁴ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 173.

claiming we ought to purify signification, distilling it to a bare being that could then ground a new creation of the political. The point is more to gesture toward the font for a politics that contends the privileging of a final Meaning, a finished work, over the singularity of the unique event and moment of speech, which happens here and now, but also everywhere and always.²⁶⁵ It is that which throws us outside of ourselves: the voice, the materiality of the flesh resounding in our own flesh, is what discloses the impossibility of appropriating our origins and the possibility of originating anew the exposure of this finitude. This is the sense in which community must be inoperative, for Nancy: the community of essence and meaning, founded in a common reality and common signification, is always undone at bottom by the exposure of the uniqueness of each saying and each speaker in the singular tracing of two unique beings. “We are meaning,” not in the sense that we are the meaning that will finally appropriate itself in a sovereign self-execution, but in the sense that we are sense, the circulation of a sense that never ends, a “meaning that is, in turn, its own circulation—and we are this circulation.”²⁶⁶ To say ‘we’ is not to declare a commonality but to share the irreducible uniqueness of oneself with the uniqueness of each other.

The obvious objection to this thinking, which ‘depoliticizes the what,’ is that it merely escapes the ‘what,’ leaving the structures of power enabled by identity categories intact. The sovereign definitions of citizens, and the ‘we,’ are left intact for a mystical and special uniqueness that amounts to nothing but the exposure of privilege, the privilege of not being tied to one’s identity. The ‘we’ Nancy just mentioned would then be the ‘we’ of French men, the ‘we’ of fraternity, liberty, and equality. I cannot deny that

²⁶⁵ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 180.

²⁶⁶ Jean Luc Nancy, “Being Singular Plural,” 1-3.

this is the case: the politics of hesitation, by premising itself on uniqueness, does not militate on behalf of identity categories and does not necessarily help oppressed groups. However, it does militate on behalf of something in excess of Meaning, including the meaning that captures each one of us into a category. Cavarero herself, though, traces a feminist politics at the heart of the politics of the voice. The emphasis on the voice reverses the male-centered focus on the Said over the saying, and thus, as it is enacted, fractures and fragments “Woman” into the sharing of unique voices: “this politics consists in the...absolute local, where reciprocal speech signifies the sexed uniqueness of each speaker...before signifying something.”²⁶⁷ By not abstracting from the embodied saying of a sexed and gendered voice, it rejects the Said’s pretention to disembodied rational agreement. It is thus amenable, as well, to Judith Butler’s politics of embodied vulnerability, and her politics of performative gender identity, tenuously constituted by acts here, in time, each time, and not founded in a category of final meaning that originates in natural beginning.²⁶⁸

Indeed, the singularity of the fragment that can no longer be appropriated in the work of sovereignty is often disclosed precisely at the limit of identity categories, at the place of their necessary failure. Judith Halberstam has enlisted a wide archive of what she calls “The Queer Art of Failure,” which, while apparently remote from Hobbes’s polemic for sovereign fabrication, is actually quite relevant. The queer art of failure aims to affirm inoperativity and thus upset the necessary demand for the model. In *The Queer Art of Failure* Halberstam hopes to mobilize the failure to ‘succeed’ by the standards and

²⁶⁷ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 206.

²⁶⁸ See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2005), 34-36; *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 183-188.

norms of contemporary society for a transformative politics. This would be a failure that affirms “the impossible, the improbable... and the unremarkable,” which “loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.”²⁶⁹ That is, to be sovereign otherwise, emphasizing the unique against the ‘work,’ is not necessarily a comfortable emphasis on how special each of us is, but can also be a radically negative politics that involves a choice “not to choose ‘life,’” that is, to reject success, reject the journey toward final meaning.²⁷⁰ Halberstam, for instance, discusses the butch lesbian, excluded in mainstream narratives about gay women (such as *The L Word*) such that the category of masculinity in its purity can be preserved. Only in this way can “lesbian” be represented as “successful,” for the butch simultaneously exemplifies a “block to heteronormative male desire” that might enable lesbians to be adequately ‘feminine’ and an active exemplification of the necessary failure of the fantasy of masculinity.²⁷¹ That is, “what remains unattainable in the butches’ masculinity, we might say, is what remains unattainable in all masculinity: all ideal masculinity by its very nature is just out of reach, but it is only in the butch, the masculine woman, that we notice its impossibility.”²⁷²

The queer art of failure thus enacts a politics of an active and apparent inability to embody an ideal or final ‘work,’ disclosing the impossibility of work as such, in the same way that a politics of ‘saying’ against the ‘said’ discloses the impossibility of the said’s finally swallowing up the unique event of saying. The politics of failure enacts a hesitation in the face of the present by eliminating the fantasy of the future ‘work’ in

²⁶⁹ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 88.

²⁷⁰ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 90.

²⁷¹ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 95.

²⁷² Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 100.

order to notice, through a “relentless negativity,” the “urgency of the present.”²⁷³ This is not the present as a liminal slice that must be worked into a future, but the present that we never entirely escape, and merely inhabit continually with a tenuous and provisional hold on ourselves. The politics of hesitation affirms failure in the face of conversion into a ‘work’ or future idea, articulating itself “in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing,” a politics that quite literally abandons the project of building oneself and completing oneself.²⁷⁴ One example of this is the political use of masochism, which as a form of femininity amounts to a “refusal of coherence,” a sketching of what one might be when one has unraveled. It is crucial, in my view, that Halberstam links this not only to a politics that refuses to participate in a hope for a better future, or a work to make history, but also to performance art, such as Yoko Ono’s “Cut Piece,” in which audience members come to disrobe Ono by cutting away her clothes. Such a process amounts to a radical passivity, wherein Ono actively stages the surrender of coherent subjectivity to a demand for incoherence that can only be enacted from without. Only from without, by exposing oneself, can the confluence of the nothing of sovereign self-institution and the exposure of abandoned being (un-working) be glimpsed.²⁷⁵ It is a passive enactment of self-destruction—or better yet, self-deconstruction—insofar as it replicates a radicalization of Hobbes’s decompositive-compositive method: “Cut Piece,” like “Promise Piece,” in which Ono smashes a vase and hands the pieces out, breaks a whole into parts. But they do so only to insist on the possibility and probability that “the fragments of the whole will never be reunited,” and to insist on a “commitment to the

²⁷³ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 106.

²⁷⁴ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 129.

²⁷⁵ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 137.

fragment over any fantasy of future wholeness.”²⁷⁶ It returns to the uniqueness of the fragmented, incoherent being that cannot be subsumed into a final, sovereign totality.

On a certain ‘Nancean’ reading of Halberstam’s analysis, we can point out the way in which her politics of radical refusal, negativity, and unbecoming points, paradoxically enough, to being-in-common. It is only by affirming a radical refusal of work and coherence that one can glimpse the bare ‘nothing’ that amounts to a sharing of unique being. Indeed, it amounts to a spacing of time, the event of a ‘we’ that discloses only the impossibility of its cohering through development and work. Masochist artistic and political practices for Halberstam are ones in which one “refuses to fortify herself against the knowledge of death and dying, and seeks instead to be out of time altogether, a body suspended in time, space and desire.”²⁷⁷ This is an exposure, though, not of simple non-being—a nothing that would amount to sovereignty—but nothing as a sharing or exposure of the ‘in’ of being-in-common: for the queer art of failure, like Arendt’s disclosive action and like Cavarero’s politics of the voice, requires an other against which one’s “unbecoming” can be exposed. The queer art of failure is political only to this extent: namely, when it aims to dramatize unbecoming for a viewer to disclose the impossibility of final coherence, and the possibility of coming undone opened.²⁷⁸

§4. Conclusion

The politics of hesitation, which pauses in the face of the unique, constitutes the obverse side of sovereignty. From the immanent critique of the work of sovereignty I have established here we can discern not an *anti-sovereign* politics but a politics or a

²⁷⁶ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 138.

²⁷⁷ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 145.

²⁷⁸ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 140.

series of political possibilities that take up the resources for political creativity (or rather, de-creativity) we might find at the origins of sovereignty. Sovereignty, as the self-institution of political authority in a self-making ‘work,’ folds over into itself, into the exposure of a world that requires no ‘work,’ no completion, but rather demands a politics against completion.

Therefore, this chapter—and this thesis as a whole—by investigating the *problematique* of foundation and origin in Hobbes, provide no transparent criticism of Hobbes’s theory of sovereignty. Rather, I attempt to open a space for new empirical and practical questions by opening a space of equivocation and *aporia* at the heart of Hobbes’s thought as a response to finitude. If Hobbes’s thought is a response to a temporal finitude that not only sets the stage for sovereign self-institution, but also the possibility for the disclosure of the unique against its being worked into completion, we can open up new practical and empirical avenues for thinking about (or against) sovereignty. I have suggested here only one vein of thinking, wherein the materiality and embodiment of the voice and the speaker acting against and with others discloses the unique that cannot be abstracted and that cannot be captured by projection. However, this disclosure of the unique existing below or alongside the sovereign system of signification, law, and work may also disclose an avenue for critiquing the historical and temporal erasure enacted by Hobbes’s text. For the materiality of the voice and the disclosure of the unique does not contest Hobbes’s thinking only according to historical erudition, posing history as more important than abstraction. It shows the way in which the embodied, singular event of acting and speaking always lies beneath Hobbes’s sovereign foundations as a groundless ground, as a disclosure of the groundlessness of

modern sovereignty as such. Only by thinking through sovereignty, and not outside of it, can we begin to think about what it might mean to be sovereign-otherwise in practice.

Conclusion: Thinking Finitude Originally with Hobbes

The overall aim of this thesis has been to interrogate the relationship between finitude, time, and modern state sovereignty through a close reading of political and scientific foundations in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. To put it incredibly briefly, I have tried to defend two claims about Hobbes's *Leviathan*, one interpretive and one more political-theoretical. First: I have tried to show that Hobbes's thought primarily turns around an escape from what I have called the temporal finitude of thought. Because we are 'in time,' time-bound creatures who know and imagine only what we experience in time, our lives are fraught with anxiety, uncertainty, and conflict that necessitate the imposition of a sovereign power to fix the meaning of words and stabilize our horizon of expectation. This sovereign power is created in an original contract that replaces historical (and violent) origins with an 'as if,' a hypothetical origin projected by an exact political science. Second, I have tried to show that it is precisely by thinking through this origin's hypothetical, impossible, and ahistorical character that we can think beyond Hobbes's account of a sovereign authorization of meaning toward a transformative politics of sovereignty. In other words, the basic claim I have tried to maintain is that the act and concept of foundation in Hobbes's *Leviathan* is premised, paradoxically, on the impossibility of foundations and the groundlessness of political existence as expressions of our human finitude.

I have done this in three steps. First, I set up the problem of temporal finitude in Hobbes's thought. Hobbes's argument for sovereignty is premised on a certain conceptualization of temporal finitude, whereby our existence in time, our time-bound thought, is a danger to be escaped by guaranteeing the meaning of words through

sovereign violence. Only then can time as a dangerous source of anxiety be replaced by a political fiction that ensures a stable horizon of expectation.

Second, I considered the event through which this transition from anxious uncertainty to sovereign fixity occurs: Hobbes's original contract. This contract, I argued, far from being simply a hypothetical argument for political obligation, in fact makes possible an escape from temporal finitude. It does so by establishing a calculable and ordered world through a projection of political science: the incalculable, impossible contract separates political thinking from the historical and temporal world in order to project the impossible origin as the only possibility. However, it is precisely because the impossible origin is written into the world as something that must have been that the possibility for a transformative politics, rather than a politics of exactitude and calculation, is opened.

Thus, there is in Hobbes's specifically modern account of the temporality of founding both a politics of escape from temporal finitude, and a politics that attempts always to reconceptualise this temporal finitude as something that in principle cannot be escaped—and need not be escaped—without violence. The central attitude underlying this thesis, however, is that it is only by going through sovereignty, through immanent critique, that we can begin to discern the latter in a way that it does not appear merely as the threat of dissolution and anxiety about the future.

A secondary implication of my conclusions here is, however, that there is no clear or necessary reason why the second possibility—the sovereignty of the unique and of the event of hesitation—will overcome the first. What Hobbes's thought discloses first and foremost is an understanding of finitude to which we must respond with a decision. If one

wishes to question just who this ‘we’ is to which I have been referring, I would respond that this is precisely what is at issue. What is presented in my reading of Hobbes is a refusal to simply critique Hobbes’s sovereign violence and his abstraction, but to think it as one response among others to the alienation from the world imposed by the modern project. The ‘we,’ therefore, is simultaneously what must be decided upon and what must decide: for the decision is one between the creation of a common origin and the exposure of the impossibility of a single origin. This decision is revealed in the double possibility of Hobbes’s politics of origins as a founding and an exposure of the groundless ground, as the work without model and the un-working of the model: for the decision itself is revealed in the space in which there is no model or program by which one must decide. What I have attempted to do in this thesis—*all* I hope to have done—is to show the way in which the modern problematic of origins in Hobbes’s *Leviathan* exposes this decision by unveiling the incalculable postulation at the heart of calculative rationalities, the creation without model at the heart of sovereign self-institution. Because we have no model, there can be no program of thought with which we might respond to this problem of origins.

It might be that to be sovereign-otherwise, to demand the transformation that sovereignty already contains within itself as the source of its own deconstruction, requires not a cogent critique of sovereign institutions, or the theory of sovereignty, but courage. The entire split at the heart of the modern problematic of origins in Hobbes’s political thought is opened by a polemic against courage as vainglory. The problem that confronts any critic of sovereignty, as opposed to a mere interpreter, is the problem of convincing others that courage is not vainglory, that to demand the sovereignty of the

unique fragment and the un-working of sovereign execution is not to demand the “fires” of civil war.

Theodor Adorno once wrote in his *Minima Moralia* that the modern age is one in which technology “expels from movements all hesitation, deliberation, civility,” causing a “withering of experience” because all things are rendered “under the law of pure functionality” which tolerates no surplus either in freedom of conduct or in autonomy of things, which would survive as the core of experience, because it is not consumed by the moment of action.”²⁷⁹ Hesitation arises from this surplus that exceeds the demand of technological and scientific rationality. I think that both the embrace of the security and fixity of sovereignty and the denouncement of the sovereign violence enacted around the world are both programmes that can be carried out without hesitation. Hesitation, the courage to hesitate, emerges in the space between programmes, when one confronts what cannot be constructed, where the decision between postulating a common origin and affirming our abandonment to origination is posed. This moment is traditionally one of courage, the courage of thought—indeed, the courage *to* think in the face of a world that demands immediate action. Derrida, in his account of deconstruction, argues that the undoing of the sovereignty of the origin opens a space for thought and for the event that comes, but that it takes courage to look ahead to that which cannot be constructed with a model. What comes after the deconstruction of the origin is not, for Derrida, a transparent critique according to a moral programme. Rather, without model we can only await monsters.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 40.

²⁸⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” trans. Alan Bass, in *Writing and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 370.

We exist on the threshold in which we can no longer tolerate the monster of the Leviathan but await nothing but monsters on the horizon because our models and programmes have been undone by the very finitude to which the Leviathan responds. This finitude cannot be escaped therefore but must be confronted as the very possibility of transformation in face of a lack of horizon. It must be confronted not with the conviction that something awaits us but with the paradoxical courage of Weber's heroes who arm themselves with the "staunchness of heart that refuses to be daunted by the collapse of all their hopes."²⁸¹ The collapse of hope is not a source of despair but beginning of a politics that does not escape but faces the irrationality of the world and affirms the sovereignty of the fragment over the model that escapes time.

²⁸¹ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 94, 85

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