The Elements of Progress: Ideology and History in Hobbes and Vico

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A dissertation

submitted to the Faculty of

the department of Political Science

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Boston College
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences
Graduate School

August 2020

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The 21st century has witnessed jarring set-backs in the spread of the liberal democracy around the globe, as well as domestic challenges to the liberal form of government where it has been long established. By interrogating the root principles of the liberal theory of progress, this study aims to account for both the overwhelming success of the liberal progress in the latter half of the twentieth century, as well as its mounting failures in the early twenty-first century. It is argued that the liberal theory of progress rests on an unstable synthesis of two competing modern political philosophies, which are identified as ideology and the philosophy of history. The latter offers a theory of mankind's historical development toward reason, while the former provides a blueprint for the construction of the rational state.

Before these modern philosophies were synthesized in the liberal theory of progress, they emerged in opposition to one another, in the works of Thomas Hobbes and Giambattista Vico. The first chapter introduces the political philosophy of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and examines Hobbes's teaching about nature and art, power and public opinion, culture and civil religion. On this basis, the *Leviathan* is shown to inaugurate the ideological form of politics, of which liberalism is one example. Chapter two defines ideology and traces its history, demonstrating the common source of all modern ideologies in a foundational egalitarianism that replaces the natural politics of rule. Chapter three addresses the modern philosophy of history, inaugurated by Vico's *New Science*. An account of the genesis of this philosophy is presented and contrasted with Leo Strauss' account. The fourth chapter considers Vico's political teaching and his opposition to the modern theories of natural law, including especially that of Hobbes. Rejecting the view that Vico should be characterized as an enemy of the Enlightenment, this chapter examines his teaching about the historicity of human nature as reflected in religion, justice, poetry, philosophy and the political cycle of human history, and concludes with a discussion of the "barbarism of reflection," in which all progress is said to come to an end. These studies of Hobbes and Vico indicate the points of greatest tension within the liberal theory of progress, and prepare the way for a future critical study of liberal theory of progress in Kant and his successors.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Profs. Susan Shell, Christopher Kelly and Paul Wilford, whose patience, encouragement and feedback made this dissertation much better than it would otherwise have been. I owe a debt of gratitude as well to all the students and faculty at the Boston College Department of Political Science. I cannot imagine a more congenial and stimulating environment in which to have spent the years in which this work took shape. Finally, I wish to thank the *Herzl Institute* in Jerusalem, where I served as the Morris and Marilyn Moscowitz senior fellow during 2019-2020. Without the financial support of the *Herzl Institute* and the Moscowitz family, this project could not have been completed.

Introduction

The Elements of Liberal Progress in Hobbes and Vico

What was described in the twentieth century as a crisis of confidence among intellectuals in "the idea of progress" has begun in recent decades to manifest concretely. The intellectual crisis of progress has become a political crisis. The viability of the liberal world order that emerged in the wake of the Second World War is increasingly threatened and uncertain. "History was not supposed to turn out this way,"[1] begins a recent front-page article in the *New York Times* on the 'Global Order.' Francis Fukuyama, whose book, *The End of History and the Last Man (1992)*, popularized the idea that history was nearing its culmination in the form of the universal and irreversible spread of peaceful liberal democracies, now believes that the wave of democratization seen between 1970 and 1989 "has reversed itself, and the total numbers of [democratic states] have declined. Authoritarian countries… have meanwhile grown more confident and self-assertive."[2] Fukuyama further remarks that although the global reverses of liberal democracy are alarming, "what was far more unexpected was that threats to democracy should arise from within established democracies themselves."[3]

The Elements of Progress was conceived with this problem in mind. To explain the phenomenon identified by Fukuyama and others, it would be necessary to account for both the astounding success of liberal progress in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as it apparent faltering or reversal in the early twenty-first century. The approach adopted in this study is not empirical, and no attempt has been made to explain the reversals suffered by liberalism in specific countries, each of which has its own history and its own domestic challenges. Rather, since the weakening of liberalism is global, it seemed best to interrogate the liberal theory of progress itself,

[1] Goodman, "Postwar Global Order is Attacked From Within"
[2] Fukuyama, p. xi
[3] Fukuyama., p. xi

to try to understand if it offers any theoretical clues able to account for its own rise and fall. Does the theory of progress secretly point to an end-point of progress – an event horizon – beyond which lurks not a perpetual end of history, but a return to history in all its strife and uncertainty?

This work in its present form does not hazard a direct answer to this question. Instead, as a first step towards an answer, it presents two preliminary and preparatory studies of the early modern thinkers, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). Hobbes and Vico may seem a strange place to begin a study of the liberal theory of progress, since neither is properly liberal or progressive. A more natural place to start might be with Immanuel Kant, whose essay, *Towards Perpetual Peace*, is widely considered the original articulation of the liberal theory of progress. That study of Kant, which will form a third and concluding part of the larger study begun here, still awaits completion. It was nevertheless the structure of Kant's progressive theory that has guided these preliminary studies of Hobbes and Vico. For in common with his progressive liberal successors, Kant's theory of progress unfolds in two distinct stages.

The first stage of liberal or Kantian progress is characterized by the unconscious, natural and unreasoning historical development of mankind from savagery toward enlightenment and the free exercise of reason. In this historical stage, it is not the decisions, intentions, or reasoned reflections of particular men that lead mankind toward the exercise of reason; on the contrary, this development occurs despite a total lack of conscious human cooperation. Kant refers to this movement as "a concealed plan of nature"[4] and "a purposive plan to create harmony through discord among people, even against their will."[5] Meanwhile, the second stage of progress is

[4] Kant [8:27]
[5] Kant [8:360]

characterized by the victory of human reason, and involves a conscious and reasoning project to construct the ideal political order. At this stage, in contrast the first, the promotion of progress by individuals becomes itself a moral duty. The full exercise of human reason is, in the final stage of history, turned to the problem of constructing the state on a rational and permanent basis.

This is not the place to enter into the details of Kantian theory of progress. But what the theory teaches in common with later progressive thinkers of the left and right – from J.S. Mill in the nineteenth century to Frederick Hayek and John Rawls in the twentieth century – is that human history is characterized by a radical rupture. On one side lies mankind's unreasoning childhood, in which nature reasons on man's behalf. On the other side, after mankind has entered its age of maturity, lies its conscious self-direction, as well as its responsibility for its own self-perfecting through the exercise of reason.

The conceit of this study is that the two-staged progressive theory of man characteristic of the liberal theory of progress draws from two divergent and competing schools of modern philosophy and undertakes their synthesis. The constructive project of the second age, including the whole Kantian project to produce the perfected "civil state," draws heavily on the work of Thomas Hobbes, who, in the *Leviathan,* describes precisely such a construction of an ideal and permanent state built of reasoned reflection. The earlier, developmental stage of human history draws on the modern philosophy of history, whose essence is to trace the unconscious historical development of man and of human ideas. This modern philosophy of history is often traced to Kant and his near contemporaries Herder, Hamman and Rousseau, and then afterward to Hegel. But the modern

philosophy of history actually emerges significantly before this, in Vico's *New Science* (1725, 1744).

Hobbes exercised an enormous influence on Kant, as did Rousseau. What interests us, however, are not the sources Kant might have made use of in creating his philosophy, or the thinkers who inspired him. We are interested rather in the general viability of the synthesis of these two very different streams of political philosophy that emerged separately in the early modern period. Though possibly unknown to Kant, Vico furnishes a unique window into the historical stream of modern philosophy. He also develops his philosophy of history in conscious opposition to the Hobbesian philosophy. This fact makes him a more useful window into the rise of the philosophy of history than, for instance, Rousseau, who in common with Kant, already combines the philosophy of history with Hobbesian political science. With Vico, it is possible to isolate more effectively the theoretical tension between the two stages or aspects of the liberal theory of progress, which remain at root two distinctly modern philosophies of man.

The overarching aim, then, has been to explain both the success and failure of the liberal theory of progress, and to determine if a flaw in the theory itself can explain what precisely has gone wrong with progress just when history was supposed to reach its end. The study of Hobbes and Vico could be replaced for this purpose, certainly, with the study of other thinkers. Nevertheless, the reader is invited to revisit this question at the conclusion of the study, and determine for himself if indeed any other two thinkers could draw out so very well the active tensions that still today characterize the faltering liberal theory of progress.

Although the fundamental question why liberal progress is failing is not directly answered in this work, the two preparatory studies of Hobbes and Vico presented are self-subsisting and complete in themselves. Together they sketch a great divide at the beginning of modern political philosophy, later bridged by the liberal theory of progress. Precisely because Hobbes and Vico each develop ideas essential to the theory of progress, while neither is a progressive in the full and proper sense, they are able to speak directly to the crisis of progress in our times.

Chapter 1, **The Natural and Artificial Roots of the Leviathan**, introduces the political philosophy of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and examines the key ideas Hobbes develops with respect to nature and art, power and public opinion, culture and civil religion. These and other novel conceptualizations of the political universe cohere in the *Leviathan* in an unsurpassed articulation of a new mode of political thought that I call *artificial or ideological politics*, and which, I argue, provides the theoretical basis of the constructive or second stage of progressive history.

Chapter 2, **"Armed Reason": Hobbes and the Invention of Ideology**, argues that Hobbes should not be understood as a "proto-liberal," but rather as the collective father of all dominant ideological systems of modern politics, including liberalism, socialism and fascism. This chapter traces the history of the term 'ideology,' showing that the concept, if not the term, is rooted in Hobbes. The formal features of ideological politics are examined and contrasted with the pre-ideological or natural politics that preceded it. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the perpetual struggle of ideological and natural forces in modern politics.

Chapter 3, **Vico's New Science: The Modern Philosophy of History**, turns to Vico, the founder of the second great stream of modern political thought. The chapter discusses and compares the philosophy of history in its ancient, medieval and modern forms. Explicating a number of key terms in Vico, the chapter proposes how Vico ought to be distinguished from his premodern predecessors, and demonstrates that the philosophy of the *New Science* agrees with the Hobbesian conception of ideas and nature, but draws contrary conclusions regarding the origins of political life. This account of Vico's philosophy sketches a general theory of the genesis of the modern philosophy of history as a reaction against *ideology*. This account is then contrasted with Leo Strauss's theory of the genesis of the modern philosophy of history.

Chapter 4, **"Vulgar Wisdom" and the Politics of History,** considers Vico's political teaching and his opposition to the modern theories of natural law, including especially that of Hobbes. Rejecting the view that Vico should be characterized as an enemy of the Enlightenment, the chapter examines his teaching about the historicity of human nature as reflected in religion, justice, poetry, philosophy and the political cycle of human history. The conclusion presents Vico's most forceful rejoinder to Hobbes' artificial or ideological politics, in the form of the "barbarism of reflection" by which reason becomes unhinged from inherited custom and destroys itself.

Postscript: The Modern Crisis of Progress, replaces a conclusion, and returns to the original question of the crisis of liberal progress, indicating the shape of further outstanding research suggested by the study of Hobbes and Vico, and setting out what work remains to be done to determine the theoretical causes of the arrest of liberal progress in our time.

Chapter 1

The Natural and Artificial Roots of the Leviathan

"Words, languages, laws, sciences, and the fine arts have come, and by them finally the rough diamond of our mind has been polished. Man has been trained in the same way as animals. He has become an author, as they became beasts of burden."

- Julien Offray de La Mettrie, L'homme Machine (1749)

1. Introduction: The Study of Hobbes

The first task in the study of any great philosopher is to make sense of his thought by providing an account of its elements and their connection. This chapter is devoted to Hobbes' political philosophy as presented in the *Leviathan*, though reference is made to other works where they shed light on Hobbes' overall intention. Our primary focus is on those original aspects of Hobbes' thinking that entitle him to be called the father of modern political thought, and which interest us in this study particularly insofar as they have contributed to the rise of the liberal theory of progress. Our attention is turned in particular to the ideas Hobbes develops with respect to nature and art, power and public opinion, culture and civil religion. These and other novel conceptualizations of the political universe cohere in the *Leviathan* in an unsurpassed articulation of a new mode of political thought that will here be called *artificial or ideological politics*, and which, I argue, provides the intellectual basis of the form of politics that, to a greater or lesser extent, has succeeded in capturing the modern state.

Hobbes' picture of human nature can hardly be said to flatter human vanity. Perhaps this goes some way toward explaining why it has been his fate to exercise a vast but largely subterranean influence, never winning a large public following. Because his ideas bear a seminal but indirect relationship to our own politics, the question of his influence remains vital and contentious. After revisiting the revolutionary argument of the *Leviathan* in this chapter, the following chapter, "'Armed Reason': Hobbes and the Invention of Ideology," builds on that textual analysis to propose a new understanding of Hobbes' place in the development of modern political thought. Our thesis is that Hobbes' true legacy lies, not in his supposed proto-liberalism, but in having set

out the theoretical basis of the broader modern phenomenon of the artificial or ideological mode of politics, encompassing liberalism alongside the other dominant ideologies of modern politics.

The tone of political discourse in the early decades of the 21st century has turned significantly more aggrieved, partisan and factional than in the recent past; it has perhaps also shown itself less strictly ideological than it was for most of the 20th century, at least in the sense that it is less impersonal, less universal, and less systematic in nature. Yet today as in the recent past, political discourse around the globe is still to a great degree formed and dominated by organizing moral-political systems – ideologies – such as liberalism, socialism or fascism, as well as many other opposing systems and sub-systems of derivative importance. This political universe, unquestionably dominant in the twentieth century and so different from the direct personal rule of pre-modern times, finds its first expositor and engineer in Hobbes. Because the theoretical underpinnings of ideological politics emerges with Hobbes, he allows us to step outside ideology – outside the familial disputes between liberalism, socialism and other competing ideologies – to see what these systems share, as well as to better understand the forces that today challenge their collective dominance over political practice.

2. 'Civil philosophy': The modern science of politics

Hobbes aspired to transform political practice by means of the first truly scientific approach to politics. "Civil philosophy," he wrote in 1642, is "no older... than my own book *De Cive*."[6] He had undertaken to render obsolete the art of politics, in all its dangerous and destructive uncertainty. The "civil philosophy" he proposed in its stead would methodically and reliably generate safety and order. Philosophers since Plato had held that the coincidence of wisdom and political power is difficult and improbable. Hobbes' counter-proposal is a novel and infallible kind of political science able to generate and direct political power of itself, without relying on any person's uncertain virtues. William Molesworth, the early 19th century editor of Hobbes' complete works, gives Hobbes' new tool of statecraft the extraordinarily apt name of "armed reason."[7]

In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes reflects with satisfaction on his accomplishment. "So, long time after men have begun to constitute Common-wealths, imperfect, and apt to relapse into disorder, there may be Principles of Reason found out, by industrious meditation, to make their constitution (excepting by external violence) everlasting."[8] As the decimating and fratricidal English Civil War raged on intermittently between 1642 and 1651, Hobbes noted wryly from exile in Paris that the practical success of his new principles "concerneth my particular interest, at this day, very little."[9] He returned to England during Oliver Cromwell's rule, leaving Charles II behind in exile. As a result of this decision, as well as passages in the *Leviathan* (some excised in the Latin edition of

[6] "Natural Philosophy is therefore but young; but Civil Philosophy yet much younger, as being no older (I say it provoked, and that my detractors may know how little they have wrought upon me) than my own book *De Cive*." (EW I, p. ix)
[7] EW VI, p. 421
[8] Lev., p. 232; Cf. Lev., p. 221 : "Though nothing be immortal, which mortals make; yet, if men had the use of reason they pretend to, their Common-wealths might be secured, at least, from perishing by internal diseases."
[9] Lev., p. 232

1688) thought to challenge the Anglican Church,[10] Hobbes' reputation suffered after the Stuart Restoration of 1660, never quite recovering in his lifetime.[11] It was impossible to know, he confessed, whether his principles would be adopted by "those that have Power to make use of them."[12] He had produced, all the same, what he understood to be a working universal blueprint of perfect government. With its publication, Hobbes informed his public that there would be no further need of waiting indefinitely with Plato "till Soveraigns be philosophers."[13] Any sovereign whatsoever might "convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice."[14]

What led Hobbes to propose an entirely new science of politics? There is no need to adopt Hobbes' own strict determinism to see that changing historical conditions must have played an important role. As a consequence of Quentin Skinner's studies, much attention has been devoted to uncovering the ways Hobbes' political philosophy might be seen to respond to the immediate "ideological context" in which he lived and wrote, and especially the so-called Engagement controversies stirring at that time.[15] Richard Tuck has also provided an illuminating account of Hobbes' debt to his great predecessors and contemporaries in the natural rights tradition, especially Hugo Grotius and John Selden.[16] I propose to begin briefly with some historical remarks of a different character. Our interest in Hobbes' philosophy cannot be justified by the ways he was affected by his contemporaries, or by uncovering his intellectual debts. But to the degree that

[10] Cf. Lev., 479-480
[11] Hobbes subsequently denied vehemently that he had abandoned the king and Anglican Church, or supported Cromwell, ascribing his return to England to fear of persecution at the hands of the French clergy. (Cf. EW IV, p. 415).
[12] Lev., p. 232
[13] Lev., p. 254
[14] Lev., p. 254
[15] Cf. Skinner, 1966; Skinner, 1972.
[16] Tuck, 1979, pp. 4, 119-142

Hobbes responds to broader circumstances that continue to characterize the modern condition, he is responding to our own circumstances. Let us therefore begin by taking note of three much larger, even tectonic, historical shifts with which Hobbes was confronted. These hardly account for the originality and influence of his philosophy, but they indicate in some part why a new science of politics appeared to him both possible and necessary.

2.1 Increased Size of the Political Community

Political communities in Hobbes' time were, for a great variety of reasons, many times larger than the city-states in which Plato and Aristotle had lived. Although the Roman Empire had spanned continents (as had the Persian Empire before it), it was ancient Greek political philosophy, with its orientation toward the geographically and demographically limited city-state, that had been resurrected to prominence and influence at the hands of the Renaissance humanists. There are many reasons that Hobbes gives for rejecting Aristotelean philosophy generally, and Aristotelean political philosophy in particular.[17] Among these must be accounted one that Hobbes never mentions explicitly, though it is implied in several places. Both Plato and Aristotle, oriented as they were toward a politics of personal virtue, severely limit the size of the ideal city-state to the number of several thousand citizens and their families.[18] There was therefore pressing need of a new political theory capable of organizing much larger and more densely populous political communities than the Greek philosophers had known.

[17] A very clear and exhaustive account of Hobbes' rejection of Aristotle may be found in Devin Stauffer's *Hobbes' Kingdom of Light* (Stauffer, 2018, pp. 10-80.) Stauffer, however, underestimates the centrality of Hobbes' rejection of final causes, which forms the central point of his rupture with ancient and medieval philosophy.
[18] Cf. Plato, *Republic* [423b], *Laws* [737e-738b]; Aristotle, *Politics* [1326a25-1326b26]

When facing large enemy states, a sufficiently large population becomes a bare requirement of defense. Hobbes therefore declares in the *Elements of Law* that the city-state is no longer viable.[19] The point is repeated still more emphatically in *Leviathan*: "And as for very little Common-wealths, be they Popular, or Monarchicall, there is no humane wisdome can uphold them, longer than the Jealousy lasteth of their potent Neighbours."[20] Hobbes evidently did not much admire the highly creative but unstable political life of the Italian city-states, with which he had some first-hand familiarity.

Beyond the military and economic impossibility of a broad return to the small communities of the past, Hobbes makes clear that he does not share the prejudice of the ancients in favor of a personal politics requiring small political communities. In the earliest historical times, Hobbes writes, industry and learning were small, and progress in philosophy almost non-existent, for the reason that there was no leisure to pursue these things due to the requirements of self-defense preoccupying all small political communities, such as the Greek *poleis.* It could not have been otherwise "till the erecting of great common-wealths."[21] The closest Hobbes comes to a theory of historical development turns, in fact, on the gradual amalgamation of the Greek population into increasingly large communities. The enlargement of the political community, produced at length through the attrition of ceaseless war, forms for Hobbes one of the key conditions of collective human advance towards the achievement of a more stable and peaceful civil condition, which is the precondition of philosophy.

[19] EW IV, p. 119, Cf. *De Cive*, p. 167
[20] Lev., p. 182
[21] Lev., p. 459

> Philosophy was not arisen to the Graecians, and most other peoples West, whose *Common-wealths* (no greater perhaps than *Lucca*, or *Geneva*) had never *Peace*, but when their fears of one another were equall; nor *Leasure* to observe any thing but one another. At length, when Warre had united many of these Graecian lesser Cities, into fewer, and greater; then began Seven men, of several parts of Greece, to get the reputation of being *Wise*.[22]

Population growth had however at least two sides. Hobbes identified urban concentration and the vast accumulated fortunes it enabled as one of the major causes of the English Civil War, and as a standing challenge to any sovereign power.[23] In Hobbes' lifetime the population of London alone grew by three times, from around 200,000 to 600,000. Such large early modern cities dwarfed most of their classical counterparts in size and economic output, but were at the same time constrained by a vastly diminished degree of political independence and self-government. The ballooning urban population of cities like London were therefore hotbeds of seditious opinion, as Hobbes reiterates throughout his account of the English Civil War, *Behemoth*. These populations could not be simply dispersed however, not least because they had become essential to the economic and military power of the larger states to which they belonged. But they would need somehow to be managed and kept in their places.

The closest historical parallel to the population distribution of 17th century Europe was the imperial order of Rome. This provided Hobbes with some useful conceptual material.[24] But the Roman

[22] Lev., p. 459
[23] Cf. EW VI, pp. 320-321; Lev., p. 230
[24] Hobbes' conceptual borrowings from the *Digest* of Roman Law have been discussed by Quentin Skinner. The Hobbesian formulation of personation is particularly indebted to Roman law. (Cf. Skinner, 1999, p. 4)

Empire had initially and long rested on the fiction of continuous republican government, and afterward had lacked an explicit organizing theory. It had also been wracked by instability, periods of military dictatorship, and eventual decline.[25] Rome had been an empire, not a commonwealth. And now, the pressing task with respect to political demography was to invent a common-wealth strong and unified enough to awe its members, and absorb into itself all subordinate political communities, especially large and wealthy cities. The personal politics enjoined by the Greek and Republican Roman writers, resting on the particular virtues of ruler and ruled, simply would not answer the purpose. It was necessary to conceive of a form of government more powerful, more predictable and more impersonal than any previously known.

We might say that the Hobbesian political doctrine demands, in theory at least, the eradication of what Alexis de Tocqueville called "intermediary powers," i.e., the various privileges and corporate or personal rights that, as a matter of fact, in varying ways and to differing degrees, are always exercised below the level of the sovereign state. At the same time, Hobbes saw that the larger a political community, the more its unity depends on a uniformity in the basic political character of its citizens, rather than on any complementarity of its parts or classes. And the larger the political community, the more easily this might be accomplished through a method of uniform indoctrination available specifically to large, impersonal political communities.

[25] Samuel Pufendorf's criticisms of the constitution of the Roman Empire may in some measure supply the want of any explicit treatment in Hobbes. "But in effect, this Monarchy was not founded so much upon the consent of the Senate and People, as upon the Power of the Souldiery, by whose assistance it was introduc'd and maintain'd... But this Monarchy being founded upon the Souldiery, could not be of long continuance; for as soon as the Souldiery had once learn'd this Secret, that they being the Supporters of the Monarchy, could dispose of the Empire at pleasure... they also began to kill such Emperours as were not pleasing to them, and to fill up their room with such as could obtain their Favour." (Pufendorf, pp. 36-37)

2.2 Diffusion of Knowledge: The Renaissance, the Reformation and the Printing Press

The recovery of Greek philosophy in the Renaissance, and the vernacular translations of the Bible spread to all parts of Europe during the Reformation, had by Hobbes' time completely overturned the delicate and formal reconciliation of Greek philosophy and Christianity effected by scholasticism. The dissolution of this loose civilizational consensus surrounding matters of theological and political doctrine made the situation very dangerous. Hobbes looked upon a Europe decimated by religious wars and seditions of the high and low, and blamed the unprecedented and destabilizing diffusion of literacy and knowledge, and the ensuing disintegration of religious authority. Hobbes speaks of these changes with hostility and suspicion, but apparently without any hope of a reversal.[26]

From humanism had arisen an "imitation of the Greeks, and Romans," largely among members of the aristocracy:

> And as to Rebellion in particular against Monarchy; one of the most frequent causes of it, is the Reading of the books of Policy, and Histories of the antient Greeks, and Romans [...] From the reading, I say, of such books, men have undertaken to kill their Kings, because the Greek and Latine writers, in their books, and discourses of Policy, make it lawfull, and laudable, for any man so to do; provided before he do it, he call him Tyrant.[27]

[26] C.f.,"And now at length all men of all nations, not only- philosophers, but even the vulgar, have and do still deal with this [sc. civil science] as a matter of ease, exposed and prostitute to every mother-wit, and to be attained without any great care or study." (De Cive, p. 96)
[27] Lev., p. 225-226

Hobbes proposes suppressing the works in question, and publicly teaching his new and contrary doctrine.[28] The honorable and high-minded would need to be put in their place. But more alarming still in Hobbes' view were the effects of the spread of literacy and vernacular translations of the Bible among the lower classes. The English Civil War, Hobbes suggests in *Behemoth*, was in part the work of "enemies which rose against his Majesty from the private interpretation of the Scripture, exposed to every man's scanning in his mother-tongue."[29]

> For after the Bible was translated into English, every man, nay, every boy and wench, that could read English, thought they spoke with God Almighty, and understood what he said, when by a certain number of chapters a day they had read the Scriptures once or twice over. The reverence and obedience due to the Reformed Church here... was cast off, and every man became a judge of religion, and an interpreter of the Scriptures to himself.[30]

The danger to public order engendered by the translation and diffusion of the Bible was essentially irreversible. Christianity thus exposed to the interpretation of the masses could no longer serve as a force for political or intellectual unity, but on the contrary, had produced and was producing the most intractable and bloody religious strife. Generally speaking, it was obvious in Hobbes' time that the ignorance and credulity of the people could no longer supply a basis for political order, as it had not only for the ancient Greek philosophers, but also for Machiavelli, and even for Hobbes' former patron, Francis Bacon.

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[28] "I cannot imagine, how anything can be more prejudiciall to a Monarchy, than the allowing of such books to be publikely read, without present applying such correctives of discreet Masters, as are fit to take away their Venime; Which Venime I will not doubt to compare to the biting of a mad Dogge." (Lev., p. 226)

[29] EW VI, p. 167

[30] EW VI, p. 190

Hobbes therefore felt compelled to seek alternative means of imposing doctrinal order. In his *Dialogue of the Common Laws,* he poses the question: "But what Reason can you give me why there should not be as many Copies abroad of the Statutes, as there be of the Bible?"[31] Religious and seditious war, Hobbes writes, will always recur "except the vulgar be better taught than have hetherto been."[32] Mass instruction or indoctrination on scale never before seen would now be necessary. The laws of the common-wealth ought to be publicly taught and expounded, as Moses did for the Hebrews.[33] According to Hobbes, "the Right of Teaching is inseparably annexed" to the sovereign power.[34] Nor does Hobbes find good grounds for thinking the common people incapable of such instruction. "The Common-peoples minds, unlesse they be tainted with dependance on the Potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their Doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Publique Authority shall be imprinted in them..."[35]

Hobbes' political theory responds therefore to the political and religious instability brought about with the diffusion of knowledge and the quickening of communication. From this circumstance arises the centrality in the *Leviathan* of reforming and unifying Church, State and University (this last, in particular, being the chief purveyor of doctrines of duty[36]). These three institutions, inherited from the Christian Middle Ages, Hobbes intended to unify and repurpose as instruments of a rational public indoctrination. The English historian A. L. Rowse, grasping the essence of the

[31] EW I, p. 28
[32] Lev., p. 127
[33] Lev., p. 235
[34] Lev., p. 381
[35] Lev., p. 233
[36] "It is therefore manifest, that the instruction of the people, dependeth wholly, on the right teaching of Youth in the Universities" Lev., p. 237, cf. Lev., p. 491

matter, writes that "Hobbes was modern again in realising the importance of propaganda, and that the pulpit was the chief instrument of propaganda."[37]

Effective propaganda is not auxiliary to Hobbes' political order; rather his civil philosophy is in large measure based on a successful appropriation of the Church, University and Bible in the service of a rationalizing mass propaganda. This point is often overlooked or misunderstood. Hobbes' political philosophy is in essence not so much anti-Christian as post-Christian. Its success depends on expanding and repurposing the institutions of public indoctrination that arose in Medieval Christendom, and harnessing to new purposes the authority that Christianity had conferred on these institutions over long centuries.

Hobbes' political philosophy, resting as it does on an irresistible regime of propaganda, also proposes a new kind of propaganda. The new propaganda would be characterized by a democratic transparency of aim and function; it would be designed to capture the loyalty of the newly educated or half-educated masses and induct them into its modes of reasoning and its norms. The new propaganda Hobbes proposes aims to humanize and it professes its own exhaustive and reasonable self-justification, laying out its entire reasoning to the world. It never deceives, it professes its aims openly.

Hobbes conceived of the new propaganda as a kind of master political discourse, independently determined by the civil philosopher, and, if correctly determined, capable of guiding the impersonal state and its subjects with perfect reliability. For the *impersonal* state depends on the

[37] Rowse, p. 44

state's obedience to a doctrine, and, if it is to be more than a tyranny, it also requires the unforced acquiescence of all or most citizens in the same doctrine. For this reason, once politics have shifted into the ideological mode, propaganda becomes less an elective tool of the state, and more and more essential to its existing and functioning at all. This new kind of propaganda rests on an understanding of the state as fulfilling the role of guarantor of a moral-political doctrine determined independently by civil philosophy.

2.3 The Denial of a Natural Standard of Good

Perhaps the most important historical circumstance Hobbes confronted, and the most difficult to define precisely, was the rise of the "new science." Hobbes was influenced by Galileo, Harvey, Bacon, and Descartes, among others; he himself was considered a prominent practitioner of the new science. Rather than entering here into a detailed interpretation of the character of Hobbes' "natural philosophy," I wish only to indicate one feature of the new science most relevant from a political perspective. The new scientists were united in their denial of what Aristotle had called "final causes." Hobbes himself attacks this idea savagely, most often under the scholastic name of "abstract essences."[38]

The significance of the growing scientific rejection of final causes could not have been more portentous for every branch of knowledge, including "civil philosophy." Under the headings "final cause" and "abstract essence" medieval philosophy had found natural purposes applying to all natural beings, including human beings. These natural purposes, alongside the divine purposes revealed in Christianity, had provided a theoretical touchstone for establishing and judging

[38] Cf. Lev., 463-466; "A *final cause* has no place but in such things as have sense and will; and this also I shall prove hereafter to be an efficient cause." (EW I, p. 132)

political order, and generally for determining right from wrong. Hobbes' mechanistic worldview, by contrast, finds nothing in nature but matter in motion, and denies outright that nature provides any objective or permanent basis from which to judge good and evil.[39] It has perhaps not always been duly recognized that the rejection of final causes leads Hobbes to a reconceptualization of the categories of the natural and the artificial, and to a new understanding of the nature of ideas themselves. Our reading of the *Leviathan* begins by considering the shift in the meaning of these terms that Hobbes brings about, with an eye to the political character of his innovation.

[39] "For these words of Good, evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the Person of the man (where there is no Common-wealth;) or, (in a Common-wealth,) From the Person that representeth it; or from an Arbitrator or Judge, whom men disagreeing shall by consent set up, and make his sentence the Rule thereof." (Lev., p. 39)

3. The Natural and the Artificial Roots of Leviathan

Hobbes famously begins his political theory by supposing an original and anarchic state of mankind in which nothing but disorder, war and misery reign. By means of an extended meditation on the "continuall feare, and danger of violent death" characterizing this "natural condition,"[40] he derives theoretical justification for the unlimited power he grants to the civil sovereign. The state of nature has also another, perhaps more pregnant function, insofar as it defines political life as artificial by way of contrast. The "natural condition" opens to us a perspective from which the state itself appears as a product of human art, provocatively called by Hobbes an "Artificiall Man."[41] The significance of this very foundational idea, which is among the most original Hobbes proposes, appears fully only in light of the novel meanings Hobbes attaches to the notions of nature and art.[42]

3.1 Ancient and Modern Art

Classical political thought turned on a distinction between nature and convention, *phusis* and *nomos*. It was the characteristic position of the sophists, as Plato represents them, to argue that mere convention is responsible for human laws, and in so doing to undermine the moral prestige of law.[43] For the sophists, as well as Plato, nature signified not only the spontaneous and necessary,

[40] Lev., p. 89
[41] Lev., p. 9
[42] Given the prominence of the concepts of nature and art in the *Leviathan*, it is surprisingly how little serious attention the topic has received in the scholarly literature. The notable exception, discussed below, is Michael Oakeshott. On the other hand, an entire issue of *Hobbes Studies* (Vol. 28, No. 1, 2015), devoted to these "rich but underexplored concepts in Hobbes's political theory" (Prokhovnik, 2015, p. 1) manages to avoid hazarding any definition or formula as to what precisely Hobbes means by nature and art. Summarizing the findings presented in the issue, Terrell Carver observes, pointedly but somewhat confusedly, that "understanding the natural life of humans as inherently artificial... is pretty much where we end up." (Carver, p. 73)
[43] "They claim," Plato complains of the sophists in the *Laws*, "that the noble things by nature are different from those by convention, and that the just things are not at all by nature, but that men are continually disputing with one another and are always changing these things, and whatever changes they've made at a given time are each at

but also the realm of truth. Art might be a pale imitation of nature, as in painting or poetry. In other arts, such as medicine, art accomplishes its tasks by following nature. "As for the political art [*technè*]," Plato complains of the sophists, "they claim that there is a small portion of it that is in partnership with nature, but that most of it is by art; and thus the whole of legislation, whose assumptions are not true, is not by nature but by art."[44] Against this view, Plato argued that what was best, for the individual as for the city, was most "according to nature." Any art wholly dispensing with a natural model would have appeared to Plato as *unnatural* in the pejorative sense of deformity that still obtains.

Hobbes subscribes to a very different understanding of nature.[45] Mechanistic and deterministic, consisting of nothing but matter in motion, it contains no final causes and nothing morally exemplary. Consequently, its creatures can appeal to no natural ends against which their selves or their projects might be measured. Human individuals, wound up like springs by their internal motions, speeding on paths traced by congenital and apparently insatiable appetites, collide constantly and are perpetually frustrated in reaching their destinations. Consequently, human life in the "natural condition" is, in the celebrated phrase, "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short."[46] Man in the "natural condition" is bereft of natural purpose in a sense analogous to nature at large. Commentators have long emphasized that Hobbes' repellent vision of human life outside the civil state bears the strong impression of the horrors of the English Civil War and the other wars ravaging 17th century Europe. But it reflects, equally if not more, the specter of nature conjured by

that time authoritative, having come into being by art and by the legal conventions, but not, surely, by any nature." Plato, Laws [889e-890a]

[44] Plato, Laws [889d-e]

[45] Hobbes indicates in his Epistle Dedicatory to Elements of Philosophy that the modern conception of nature begins with Galileo and Harvey. (EW I, p. viii)

[46] Lev., p. 89

the new science, and exposed quite literally to view through the lens of the recently invented microscope (an instrument that fascinated Hobbes).[47] We might fancifully picture Hobbes conceiving of man's "natural condition" after starting at the sound of cannon shot, torn reluctantly from the whizzing and colliding corpuscles in the lens of his microscope.

Nature, as Hobbes conceived it, not only offers no guidance regarding man's proper ends, but is strictly unknowable. We know only our own sensations, which are only so many motions communicated to our bodies.[48] Under the weight of the new science, what Arthur Lovejoy has called the "Great Chain of Being" – the classical and medieval conception of a universal hierarchy of created beings – had collapsed into a tangled web. Yet Hobbes' denial of a hierarchy of beings does not prevent his proposing a hierarchy of human inventions.[49] Nor does he, as we might expect, abandon the notion of art as the imitation of nature. We find, on the contrary, that Hobbes both upholds the idea of art as an imitation of nature, and vastly expands the pretensions of art in the political sphere.

3.2 The Art that Makes Machines

How and why does the abandonment of natural purpose lead Hobbes to an unprecedented elevation of art? This is by no means its obvious consequence. Yet looming large in the 17th century is something absent to the consciousness of the ancients – even the atomists among them – that illuminates Hobbes' reformulation of the relation of art to nature. Modern science had denuded nature of purposes, but it had also given rise to powerful machines. The machine is a complex of

[47] Cf. Malcolm, 2002, p. 183
[48] Lev., p. 13
[49] These are language, letters, and printing. (Lev., p. 24); The phrase "hierarchy of inventions" is borrowed from Otfried Höffe. (Höffe, 2015, p. 94)

matter in motion controlled by human will to achieve predictable ends. And the machine – rather than painting, architecture, medicine or political convention – forms for Hobbes the prototypical *artifact.*[50] Machines are animate art. Human art generally might now be conceived as an imitation less of the natural objects experienced in everyday life, as of God's creation *ex nihlo.*[51] The idea is summarized in the extraordinary opening passage of the *Leviathan*.

> Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governs the World) is by the *Art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal. For seeing life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principall part within; why may we not say that all *Automata* (Engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificall life?[52]

The most powerful human artifice, the "greatest of humane Powers," is the common-wealth.[53] Hobbes reiterates with provocative impiety that it is created in an act resembling "that Fiat, or the Let Us Make Man, pronounced by God in the Creation."[54] Unlike the ancient epicureans,

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[50] It is only in the *Leviathan* that Hobbes really develops this idea, as we will see below, but it is anticipated already in *De Cive*, showing that Hobbes was early preoccupied with the machine and its analogy to both human and natural objects. "For everything is best understood by its constitutive causes. For as in a watch, or some such small engine, the matter, figure, and motion of the wheels cannot be well known, except it be taken insunder and viewed in parts; so to make a more curious search into the rights of states and duties of subjects, it is necessary, I say, not to take them insunder, but yet they be so considered as if they were dissolved; that is, that we rightly understand what quality of human nature is, in what matters it is, in what not, fit to make up a civil government..." (*De Cive*, p. 99)

[51] Lev., p. 10; Among the things of art in which man imitates God's creation, according to Hobbes, is philosophy. "Philosophy, therefore, the child of the world and your own mind, is within yourself; perhaps not fashioned yet, but like the world its father, as it was at the beginning, a thing confused. Do, therefore, as the statuaries do, who by hewing off that which is superfluous, do not make but find the image. Or imitate the creation: if you will be a philosopher in good earnest, let your reason move upon the deep of your own cogitations and experience; those things that lie in confusion must be set asunder, distinguished, and every one stamped with its own name set in order; that is to say, your method must resemble that of the creation." (EW I, p. xiii)

[52] Lev., p. 9

[53] Lev., p. 62

[54] Lev., p. 10

Hobbesian materialism is inflected with the Biblical ethos of creation. But it is not creationism by itself, so much as the idea of the machine conceived in light of creationism, that inspires Hobbes' great admiration for human art.[55] By reflecting on the products of man's art – the 17th century machine – Hobbes arrived at an understanding of nature as God's art.[56] Half-anticipating Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* on several occasions, he believed that by means of the study of man's machine-like nature, human art ought to be capable of "making an artificial life, imitating that Rationall and most excellent worke of Nature, Man. For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man."[57]

3.3 Human Artifice and the Artificial Man

The prominence of the machine as a product of human art is an important and generally overlooked clue in discerning what art means for Hobbes. Hobbes, however, never proposes a clear definition of art, and makes a rather very free use of the word's various associations. Sometimes he seems to revert to the classic distinction of *phusis* and *nomos*, as when he maintains that the sociability or "agreement" of bees and ants is "natural," that is, spontaneous and necessary, whereas human sociability is "by Covenant only, which is Artificiall."[58] At other times he uses art to mean what is feigned, contrived or deceptive, as in the case of the verbal "artifice of those that seek not the truth, but their own advantage."[59] Art signifies, simultaneously and by turns, the conventional, the

[55] It is nevertheless the case that as early as Philo of Alexandria the post-Biblical tradition in philosophy has associated human art with human dominion over nature. See Milibank, p. 12

[56] It is the machine that distinguishes Hobbes' formulation of nature as "God's art" from superficially similar formulations in earlier thinkers. (cf. Plato, Sophist [265e]).

[57] Lev., p. 9

[58] Lev., p. 120

[59] Lev., p. 415; Thus, for instance, if there were no justice, there would be no bar to "whatsoever a man can by force, or art, acquire to himselfe." (Lev., p. 232) The subtitle of *Behemoth*, Hobbes' account of the English civil war, is "the History of the Causes of the Civils Wars of England, and of the Counsels and Artifices by which they were carried on from 1640 to 1660"

feigned, and the creative imitation of God. All of these are human products, and there is of course nothing particularly new in conceiving of art as human making. But for Hobbes, even truth itself, being exclusively an attribute of verbal propositions, is artifice.[60] "And to *know truth* is the same thing as to remember that it was made by ourselves by the common use of words."[61] Geometry and civil philosophy are both certain sciences, investigating, as Hobbes took them to do, the products of man's mind. By contrast, science does not reach any similar degree of certainty when interpreting external nature.[62] Hobbesian man makes rather than discovering truths. He appears therefore in a new and very radical sense as *homo faber*.

Given the air of significance and novelty Hobbes imputes to the artificial character of the Leviathan, it is important to try to grasp still more precisely the meaning art holds for him. Michael Oakeshott, one of the few scholars to have meaningfully grappled with this puzzle, correctly observes that the artificial cannot be what is made by human reason, since Hobbes takes reason (and the language that precedes it[63]) to be human inventions and hence already artificial. Oakeshott suggests that "a work of art is the product of mental activity considered from the point of view of its cause," namely "the will of man."[64] Hobbes' analogy between human art and divine creation supports this voluntarist definition. Will, however, is common to man and beast.[65] And the will is merely "the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhaering to the action."[66] We must ask,

[60] EW I, p. 36
[61] De Cive p. 374; cf. *De Cive*, p. 367
[62] Hobbes' holds that geometry is the most perfect of the "demonstrable" arts, and that civil philosophy is likewise demonstrable, because "the construction of the subject thereof is in the power of the artist himself…" (EW VII, p. 183). Arthur Child presents an interesting argument distinguishing the individual making of geometric objects from the collective making of the state, an important theme addressed from a somewhat different perspective below. (Child, 1953, pp. 271-283)
[63] Lev., p. 24
[64] Oakeshott, 1975, pp. 28-29; Cf. Oakeshott, 1991, p. 247
[65] Cf. Lev., p. 44, EW I, p. 409
[66] Lev., p. 44

therefore, what makes the human will uniquely capable of producing art, not only in contrast to animal will, but again only in particular cases.

The key to distinguishing artifice from other acts of will lies in Hobbes' view of human singularity. Among the things distinguishing man from beast are speech, verbal reasoning and curiosity.[67] The first two of these, as mentioned, are themselves artificial. Only curiosity emerges as a peculiarly and naturally human passion or capacity preceding all art. Curiosity means that,

> …when imagining any thing whatsoever, wee seek all the possible effects, that can by it be produced; that is to say, we imagine what we can do with it, when wee have it. Of which I have not at any time seen any signe, but in man onely; for this is a curiosity hardly incident to the nature of any living creature that has no other Passion but sensuall, such as are hunger, thirst, lust, and anger.[68]

It is indicative of Hobbes' whole approach to science that curiosity does not signify a passion to know the world and its beings, but the seeking of "all possible effects" that can be produced by a given thing. This means that human curiosity is passion for power, one that conceives of all things as tools. Science, like the passion of curiosity, is founded on the possibility of a "knowledge of consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another."[69] It is a method enabling us to use like causes to "produce the like effects."[70] Hobbes is the first to apply this broadly Baconian

[67] Lev., p. 42
[68] Lev., p. 21
[69] Lev., pp. 35-36
[70] Lev., pp. 35-36; Cf. EW I, p. 7

understanding of science systematically to politics. Science is merely one powerful method of satisfying curiosity; curiosity is the basis of all human artifice.

Articulate language, for instance, is an artifice that ambivalently raises man above the beast, not only by enhancing his ability to remember and communicate truth, but also by enabling him to lie. "By speech man is not made better, but only given greater possibilities."[71] For animals "want *that art of words*, by which some men can represent to others, that which is Good, in the likenesse of Evill; and Evill, in the likenesse of Good."[72] Human artifice, in the broadest sense, assumes the sense of natural elements controlled and organized as tools serving human purposes.

Through the artifice of words and reason, covenants and civil laws arise. These are "artificial bonds,"[73] that is, legal tools made to bridle and control human behavior. "Persons Artificiall" are living tools that "have their words and actions Owned by those whom they represent."[74] Human art also imitates divine creation by producing altogether new and unprecedented things, and, in the paradigmatic case of the machine, by animating them with an artificial life.[75] A remarkable conceptual shift follows. The organic view of the city, namely the view that human community is a real unity composed of living parts, had since Plato and Aristotle been opposed to the

[71] *De Homine*, p. 41
[72] Lev., p. 119 [italics added]
[73] Lev., p. 147
[74] Lev., p. 111
[75] Aloysius Martinich's formulation of Hobbes' approach to nature and art is correct but misleading and insufficient. "In postmodern terms," he writes, "Hobbes wants to 'deconstruct' the art-nature dichotomy. His point is that, far from their being opposed to each other, nature is artificial." (Martinich, 1992, p. 46; n. 5, p. 375) Martinich points out in the note that Plato and certain medieval thinkers had anticipated Hobbes' formulation that nature is God's art. The idea of nature as God's art is implied by a creationist account of the world. What was absent before Hobbes was the notion, suggested by the biblical account of creation only in conjunction with the rise of the machine, that man's art can imitate the divine creation in creating animate things. What Martinich's formulation generally forgets is that the *Leviathan* exudes the exhilaration of the Baconian ambition to further extend the sway of art over nature.

conventionalist view of politics, according to which the state is founded by an arbitrary agreement. The Leviathan is however both artificial and organic. It is an "artificial man," animated by a "sovereignty" that serves as an "Artificiall Soul."[76] The Leviathan is a self-moving or organic artifice. In being both artificial and organic, the Leviathan anticipates the modern ideological state generally.

[76] Lev., p. 9

4. Artificial Politics: Fiction as Tool

The Hobbesian state is however obviously not a machine or organism in the usual sense, nor even a tangible thing. It is here that Hobbes moves unobtrusively but decisively beyond his materialism. It ends precisely where the natural science of his time ended. He maintains meanwhile in a much more thoroughgoing and systematic manner than any earlier political thinker that public ideas can and must be systematically harnessed as political tools. As Hobbes proceeds to unfold the generation of the Leviathan, the metaphor of the state as man-machine opens up toward an examination of its parts. The most important and tangible of these parts are natural men. Yet these men are determined in their pursuits of ends, individually and collectively, by commonly held ideas, opinions and beliefs. The civil order exists by virtue of these shared opinions that organize men by reforming their natural wills and by generating their common objects of desire and aversion. What sets Hobbes apart from his predecessors is his insistence that these shared opinions are always and necessarily fictions; they are neither true nor false, neither strictly in conformity with nature nor strictly opposed to it.[77]

Fiction is a very broad category for Hobbes. It is any image or idea not immediately impressed on the senses, or modified by the internal motions of the body from its original in the senses.[78] All

[77] Hobbes writes that "though *true* be sometimes opposed to *apparent* or *feigned,* yet it is always to be referred to the truth of a proposition... And therefore truth or verity is not any affection of the thing, but of the proposition concerning it." (EW I, p. 35) Devin Stauffer is thus altogether mistaken in describing the fictional state as a "noble lie." (Stauffer, p. 249). The Hobbesian position that there is not necessarily any truth contradicting the fiction of the state, or any other fiction. The artificial basis of Hobbesian ideology is quite distinct from the Platonic idea of the "noble lie," which is a falsehood serving a noble purpose. Borrowing from Philip Pettit, Sandra Field has applied the idea of "social ontology," or "an account of the kinds of entities that exist in the social domain" to describe this aspect of Hobbes' political philosophy. (Field, p. 65ff) Robin Douglass observes that the common-wealth "is a fictitious body and its unity and strength are no more than men imagine them to be." (Dougalss, p. 146)

[78] Cf. Lev., p. 16

imaginary things are fictions, not excluding our most foundational ideas and opinions about the world. The future is "but a fiction of the mind."[79] And more generally "to consider a thing, is to imagine it... to understand a thing is to imagine it... to hope and fear, are to imagine the things hoped for and feared."[80] Yet fiction is not always artificial, which for Hobbes always indicates a tool-like quality. For example, dreams and visions are natural fictions "caused by the distemper of some of the inward parts of the Body."[81] Thus Hobbes remarks that a sculpture is "the Matteriall Body made by Art" derived from a spontaneous mental image or fiction, a "Phantasticall Idoll made by Nature."[82] Spontaneous or natural fictions are not purposive, though they may be exploited for various purposes.[83] Fiction is properly artificial only when it is made to serve a purpose.[84]

The most powerful artificial fictions are public opinions, and they may be said to have a real social being.[85] A "natural person," according to Hobbes, is one whose words or actions are considered his own, whereas an "artificial or feigned person" is one whose words or actions "are considered as representing the words and actions of an other."[86] The artificiality of a person depends on a nearly unanimous public attribution. Such social fictions combine all three senses of art; they are

[79] Lev., p. 22
[80] EW V, pp. 358-389
[81] Lev., p. 17
[82] Lev., p. 448
[83] Cf. Lev., pp. 18-19
[84] This formulation may be contrasted with that of Robin Douglass. "Both artificial and fictitious bodies signify something created by man, yet it is the latter term alone that evokes the idea that the creation exists only in the imaginations of men." (Douglass, p. 141)
[85] Arthur Child has commented incisively on the fact that geometry and civil philosophy are both certain sciences for Hobbes because they treat object made by humans, but that the making in the case of civil philosophy is collective. The geometer is the first cause of the objects of geometry in a way that the civil philosopher is not the first cause of the objects of civil philosophy. Civil objects are made by not by an I, but by a "we." (Child, pp. 280-283)
[86] Lev., p. 111

at once conventional, imaginary, and tool-like, that is, they are shared, feigned and purposive. Civil laws are "artificiall Chains,"[87] that is, fictional or imaginary chains established by the sovereign in public opinion. The Leviathan is contrived so as to have an "artificiall eternity of life,"[88] that is, an effectual immortality upheld in and by opinion and through the public imagination. Again, since Hobbes holds that a chief function of the sovereign is to oversee the government of opinion in the commmon-wealth, any public body subsisting in law and public opinion, may be dissolved by the sovereign's decreeing a new and contrary law or public opinion – a punishment which is "to such artificiall, and fictitious Bodies, capitall."[89]

The state's existence everywhere turns on a common currency of fiction, and possesses itself a fictional being.[90] As we have said, this does not mean that that its being is unreal. Hobbes' denial that the ultimate truths of nature may be known except by way of their impressions on our bodies, permits him to regard effectual fictions as every bit as real as the inadequate impressions we receive from nature. "Though true be sometimes opposed to apparent or feigned," he writes, "yet it is always to be referred to the truth of a proposition... And therefore truth or verity is not any affection of the thing, but of the proposition concerning it."[91] In applying this idea to politics,

[87] Lev., p. 147
[88] Lev., p. 135
[89] Lev., p. 157
[90] In the *Element of Law* Hobbes writes explicitly that "a body politic, as it is a fictitious body, so are the faculties and will thereof fictitious too." (EW IV, p. 140) It is true, as Skinner points out, that in the *Leviathan* Hobbes calls the state artificial but not fictional. Skinner has argued on these grounds that the Hobbes had come to the view that the state is artificial but not fictional, because the acts of the sovereign are "truly" attributable to the state. (Skinner, 1999, p. 22). In response, David Runciman maintains that 'feigned' is for Hobbes "synonymous with 'artificial', meaning contrived rather than non-existent." (Runciman, p. 271). Runciman is certainly correct that there is no reason to assume that the rhetoric shift of the *Leviathan* indicates a deeper conceptual shift. As we have seen, however, "contrivance" in the sense of a thing's provenance in the human will does not exhaust the meaning of artifice in Hobbes, which is a tool-like production, whether physically existing or merely mental. Robin Douglass has observed correctly and incisively that "a central purpose of Hobbes's political philosophy was to cast the fiction of the body politic upon the imaginations of his readers." (Douglass, p. 127)
[91] EW I, p. 35

Hobbes expands on a Machiavellian insight. Since public opinion is the most potent political force, philosophy, which is always devoted to the truth, comes to assume the character of an investigation into the "effectual truth" of public ideals or opinions.[92] Public fictions are *not* lies of either a noble or an ignoble variety, because they do not contradict truths. For example, the honor in which a man or institution is held is neither true nor false; it is rather well or badly, powerfully or weakly, established.[93] Like money, honor really exists. Its real existence consists in shared beliefs and expectations: "the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people."[94]

When Hobbes treats social fictions as real entities, he places human ideas and opinions, alongside human passions and material objects, among the things that simply exist. All existing things produce consequences, but only artificial things can be made to produce useful consequences with perfect regularity. Ideas as such, whether held by one or many people, have no necessary relation to nature, their reality does not depend on any particular external reality outside the mind. This leads Hobbes to a reformulation of the central problem of ethics and politics. The problem that confronts Hobbes is not the human tendency to *error and ignorance*, but a naturally irremediable

[92] Machiavelli writes in the *Prince*, "... it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it. And many have imagined principalities or republics that have never been seen or known to exist in truth..." (Machiavelli, p. 61) Machiavelli's rejection of "imagined" or ideal politics in favor of the "effectual truth," does not means that ideals cease to exist, and does not entail exploding false ideas, or replacing false with true ideals. Rather it turns on the prince's manipulation of the "effectual truth" of public opinions, namely, their effects. In rejecting imagination in favor of truth, Machiavelli indeed implies that all ideals are imaginary, but not for that reason that they are dispensable. The social being of ideals is not to be overcome by Machiavellian truth, for this truth amounts, for Machiavelli and Hobbes alike to knowledge of effects. Machiavelli's "effectual truth" and Hobbes' "knowledge of consequences" are converging expressions.

[93] "The publique worth of a man, which is the Value set on him by the Common-wealth, is that which men commonly call DIGNITY... understood, by offices of Command, Judicature, publike Employment; or by Names and Titles, introduced for distinction of such Value." (Lev., pp. 63-64)

[94] EW VI, p. 184

contention in the realm of ideas and opinion.[95] The resolution is the establishment of a science determining the most advantageous common opinions and ideas.

To understand truth and opinion alike as invented and subject to artificial manipulation is surely to ascribe to man a God-like power, and Hobbes is perfectly aware of doing so. God had been conceived by the medieval theologians as the most perfect being. But God and God's will has no existence in our senses, therefore Hobbes understands God to be literally unthinkable.[96] The divine will exists, but as a strictly artificial fiction: "it needs be that God's person be created by the will of the state."[97] But since fictional being does not mean for Hobbes defective being, there is no reason why Leviathan cannot in very truth become a "Mortall God."[98] Indeed, even if we set aside this radical formulation, God remains for Hobbes an idea or opinion like any other, susceptible to the control of human art, yet permanently vulnerable to both the untrammeled chaos of the natural condition and the ambitious machinations of "confederacies of deception."

By the warnings that Hobbes sounds throughout the *Leviathan* regarding the use of metaphor, he indicates his keen awareness of the potential for misuse of the means of public indoctrination.[99] Let it be emphasized once more that the Hobbesian civil philosopher is no liar; he investigates and expounds the truth. That is to say, he examines both nature generally and the true nature of fiction. He is charged, not with spreading noble lies to protect the truth from the unwise, as Plato enjoined, but rather with managing the universal social-moral fictions which determine practice more

[95] Cf. Lev., p. 110
[96] Lev., p. 250
[97] *De Homine*, p. 85; Cf. Lev., p. 122
[98] Lev., p. 120
[99] Cf. Lev., pp. 25-26, 31, 35, 177-178; Yet strictly speaking all words might be considered metaphors (Lev., p. 38), since only bodies and motions exist simply without pointing beyond themselves.

perfectly and comprehensively than written laws could. The philosopher is in this way transformed into an *ideologue*. His concern for truth suffers no abatement, but it is focused in the service of discovering what must *necessarily be universally believed and espoused* in order for social and political life to proceed as it ought.[100] Hobbes' originality here is twofold. First, in claiming for fictional things the status of potent and necessary things, he systematizes Machiavelli's principle that all socially and politically organizing beliefs are fictions. Second, he shows these fictions, like all products of art, to be tool-like and subject to rational-systematic control by science, much as rhetoric uses "similitudes, Metaphors, Examples, and other tooles of Oratory."[101] Of course, no system of fictions can be useful or powerful unless it can be connected in some way to nature and to natural men. Hobbes achieves this connection by means of the mediation of the concept of power, to which we now turn.

[100] One hears the distant echo of this instrumentalized notion of truth in Kant's account of the postulates of practical reason, ideas which must be believed if morality is to be possible.
[101] Lev., p. 178

5. Passion, Rule and the Pursuit of Power

To understand still better Hobbes' idea of the role of fiction in political life, it is necessary to consider it in connection with his notion of power. According to Hobbes, the desire for power belongs to man by nature. Man, on the model of a machine, is a complex of moving parts. The internal motions of the body produce "endeavour," which "when it is directed toward something which causes it, is called Appetite, or Desire."[102] The individual is driven by desires, appetites, passions, and aversions; his will at any given time is simply the last or strongest of these. The original stirring of appetite is coeval with life; life itself is the gradual unwinding of the human spring. Some specific appetites "are born with men,"[103] for instance the desire for food, sex and excretion. These innate appetites are however "not many."[104] Because the other objects of appetite arise from experience, education, and the constitution of the body at a given time, and because these are always in flux, it is unlikely that one man should long desire any thing, or that all men should ever desire the same thing. Good and evil are, in the natural condition, simply the names given to the things appetite or aversion bring into view.[105] Nothing is simply good, all goods are relative to circumstance and appetite.[106]

The natural basis of civilized man's complex social behavior, as it appears in daily life or the historical record, is discerned neither by direct observation of the world, nor through the critical interrogation of common opinion. What one observes in observing social and political behavior is

[102] Lev., p. 38
[103] Lev., p. 38
[104] Lev., p. 39
[105] Lev., p. 39
[106] De Cive, p. 47

man already transformed by opinion, doctrine, and social fiction; each individual's appetites are already refracted through the fictional architecture on which a given social order is based. Hobbes remarks, in the opening lines of the *Leviathan*, that men "might learn truly to read one another, if they would take the pains; and that is, *Nosce Teipsum, Read Thy Self*."[107] The proposed method of study is thus introspective. The classical dialectical examination of opinion assumes a fixed relation between opinion and nature, so that any opinion might ultimately be judged more or less true. The introspective method resolves the human being as nearly as possible into the primitive passionate motions that precede all complex ends and acquired opinions of the good. The microscope, using a similar method, exposes the parts of some physical object by temporarily effacing the integrity of the object. Introspection is the microscope of the appetitive human machine whose outward unity, like a physical object, masks infinite inward contention and collision. These motions, once discovered, are always more or less similar: what really distinguishes men is not so much their natural passionate motions, as the objects they come to seek.[108]

Even the good of self-preservation, on which Hobbes bases his conception of natural right, is not strictly speaking an ultimate or universal good. Self-preservation is a reasonable human end, but it is far too complex to be a natural appetite. It is an object acquired through reasoning and experience, a means to the gratification of appetites that successively arise in the "continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another."[109] There is strictly "no such Finis Ultimus, (utmost ayme,) nor Summum Bonum, (greatest good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old

[107] Lev., p. 10
[108] Lev., pp. 10, 70
[109] Lev., p. 70

Morall Philosophers"[110] – not even life itself. Since it is a feature of the architecture of the human machine that man's notions of the good are subservient to passion and circumstance, Hobbes' common-wealth will be designed to exploit this almost indefinitely plastic quality of human appetite in the service of commodious living.

The denial of any common or natural standard of the good does not of course prevent men from competing for the scarce goods of the physical and social world they inhabit. Hobbes is at one with Plato in recognizing a genuinely innate and unlimited tyrannical drive. Plato had maintained that all desire "to have things happen in accordance with the commands one's own soul – preferably all things, but if not that, then at least the human things."[111] For the reasons discussed, the Platonic solution to this problem, involving a moderation of the innate tyrannical impulse through knowledge of the truly good, was unavailable to Hobbes. In place of the good, Hobbes develops the concept of power. Power is the peculiar consuming object of desire of creatures introspective enough to have come to embrace the insatiability of their own desires, whose desires are self-confessedly transient and undefinable.[112]

[110] Lev., p. 70

[111] Plato, Laws [687c]

[112] Hobbes emphasizes that the incessant seeking of power results "not alwayes that a man hopes for intensive delight, than he has already attained to," but often from the fact that he "cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more." (Lev., 70) This argument is used to justify the limitation of the power of individuals imposed by the common-wealth, which if it were merely to frustrate their natural desire for power without offering compensation, could not win consent. James Read, however, goes too far in his formulation that the quest for power is "primarily defensive." (Read, p. 511) Felicity is, after all, "Continual Successe in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering." (Lev., p. 46) Thus, while it is quite possible to tame man's quest for power through the provision of safety and the imposition of fear, it is not possible to alter the inherent insatiability of the desire for power. Men, according to Hobbes "naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others" and must always be induced to restrain themselves. (Lev., p. 117)

In other words, it is precisely because nothing is simply and permanently good, that all men desire and pursue power.[113] "The POWER of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good."[114] It is no accident that this definition of power accords with what we have identified as Hobbes' notion of art. Power is a "means," which is to say that it partakes of the essentially tool-like quality of the artificial. All desire at present the tool that will indiscriminately fulfill their future desires. This is so because people cannot know their desires in advance, or rather, because they do not yet desire what they will desire. Man thus presents to Hobbes the jarring spectacle of a "restlesse desire of Power after Power that ceaseth onely in death." [115] The Platonic good is specific thing, whereas Hobbesian power is abstract and instrumental. The good is desired for its own sake, power for the sake of something else. The good is approached, but power may be accumulated without definite limit.[116]

Ancient political philosophy grappled with the problem of who should rule, which Plato understood to reflect the problem of order among the permanent parts of the soul and the city; for Plato man's good is characterized, though not exhausted, by the attainment of harmony. The

[113] The English term "power" corresponds to two Latin terms, *potestas* and *potentia.* The former is "the right by virtue of which some men control others," or legal authority. The latter is more general, meaning "possibility, natural faculty, or *de facto* control (whether by right or otherwise)." (Benn, p. 184; Cf. Dunn, p. 418) Although much has been made of this distinction, the following account assumes that the conflation of the terms in English is no less indicative of Hobbes' thinking than their unavoidable distinction in Latin. *Potestas* is a sub-species of *potentia*, and it is clear that in the primarily definition of power in the *Leviathan,* Hobbes intends *potentia*. Stanley Benn has argued, "By consent is created a *summa potestas*, a sovereign authority, that is also a *summa potentia*; for unless it is the latter, there would be no point in its being the former." (Benn, p. 212) This formulation is correct, except that there is strictly speaking no *summa potentia,* because power has no permanent limits.

[114] Lev., p. 62

[115] Lev., p. 70

[116] Hobbes speaks at times of "absolute power" (cf. Lev., p. 144, 222). This is absolute *potestas*, or rightful authority. Not only the primary definition of power (*potentia*) as present means to achieve a future apparent good (Lev., p. 62) but the whole thrust of Hobbes' analysis of power makes it impossible that it should ever reach an upper limit. The power of the absolute sovereign is "unlimited," that is, is not limited by any other power, rather than strictly absolute. It is "as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it." (Lev., p. 144)

Hobbesian appetite for power characterizes a soul in perpetual motion, for which no lasting harmony is possible. But art may at least capture and outwardly tame this motion in the human machine. The question of rule – whether a given ruler deserves to rule – is now swallowed up in the problem of how to generate and rationally direct impersonal power. The Hobbesian state is not in essence a human corporation ruled by one or more of its parts; it is an artificial instrument answering to a blueprint, or as Hobbes puts it, it is a machine analogous to the human body. Rule directs natural men to exercise or constrain their natures in one way or another, whereas power transforms men's nature by inventing new objects of desire. The concept of power forms the bridge by which Hobbes unites artifice and fiction.

> What quality soever maketh a man beloved, or feared of many; or the reputation of such a quality, is Power; because it is a means to have the assistance, and service of many…
> The *Value*, or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another.[117]

A reputation for power constitutes the supreme element of effectual power, "for Honour consiseth only in the opinion of Power."[118] Many forms of honoring precede the civil state proper.[119] "But in Common-wealths, where he, or they that have the supreme Authority, can make whatever they please, to stand for signes of Honour, there be other Honours."[120] A new Archimedean point emerges with Hobbes. Why cannot politics be refashioned by a methodical and scientific control

[117] Lev., pp. 63-64
[118] Lev., p. 66
[119] Cf. Lev., pp. 64-69
[120] Lev., p. 65

of the currency of social fictions; the state will be made to honor not what is traditional, or innately good or true, but instead what is demonstrated by reason to be most beneficial.

The most important measures of political power are arms, legal right, reputation, wealth, honor and dignity; so to say, intangible things *attributed* to a man by himself and others. As we have seen, this means power is generated from public conceits, existing in the minds of many or all men. Honor "consisteth onely the opinion of power."[121] And "reputation of power, is Power; because it draweth the adherence of those that need protection."[122] Power itself is purchased with power, "the nature of Power, is in this point, like to Fame, increasing as it proceeds."[123] Conceits or self-conceits whose being is local and uncontrollable (and against which Hobbes levels a sustained polemic under the names of 'inspiration' and 'conscience') may be distinguished from the kind of public conceits whose being is useful and subject to control.[124] The reality of a social fiction, like that of a law or a dollar, is not its truth or ability to convey truth, but the degree to which it directs the actions of many people. "The Greatest of humane Powers, is that which is compounded of the power of most men, united by consent, in one person, Naturall, or Civill, that has the use of all their powers depending on his will; such is the power of the Common-wealth.[125]

[121] Lev., p. 66
[122] Lev., p. 62
[123] Lev., p. 62
[124] Hobbes polemicizes often against the disruptive appeals to "conscience" unleashed by the Reformation, which far from being a merely personal opinion about the good, tends severely to undermine political order. (Lev., 223) Conscience is simply "private judgment" (Lev., p 236) and the appeal to conscience is therefore an appeal to private judgment. On the other hand, conscience may be followed to the benefit of the common-wealth when it is understood as shared opinion: "When two, or more men, know of one and the same fact, they are said to be CONSCIOUS of it to one another; which is as much as to know it together." (Lev., p. 48) The law is therefore "the publique Conscience" (Lev., p. 223)
[125] Lev., p. 62

All men seek power by all means at their disposal, as is their "natural right" or "natural condition" (these are converging terms); man's life is by nature a war of all against all because life is "a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onley in Death." The basic political problem now reemerges in the following form: how might this natural war be ended? Whereas the society of certain animals, like bees, is natural or spontaneous,

> [the society] of men, is by Covenant only, which is Artificiall: and therefore it is no wonder if there be somewhat else required (besides Covenant) to make their Agreement constant and lasting; which is a Common Power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the Common Benefit."[126]

An overwhelming and fearsome power is created, not simply over the citizen (this would be simple tyranny), but through him. The power wielded by the Leviathan is tyrannical or total only in a particular sense; not indeed by addressing itself to all actions ("the greatest liberty of subjects, dependeth on the silence of the law,"[127] Hobbes maintains) nor because it always induces terror. Rather by brooking no contradiction or defection from the system of ideas and opinions, or the ideology, on which it rests. The Leviathan is jealous only of what threatens its power; its tyranny is thus impersonal and professedly benevolent. Unlike the natural tyrant, the Leviathan has no desires of its own; it is a tool designed to capture and control the desires of others.

The next stage presented in the construction of the Leviathan concerns therefore the determination of just which opinions, or system of opinions, civil philosophy ought to propose alike to the state

[126] Lev., p. 120
[127] Lev., p. 152

and its citizens in order to achieve the primary aims of peace and security. The artificiality of the Hobbesian state, or the ideological state more generally, consists in this: It is produced and maintained through a public system of ideas and opinions discovered by philosophy, but justified solely, just like any tool, by its power to realize its purposes.

6. The Natural Law of Artificial Politics

The "law of nature" is the paradoxical name given by Hobbes to the artificial system of rules or opinions invented to end the war of all against all by securing lasting peace within a common-wealth. Hobbes' conception differs from earlier systems of natural law – for instance Hugo Grotius' influential system which nearly preceded it – insofar as it assumes the artificiality not only of political order, but of all opinion. Earlier natural lawyers had looked to man's innately rational and social qualities to derive the law of nature, asking what laws answer to beings so constituted. Hobbes, denying innate human sociability, asks instead what laws and conditions are hypothetically necessary to transform human nature into something peaceable and social.[128] Contrary to an opinion that has gained currency in recent years, the force of Hobbesian natural law has no other basis than the anticipated consequences of its adoption.[129] It is to be judged not with respect to its truth, but its utility. Thus, under circumstances in which the individual cannot

[128] Richard Tuck has argued that John Selden is the missing link between Grotius and Hobbes. He maintains that Selden anticipates Hobbes by deriving obligation from individualist motivation. Selden's "extreme skepticism about the possibility of moral obligation independent of egotistical motivation, in which the moral 'ought' simply becomes the prudential 'ought', makes Selden the clear forerunner of Hobbes... Hobbes altered this position by the simple expedient of dropping information about an after-life out from the prudent egotist's calculations about the ways in which he will 'incur the detriment.'" (Tuck, 1999, p. 94) Be this at it may, Selden's idea of natural law, including certain information about God's revealed will, produces a wholly and irreconcilably different result. A conservative defender of the common-law and proponent of limited government, Selden looked to the Talmudic idea of the revealed Noahide laws to establish his highly traditionalist position. (Cf. Haivry, pp. 327-373)

[129] In his earlier works, Hobbes is even more explicit that the law of nature is a prudential calculation as to expected benefits and nothing more. In the *Elements of Law*, he defines natural law as reason, its precepts being those "which declare unto us the ways of peace, when the same may be obtained, and of defence where it may not." And "the force or the command, or law of nature, is no more than the force of the reasons inducing thereunto." (EW IV, pp. 85, 95) In *De Cive*, Hobbes affirms again that the laws of nature are "nothing else but certain conclusions, understood by reason, of things to be done and omitted... [and they] are not in propriety of speech law, as they proceed from nature." (*De Cive*, p. 152) There is nothing in the presentation and definition of the natural law in the *Leviathan* (cf. Lev., pp. 91, 111) to indicate any alteration in Hobbes' fundamental conception. Gary Herbert's rejection of the "normative" interpretation of Hobbes' natural law is therefore exhaustive and persuasive, and need not be repeated here. (Cf. Herbert, 2009)

anticipate any benefit from obeying the law of nature, Hobbes is very clear that reason itself counsels that one not follow it.[130]

Hobbes' natural law purports to be the best system of moral ideas, in terms of its internal logical coherence, its expected consequences, and its viability in persuading a critical mass of citizens. In fact, these turn out to be identical requirements. The consequences of an ideological system are realized when that system captures the opinion of the state and its citizens, and opinion is captured by means of a propaganda universally persuasive because unimpeachably coherent. Hobbes believed that there was but one system of opinions capable of establishing permanent peace and security among natural men. This is the sense in which the laws of nature may be said to be "Immutable and Eternall."[131] They are the product of reasonable reflection on the human machine that assumes only the value of each individual's life to himself, and its vulnerability in the face of violence and untimely death. "A law of Nature, (*Lex Naturalis*,) is a Precept, or general Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same."[132]

Natural law, of itself, and before it is adopted in the civil law, has neither the imperative of natural necessity, nor the imperative of irresistible command. "Where there is no common Power, there is no Law: where no Law, no Injustice. Force, and Fraud, are in warre the two Cardinall vertues."[133] The law of nature is therefore *law* (speaking, as Hobbes emphasizes, "but improperly"[134]) on the

[130] Lev., pp. 92, 110
[131] Lev., p. 110
[132] Lev., p. 91
[133] Lev., p. 90
[134] Lev., p. 111

basis of the assertion that men have but one exclusive path to achieve peace and security, namely to establish the reasoned principles of natural law in the real civil law. And the law of nature is *natural* because this law is indicated through a reflection on the natural condition and an introspective analysis of the human machine.[135]

6.1 The Artificial Man of the Natural Law

The essence of Hobbes' natural law is the relinquishing of each man's natural right "of doing any thing he liketh" according to a system of reciprocal self-restraint guaranteed by the establishment of a coercive power also obeying the natural law.[136] Thus although the natural law begins by assuming human nature to be indefinitely power-seeking, it looks to human nature as it must become, tamed and limited through a political machinery.

Hobbesian natural law is artificial in the double sense of being made by human art and remaking human nature artificially. It does the latter by generating compatible artificial appetites in both subjects and sovereign, generating both simultaneously. When the natural law becomes civil law, natural appetite is no longer the measure of virtue and vice, which is now determined by the civil law.[137] By fixing opinions of virtue and vice, civil law reforms individual appetite. Civil law is however also "the Will and Appetite of the State."[138] We may see that Hobbes speaks of the

[135] As the explicit argument in *De Cive* makes clear: "true reason is a certain law; which, since it is no less a part of human nature than any other faculty or affection of the mind than any other faculty or affection of the mind, is also termed natural."; "By right reason in the natural state of man, I understand not, as many do, an infallible faculty, but the act of reasoning, that is, the peculiar and true ratiocination of every man concerning those actions of his which may redound to the damage or benefit of his neighbors." (*De Cive*, pp. 122-123 and note)
[136] Lev., pp. 91-92
[137] Lev., p. 111
[138] Lev., p. 469; Hobbes is silently correcting Aristotle's definition of law as "intellect without appetite," Aristotle, *Politics* [1287a32]

common-wealth as an "artificial man" because the sovereign power has its appetite fixed by reason through the system of natural law. The "natural law" is thus an *artificial will* common to sovereign and subject.

The natural law's transformative intention with respect to human nature is particularly evident in the set of precepts spanning the fourth through the ninth of the laws of nature enumerated in the *Leviathan*. The fourth law of nature, gratitude, enjoins that "a man which receiveth Benefit from another of meer Grace, Endevour that he which giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will."[139] This rule can evidently never be adequately enforced by civil law. No sovereign power is sufficiently powerful to make men grateful. Notwithstanding, Hobbes notes that without broad adherence to this "law of gratitude," "there will be no beginning of benevolence, or trust; nor consequently of mutuall help... and therefore [men] are to remain still in the condition of War; which is contrary to the first and Fundamentall Law of Nature, which commandeth men to *Seek Peace*."[140] The same is evident from the fifth law, "that every man strive to accomodate himselfe to the rest."[141] This law demands of men that they be "sociable," rather than "stubborn, insociable, froward, intractable."[142] And again, the sixth law demands "facility to pardon"[143]; the seventh that in taking revenge men look only to the "greatnesse of the good to follow"[144]; the eighth that "no man by deed, word, countenance, or gesture, declare Hatred, or Contempt of

[139] Lev., p. 105
[140] Lev., p. 105
[141] Lev., p. 106
[142] Lev., p. 106
[143] Lev., p. 106
[144] Lev., p. 106

another"[145]; and the ninth, whose importance obviously cannot be overstated, "that every man acknowledge other for his Equall by Nature."[146]

In commenting on the ninth law, Hobbes makes the revealing remark that "if Nature have made men unequall; yet because men that think themselves equall, will not enter into conditions of Peace, but upon Equall termes, such equalitie must be admitted."[147] In this particular case, discussed further in the following chapter, Hobbes adopts a fiction that may indeed contradict a truth. The fiction of human equality is to be preferred to the potential truth of inequality, because reason shows the fiction of equality to be hypothetically necessary to the establishment of secure political order. The opinion of human equality, so foundational to the artificial order Hobbes proposes, is not unquestionably in accord with the experience of most people, and definitely contradicts the spontaneous opinion of some people. How is Hobbes certain that an opinion so weakly established in the world can form the basis of his system?

The laws of nature are "contrary to our natural passions," as Hobbes says, and "without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed... are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."[148] Yet that terror cannot consist entirely in the fear of punishment. The "continuall feare, and danger of violent death"[149] first induces men to leave the state of nature and institute government. The "awe" in which the state holds men is a far subtler passion, flowing indeed from a natural fear of punishment, but in greater measure from hope of benefit. The honor afforded the

[145] Lev., p. 107
[146] Lev., p. 107
[147] Lev., p. 107
[148] Lev., p. 117
[149] Lev., p. 89

state is founded more on hope than the fear of death, though Hobbes evidently finds it salutary to emphasize the latter. "The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them."[150] Both the hope and the fear invested in the state are abstract, produced by one's conceit of the state's overwhelming power and dignity, alongside the state's actual or threatened employment of force. The awe productive of the Hobbesian state is therefore a mixture of natural-physical and artificial-fictitious hopes and fears; in its capacity for dominating all other appetites, in the worship it inspires and requires, it comes very close to a religious passion. Those who follow the laws of nature do so in the rational hope of attaining the promised consequences, and because they reasonably expect others will also do so as well. But they must also, on some level, be made to not merely to fear, but also to love and worship the laws.

Hobbes' understanding of artifice, fiction and power enable him to extend the scope of law to effect the transformation of human nature. Some readers will find this statement paradoxical, since Hobbes is also known for maintaining, in contrast to most ancient thinkers, that whatever is not expressly forbidden by law is allowed, thus diminishing in one way the scope of civil law. Yet, any reduction in the scope of actions addressed by Hobbesian civil law is more than compensated by an enhancement in the law's foundational status. Reasoned civil law now determines religion, rather than the contrary. The worship of the natural law made civil, as conceived by Hobbes, has subsequently received the name *civil religion*.

[150] Lev., p. 90

7. Representation, Civil Religion and Culture

The real test of Hobbes' artificial politics lies in making people adopt the natural law, given that the natural passions tend rather to produce endless strife. Hobbes confesses that the natural laws "cannot be maintained by any Civill Law, or terrour of legall punishment" alone.[151] If the people have not assimilated the law into their very appetites, they will take legal penalties "but for an act of Hostility," biding their time and eventually breaking out in fresh rebellion.[152] The natural law must be thoroughly assimilated into manners and opinions. To mold men's desires according to the natural law it is necessary that the conduct enjoined by natural law become irresistible to them, being always in harmony with the prevailing appetite of each. The sovereign must therefore control the underlying opinions that are the cause of actions. It is the sovereign's "Duty, to cause them so to be instructed; and not onely his Duty, but his Benefit also."[153]

In a broad sense, the whole of the *Leviathan* is concerned to provide a theoretical justification of a regime of public indoctrination in the natural law, upon which the whole project rests. More specifically, the sovereign right of indoctrination follows from Hobbes' notion of representation. The unlimited Hobbesian state comes into being on the supposition of a mutual convent between each of its members, rather than between each member and the sovereign. Since there is no contract between the sovereign and his subjects, the sovereign can never be in breach of contract. Consent signifies agreement between each and every man with each and every one of his fellows to endow the sovereign with the "use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof,

[151] Lev., p. 232
[152] Lev., p. 232
[153] Lev., p. 233, Cf. *De Cive*, p. 262

he is inabled to [con]forme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad."[154] Representation entails not only the renunciation of private opinion, but the positive adoption of the sovereign's declared judgement on the part of each subject.

The people instituting and represented by a sovereign power are thus every bit as artificial as the sovereign person they create. Each member of the common-wealth is to "acknowledge himselfe to be the Author of whatsoever he that beareth their Person shall Act, or cause to be Acted… and therein to submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their Judgements, to his Judgement."[155] In Harvey Mansfield's phrase, "Hobbes' sovereign represents us, not to another body as in the medieval conception, but to ourselves."[156] On the basis of such representation, the individual within the state is endowed with an artificial will. Though the sovereign person is free to determine public doctrines as he sees fit, he is not supposed to determine arbitrarily. The civil religion which generates public opinion is upheld and enforced by the sovereign, but it is not created by him. In fact, as we have said, it precedes both the sovereign power and the people as the condition of their existence. This procedure characterizes ideological politics in general. In ideological politics, the ideology is responsible for the generation of law, citizen, state, sovereign and civil religion. Civil religion is in turn responsible for the power of the ideology. After Hobbes, and beginning in practice with the French Revolution, we may say that civil religion, in one form or another, is the indispensable support of all ideological regimes.

[154] Lev., pp. 120-121 The first English edition read "performe" apparently in error, and was corrected in later prints to read "forme." The subsequent Latin edition reads *conformare* or "conform." See Richard Tuck, Leviathan (New York: Cambridge Press, 1991), pp. xxx-xxxi
[155] Lev., p. 120
[156] Mansfield, p. 102

Hobbes devotes considerable attention to the means of inculcating the correct doctrine.[157] The Leviathan is "to rule by words."[158] Even true philosophy, when counter to the official doctrine, may be suppressed and punished.[159] For, as Hobbes does not tire of repeating, "the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions; and in the wel governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of mens Actions, in order to their Peace, and Concord."[160] In light of the necessity of a "government of doctrines,"[161] Hobbes demands a public indoctrination in the strict sense of the word. Viewed theoretically, this requirement presents a chicken and egg dilemma, since the generation of state power depends on the multitude's adoption of the natural law (which directs them to establish the state and obey it), while the natural law depends on state power for its promulgation and enforcement among subjects (without which it is not to be obeyed). Practically, as we will now see, Hobbes is able to overcome this difficulty.

7.1 Leviathan's Rational Christianity

The chicken and egg problem of the natural law and the state puts us in a position to return to the question of Hobbes' attitude toward the Christian religion. At the extreme ends of the interpretive spectrum stand Aloysius Martinich, on one side, and Thomas Pangle and Devon Stauffer on the other. Martinich argues that Hobbes was "a sincere, and relatively orthodox Christian," who hoped and failed to reconcile Christianity with the new science.[162] Pangle argues, on the contrary, that while Hobbes tries to allay the suspicions of pious readers by making his teaching appear in line with Christianity, his "deepest intention" was to lead the attentive reader to question and reject

[157] Lev., pp. 231-238
[158] Lev., p. 246
[159] Lev., p. 474
[160] Lev., p. 124
[161] Lev., p. 127
[162] Martinich, 1992, pp. 1, 7-8

scripture, in order to effect the gradual dissolution of Christianity.[163] Michael Oakeshott, taking a middle position, writes that for Hobbes, it is the "task of civil theology to make of that [Christian] religion something not inimical to civilized life."[164]

The doctrine of Hobbes' civil religion, as mentioned, is identical with the natural law. And civil religion, as mentioned, is in a sense prior to the state. As it becomes more widely adopted, for example through the reading of Hobbes' works, or through the teaching of the universities, or above all due to worship at the pulpits, power is generated and increased. It is impossible to grasp Hobbes' attitude to Christianity without taking account of his reliance on the Christian infrastructure of Church, University and Scripture in his conception of civil religion. The various scholarly opinions just mentioned concerning Hobbes' religiosity capture something true, but miss the essential point. Hobbes is no traditional Christian, and indeed undermines the traditional understanding of Christianity, as emphasized by Pangle and Stauffer. He seeks to transform that tradition, as Oakeshott observes. And, even though he is indefensibly wrong that Hobbes was a "relatively orthodox Christian," Martinich is correct that the *Leviathan* is intended as "a Bible for the modern man."[165] What all three positions fail to appreciate is that the Hobbesian civil religion, which generates an artificial politics, is quite literally unthinkable without the appropriation of the infrastructure of church, university and the printed vernacular Bible present in 17th century Christian civilization. The escape from the chicken and egg dilemma is effected by exploiting pre-existing Christian institutions, as well as pre-existing Christian habits of public worship, to deliver and impose a uniform rational doctrine over an indefinitely large, dense and scattered population.

[163] Pangle, p. 29; Stauffer concurs with Pangle's thesis that Hobbes employs a "two-sided strategy" (Stauffer, 2010, p. 870)
[164] Oakeshott, 1991, p. 291
[165] Martinich, 1992, p. 45

This many-sided appropriation of Christianity is most evident through the second and often neglected half of the *Leviathan* (parts three and four) in which Hobbes presents his idea of a rational Christian common-wealth adhering to natural law, as well as the irrational "kingdom of darkness" that perpetually threatens to submerge rational government. This half of the *Leviathan* inaugurates a tradition of political philosophy aiming to rationalize Christian faith, of which Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* and perhaps also Hegel's political philosophy are later examples. It is here in particular we see most clearly how essential the Christian infrastructure of church, university and scripture is to the success of the *Leviathan,* and the profound sense in which the tradition inaugurated by Hobbes is less anti-Christian than post-Christian.

It will not be possible to do more than indicate a few of the relevant features of the involved religious sociology and biblical exegesis of the second half of the *Leviathan*. Hobbes understands religion to be a permanent feature of human life, its "seed" being the unavoidable "anxiety of time to come," the lack of knowledge of the causes of things, and the attendant fear of "some Power, or Agent Invisible."[166] Religion is thus the obverse of science, the reasoning method of satisfying the human passion of curiosity into the causes of things. Curiosity frustrated gives rise to religion. Science addresses everything that can be made into a tool, whereas religion confers power through worship. For the highest yield of power, science ought to be expanded indefinitely, and religion turned to the worship of the scientific. Yet although science, extended to encompass politics, is perhaps capable of allaying the fear of violent death at the hands of other men, it cannot overcome

[166] Lev., p. 78

all suffering and death. Because man's mind and his science are fundamentally limited and the future unknown, man is inescapably religious; and religion, being concerned with power, is unavoidably political. The few, observing this, have in past times exploited it to be "best able to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their Powers."[167] Thus far Hobbes agrees with epicurean doctrines ancient and modern.

But just as we saw that Hobbes' epicurean materialism is inflected by a biblical voluntarism, so his epicurean theory of religion is inflected by consciousness of the overwhelming success of biblical religion, its millennia-long triumphant "rule of words." He argues that among the Jews alone was established the true "kingdom of God," although this did not signify a non-political religion. Rather, it signified "*a Kingdome Properly So Named*,"[168] a common-wealth bound by covenant to unity under God and his revealed laws, as interpreted or invented by Moses. The prophet Moses had both civil and religious authority over the people, he interpreted God to them, completely fulfilling the office of the sovereign person.[169] Christian scripture likewise requires interpretation, and this is the function of the Christian sovereign. "For when Christian men, take not their Christian Soveraign, for Gods Prophet; they must either take their owne Dreams, for the Prophesy they mean to be governed by… or they must suffer themselves to bee lead by some strange Prince."[170] The sovereign is prophet and pastor of a church coextensive with each Christian common-wealth, and the interpreter of God's law, which is also the natural law.[171] It is

[167] Lev., p. 75
[168] Lev., p. 280
[169] Lev., p. 326
[170] Lev., p. 299
[171] Lev., p. 299

the sovereign's absolute duty, under natural law, to "culture" the "seeds of religion" in order to conform his subjects to the natural law.

It is evident how much such a project depends on the infrastructure needed to promulgate a unified and monopolistic doctrine across vast areas and populations. The reforms of the church and church-spawned university proposed by Hobbes are not the result of waning of religious belief in the 17th century, but its opposite. The appropriation of these institutions is the *sine qua non* of Hobbes' revolution. "That which is now called an University," writes Hobbes, "is a Joyning together, and an Incorporation under one Government of many Publique Schools, in one and the same Town or City."[172] The university, which is just a unity of otherwise independent seats of learning, alone enables effective government of opinion.[173] Hobbes is of one mind with Luther and Calvin in his insistence that "the vulgar be better taught than they have hitherto been."[174] The unity of church, state and university under a single ideological government, unites force, reason and worship – it concentrates and generates power to a previously unimagined degree. The Leviathan is only a *mortal* and finite God, but it is a God powerful enough to answer prayers.

7.2 Culture

Religion is a permanent feature of human life. The seeds of religion "can never be so abolished out of humane nature, but that new Religions may againe be made to spring out of them, by the

[172] Lev., p. 462
[173] "For seeing the Universities are the Fountains of Civill, and Morall Doctrine, from whence the Preachers, and the Gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same (both from the Pulpit, and in their Conversation) upon the People, there ought certainly to be great care taken, to have it pure, both from the Venime of Heathen Politicians, and from the Incantation of Deceiving Spirits." (Lev., p. 491)
[174] Lev., p. 127

culture of such men, as for such purpose are in reputation."[175] Culture emerges as a very significant concept here. Hobbes derives its etymology from "*Cultus* [which] signifieth properly, and constantly, that labour which a man bestows on any thing, with a purpose to make benefit by it."[176] Culture, then, creates artifacts; it transforms what is natural into a product of art. Culture works not by an arrangement of parts, but by controlling growth. The state is a machine composed of men, but men are cultured to fit the machine, rather than physically reconstructed. Here, it may be observed, Hobbes very definitely reaches the unacknowledged limits of his analogy of man and machine.

The Hobbesian definition of culture also forms an intermediate stage on the way to the modern signification of this word, which may be defined as the totality of the ideas, customs and institutions unifying a group of people over time. Richard Velkley has observed that the Ciceronian term *cultura*, used in the sense of the cultivation of soul by philosophy, is transformed by Hobbes' successor Samuel Pufendorf into the "earliest modern notion of culture based on a nonteleological view of nature, and as universal in application..." and reflecting "the universality of natural right."[177] This etymological transformation begins, however, in Hobbes. By giving culture the sense of any artificial transformation of man, irrespective of whether based in natural right or not, Hobbes actually comes closer to contemporary usage than Pufendorf, though the term is less prominent in his work. Acculturation is a precondition of the civil state, because the passions alone are natural, whereas all opinion is acquired. Culture, for Hobbes, signifies the labor of instilling ideas and opinions "with a purpose to make benefit by it." In contemporary usage, by way of

[175] Lev., p. 83
[176] Lev., p. 248
[177] Velkley, p. 15

contrast, culture is not primarily labor, i.e. not primarily intentional production, but rather the natural or spontaneous growth of a human environment of custom and opinion. Yet, even as we embrace the notion of culture as a kind of spontaneous nature, we recur to Hobbes' understanding of culture whenever the existing culture seems to us in need of rectification, when we seek to "fix the culture," or address "cultural problems."

Culture, then, is for Hobbes an intentional product: "the labour bestowed on the Earth, is called Culture; and the education of Children a Culture of their mindes."[178] The inculcation of natural law is a *rational culture* upheld in a *civil religion*. In connecting culture to the Latin *cultus*, Hobbes also connects it to worship. He reminds us in the same passage that the "End of Worship amongst men, is Power. For where a man seeth another worshipped, he supposeth him powerfull, and is the readier to obey him; which makes his Power greater."[179] Worship gives rise to love, hope and fear.[180] It is these passions that Hobbes hopes to associate through culture with the sovereign who is God's prophet, and especially with the sovereign's teaching, which is the natural law. The coincidence of wisdom and power is achieved by making reason itself, or reason's inventions, into objects of public worship.

Art, power, culture and civil religion are the tools of what William Molesworth, the 19th century editor of Hobbes' collected works, called the philosophy of "armed reason."[181] Reason is armed not only because the state enforces it, but also because each citizen is cultured to worship it, and thus to become a source and arm of its power. The coincidence of reason and power is effected not

[178] Lev., p. 248
[179] Lev., p. 249
[180] Lev., p. 248
[181] EW VI, p. 421

by making the powerful reasonable, but by making reason powerful. The result is simply what we might call a *pure ideological state*.

Chapter 2

"Armed Reason"
Hobbes and the Invention of Ideology

"...[man] is still far from having learnt to act as reason and science would dictate. But yet you are fully convinced that he will be sure to learn when he gets rid of certain old bad habits, and when common sense and science have completely re-educated human nature and turned it in a normal direction. You are confident that then man will cease from INTENTIONAL error and will, so to say, be compelled not to want to set his will against his normal interests... and that he himself is something of the nature of a piano-key or the stop of an organ, and that there are, besides, things called the laws of nature; so that everything he does is not done by his willing it, but is done of itself, by the laws of nature. Consequently we have only to discover these laws of nature, and man will no longer have to answer for his actions and life will become exceedingly easy for him."

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes From the Underground*

1. The Liberal and Illiberal Hobbes

It is often easier to determine a great philosopher's meaning than his influence, and this is particularly true in the case of Hobbes. It is not Hobbes' particular political opinions, his absolutism for instance, that accounts for his influence and importance, but his conceptual universe. This is largely responsible for the fact the despite the clarity of most of Hobbes' immediate political positions, there exists an uncommon variety of scholarly opinion concerning the character of Hobbes' legacy.[182] One may conclude that Hobbes' declaration that he inaugurates new political epoch has been in some measure vindicated by the scholarly dispute itself. But what precisely characterizes this epoch?

[182] Much disagreement surrounds the question of the essential of points of Hobbes' influence and legacy. The following selective catalogue of opinions includes only a sampling of the more forceful theses. Isaiah Berlin claims Hobbes as a pioneer of the concept of "negative freedom" on which liberalism rests (cf. Berlin, 1969). Quentin Skinner, in broad agreement with Berlin, sees Hobbes as an individualist (liberal) opponent of the classical and communitarian ideal of "republican virtue." (Skinner, 2008). C. B. Macpherson and Hannah Arendt both find in Hobbes' work the first and deepest theoretical formulation and defense of bourgeois capitalism (Macpherson, 1945; Arendt, 1962, pp. 139-147). John Dewey credits Hobbes as the first secular political thinker of the 17th century, and visionary of the "centralized administrative state" (Dewey, p. 30). In a similar vein, Michael Oakeshott lavishes an ambivalent praise on *Leviathan* as the fount of a modern tradition of political philosophy built on the notion of "rational will," and culminating in a "politics of perfection and uniformity" i.e., bureaucratic or technocratic government (Oakeshott, 1991, pp. 9-10, 227-228.) Richard Tuck finds in Hobbes the one of the first political philosophers to confront the full philosophical implications of modern skepticism (Tuck, 1989, pp. 114-116). The early Leo Strauss argues that a quintessentially modern political morality – beneficent, egalitarian, epicurean, and bourgeois in outlook – finds its first expression in Hobbes. (Strauss, 1952) Hobbes was "the creator of political hedonism." (Strauss, 1953, p. 169) Yves Charles Zarka argues that an understanding of Hobbes is essential to understanding the "the fundamental problems and concepts of modern political thought," especially the notion of "consent" and that of the "juridical state." (Zarka, 1995) In the 19th century, Auguste Comte found it "necessary" to ascribe to Hobbes "the systematic formulation of the revolutionary philosophy" that led to the French revolution, as well as the eminence of being the last important anti-theological and "metaphysical" thinker to precede Comte's own age of "positivism." (Comte, pp. 711-717). A dissenting line of interpretive thought views Hobbes' political philosophy less as the source of later liberalism, than as a failed attempt to solve problems at the heart of modern political life. Among such interpretations is Carl Schmitt's *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes,* which seeks to recover from Hobbes a totalitarian-fascist teaching and a defense of the "sovereign decision" as essential to political life (Schmitt, 1938). Aloysius Martinich views Hobbes' legacy as tragic, and describes Hobbes' philosophy as an attempt to reconcile Christianity and modern science, ending however in "glorious failure." (Martinich, 1992, p. 8)

Among the various theories put forward, the preponderating view is that Hobbes is a pioneer of liberal thought. The idea was first put forward by Ferdinard Tönnies, who wrote in 1896 that Hobbes' "conceptual world is a system of liberalism."[183] Tönnies meant that the *Leviathan* proposed a *Rechtsstaat* (state of law) in which the civil law would answer to a permanent "law of nature." More than a century later, though often on quite different grounds, scholarly opinion continues in the main to credit Hobbes with laying the conceptual foundations of liberalism.[184] This thesis has indeed the considerable virtue of drawing attention to the important connection between Hobbes and the liberal political thought still dominant in our own time.

The difficulty is that Hobbes teaches many things stubbornly in opposition to what we now recognize as liberalism, as may be demonstrated with a few illustrative examples. Hobbes' civil science is essentially incompatible with limited government.[185] He sets himself against a division of powers in the commonwealth,[186] rejects the right to inviolable private property,[187] places many essential restrictions on the freedom of speech and expression,[188] recognizes the right of conquest,[189] and denies that subjects bear any inalienable rights beyond the right of bare physical

[183] Tönnies, p. 222
[184] Steven B. Smith's account in *Political Philosophy* (2012) neatly summarizes the typical position now current, crediting Hobbes as "the founding father of liberalism" and originator of the ideas of "individual liberty," "rule of law," and "the modern welfare state." Smith, also in keeping with the dominant view, admits some of Hobbes' liberal imperfections, and thus concludes that "at best one could say that he is a part-time liberal." (Smith, 2012, pp. 160-164) On the less emphatic end of the spectrum, Alan Ryan argues that "Hobbes was not a liberal... Nonetheless, many things about his political theory would sustain a form of liberalism, and he held many of the attitudes typical of later defenders of liberalism." (Alan Ryan, *Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, p. 237). Oakeshott notes similarly that "Hobbes, without being himself a liberal, had in him more of the philosophy of liberalism than most of its professed defenders." (Oakeshott, 1991, p. 283)
[185] Cf. Lev., pp. 124, 144-5; Skinner 2008, p. 71
[186] Lev., pp. 144-5; p. 225
[187] Lev., p. 224
[188] Lev., pp. 124-5, 127, 167, 372-378
[189] Lev., pp. 138-9

self-defense.[190] He favors monarchy as the best system of government,[191] and maintains with irreproachable consistency that the sovereign stands above the law.[192]

For these and similar reasons, it is generally emphasized that Hobbes is only a forerunner of liberalism, or a "proto-liberal."[193] The phrase correctly points to the broadly conceptual rather than strictly doctrinal character of Hobbes' influence over liberalism. But here too there is a danger of overshooting the mark. It is quite possible, for example, that Hobbes is the first to delineate and emphasize a separation of the public and private spheres, as liberalism requires. Yet it is also the case that he grants overwhelming preeminence to the public sphere, quite contrary to the liberal spirit.[194] Hobbes' appeal to a foundational principle of self-preservation found its way through Locke to the heart of English liberal thought. But Hobbes meant to use this principle to generate a nearly absolute obligation toward the conqueror (the sovereign "by acquisition") as well as the

[190] Lev. pp. 150-151
[191] Lev., p. 131
[192] See EW VI, p. 33-34; De Cive, p. 183; Lev. pp. 124, 471
[193] For a discussion and literature review of this subject, see Lucien Jaume, "Hobbes and the Philosophical Sources of Liberalism," in *Cambridge Companion to Hobbes' Leviathan*. (Jaune, p. 210)
[194] The two teachings in the *Leviathan* most commonly adduced to show a division between the public and private spheres are ambiguous in intention. First, Hobbes argues that "The Greatest Liberty Of Subjects, Dependeth On The Silence Of The Law," i.e., on matters that the law leaves unregulated. This is perhaps a step toward the idea of the private sphere. In the same passage, however, Hobbes asserts without any obvious disapproval that this liberty "is in some places more, and in some lesse; and in some times more, in other times lesse, according as they that have the Soveraignty shall think most convenient." (Lev., p. 152). Second, private worship is to be free, but only "in secret" and is never without restraint in the "sight of the multitude" (Lev., p. 249). Third, Hobbes argues that the sovereign can compel any subject to adhere publically to the state religion, but cannot coerce private or inner belief. (cf. Lev., pp. 343-344). And again, that the civil law does not extend to the government of conscience. (Lev., p. 471) It may be doubted that the mere absence of a religious inquisition is a sufficient basis to erect a "private sphere" over against the "public sphere." For the private and secret worship that Hobbes allows is properly meaningless. "Worship consists in the opinion of the beholders," consisting in signs of honor, but "a signe is not a signe to him that giveth it, but to him to whom it is made; that is, to the spectator." (Lev., p. 249) The preceding permitted Carl Schmitt to argue – in this case quite plausibly – that Hobbes' meant to protect the public worship and the public sphere, rather than to elevate the private. Only with the "modern liberalism" of Spinoza, argues Schmitt, is "Hobbes' postulation of the relationship between external and internal, public and private... inverted into its converse." (Schmitt, p. 57)

sovereign established by social contract ("by institution").[195] He opposed the right of rebellion with unimpeachable consistency, and the majority of his seventeenth century readers understood this fact to characterize his political doctrine.[196]

Hobbes has also appeared liberal – especially to opponents of liberalism – because he makes the safety of the people the common-wealth's chief end,[197] and because he argues that the desire for "ease... sensual delight... knowledge... and Arts of peace, enclineth men to obey a common power."[198] He also employs a number striking similes drawn from commerce, teaching that money is "the Bloud Of A Common-wealth,"[199] and defining a man's "worth" in pecuniary terms as "his Price."[200] On these and similar grounds, his system appeared to Hannah Arendt as the philosophy *par excellence* of the "bourgeois man."[201] But quite as many passages can be adduced proving the contrary. Hobbes stops well-short of embracing what became known as capitalism. The acquisitive "competition of riches," so essential to any capitalist order, is listed among the causes of contention and war, to be suppressed by the sovereign.[202] In sharp contrast with Locke, Hobbes considers the doctrine of inviolable private property – "Attributing Of Absolute Propriety To The Subjects" –

[195] Lev., pp. 138-139; "Conquest, is not the Victory it self; but he Acquisition by Victory, of a Right, over the persons of men." (Lev., p. 485)
[196] Skinner, 1966, pp. 306-309; Skinner, 1972, pp. 95-96.
[197] The purpose of the commonwealth, as Hobbes emphasizes repeatedly, is *salus populi* (the Peoples safety). Cf. Lev., pp. 9, 231, 244; "But by *safety* must be understood, not the sole preservation of life in what condition soever, but in order to its happiness." (De Cive, pp. 258-259) Cf. EW VI, p. 70.
[198] Lev., pp. 71-72
[199] Lev., p. 174
[200] "his Price, that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgement of another." (Lev., p. 63)
[201] Arendt writes that the Hobbesian state is a common-wealth "whose basis and ultimate end is accumulation of power." For this reason, she writes, Hobbes "gives a complete picture, not of Man but of the bourgeois man." And "there is hardly a single bourgeois moral standard which has not been anticipated by the unequaled magnificence of Hobbes's logic." (Arendt, p. 139) For a similar opinion, cf. MacPherson, 1945
[202] Lev., p. 70

as an "infirmity" in the commonwealth, and the fifth most potent cause of civil dissolution.[203] He speaks ill of merchants, money-making, and urban concentration.[204] It must be granted that he, at least, did not believe he was defending a capitalist bourgeois order.

To establish that Hobbes was a "proto-liberal," it cannot be sufficient to show that he influenced liberal thinkers in one way or another. The real significance of this designation turns on whether there is a logical or inner necessity of Hobbes' theory developing in a liberal direction. Let us consider, then, three larger and more theoretical points on which Hobbes' title as the founder of liberalism seems mostly to depend. First, Hobbes invents the modern idea of representative government.[205] Second, Hobbes is the first to develop a political philosophy beginning from the idea of the rights of man, rather than the duties of man.[206] Finally, Hobbes introduces the idea of a social contract as the basis of legitimate government. These points, taken singly or in combination, do certainly connect Hobbes to the liberal tradition. But is the liberal development of these ideas their only natural and necessary development?

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[203] Lev., p. 224

[204] Hobbes was keenly aware that the much of the agitation and insubordination in the civil war was urban and middle class. "Long or dangerous rebellion," according to one of *Behemoth*'s interlocutors, almost always occurs when the commonwealth contains an "overgrown city with an army or two in its belly to foment it." These "great capital cities" are full of merchants whose "only glory [is] to grow excessively rich by the wisdom of buying and selling... that is it to say, by making poor people sell their labour to them at their own prices..." (EW VI, pp. 320-321) Cf. Lev., p. 230

[205] See Mansfield, 1971

[206] "If we may call liberalism that political doctrine which regards as the fundamental political fact the rights, as opposed to the duties, of man and which identifies the function of the state with the protection or the safeguarding of those rights, we must say that the founder of liberalism was Hobbes." (Strauss, 1953, pp. 181-182) "It is not the priority given to security that makes Hobbes a possible candidate for liberalism but rather natural liberty, its complementary and veiled face. Natural liberty is the space granted to the human being as the natural *person* exceeding the role of *citizen*; it is also the reservoir of natural rights that may surpass positive right and substitute for it." (Jaume, "Hobbes and the Philosophical Sources of Liberalism," p. 210)

In the first place, representative government does not mean for Hobbes, as for the liberal tradition, an "accountable" government that expresses or reflects the independent will of the represented.[207] And although the Hobbesian sovereign is duty-bound before God (that is, before God *alone*) to provide peace and security for his subjects, he is in no sense legally obliged to "safeguard" his subjects' alienated natural right.[208] The Hobbesian subject has no strictly political rights, and exercises no oversight of his representative.[209] It is not very easy to see how these principles – publicly articulated by the English Levellers and explicitly rejected by Hobbes – are the necessary outgrowths of his system. [210]

Again, Hobbes is justly credited with conceiving that a social contract ("Covenant of every man with every man"[211]) might serve as a conceptual-doctrinal device to legitimate and generate sovereign power. At Hobbes' suggestion, Locke later offered a liberal interpretation of the social contract, and Rousseau proposed a republican interpretation of it. But Hobbes' theory does not smoothly conform with either of his successors' formulations. There are evidently both liberal and illiberal versions of the social contract. Moreover, though a contract establishes the sovereign for Hobbes, it establishes nothing like the legal constitution on which liberalism depends. Constitutionalism entails a distinction of normal and superior law, and the subordination of sovereign power to the law of the commonwealth. Hobbes was quite familiar with these ideas from

[207] Lev., p. 112; Cf. Locke, pp. 195-196
[208] Lev., pp. 120-1; Cf. Locke, p. 155
[209] Lev., p. 124; Cf. Locke, p. 166
[210] For instance, the Leveller manifesto of 1647, "Agreement of the People" is discussed below: "the first proposal in history for a written constitution based on inalienable natural rights." (Wootton, "Leveller democracy and the Puritan Revolution," *Cambridge History of Political Thought*, p. 412)
[211] (Lev., p. 120) Covenant, however, is a necessary but insufficient condition for the generation of the commonwealth: "[the agreement of men] is by Covenant only, which is artificial: and therefore it is no wonder if there be somewhat else required... to make their Agreement constant and lasting; which is a Common Power, to keep them in awe..." (Lev., p. 120)

the arguments of prominent English common-law conservatives, such as Richard Hooker[212] and John Selden,[213] but he forcefully rejected them.[214]

Hugo Grotius is usually considered the first to expound the modern conception of rights, in the sense of liberties, or spheres of action legally or morally exempt from interference.[215] Richard Tuck has shown that followers of the Grotius' idea of natural right had developed in seventeenth century England into conservative and radical streams.[216] The English Levellers, the radical democratic party active before, and briefly victorious during the English Civil War, asserted their inalienable natural rights and demanded accountable representative government. The prominent Presbyterian, Thomas Edwards (1599–1647), observes that his Leveller adversaries "cry out for natural rights derived from Adam and right reason."[217] Edwards sums up the Leveller idea of natural right as follows:

> By natural birth all men are equally and alike born to like propriety, liberty and freedom; and as we are delivered of God by the hand of nature into this world, every

[212] "To Hooker a Christian church and state are identical; but an English monarch's power is strictly limited by law. 'The axioms of our regal government,' he says 'are these, *lex nihil potest nisi quod jure potest.'* In all the king's proceedings "law is itself the rule.'" (*Cambridge History of English and American Literature, Vol. 3, 18.9.32)*

[213] Cf. Haivry, pp. 105, 128-130

[214] Cf. Lev., pp. 124, 127, 144-5, 200, 225; "For I understand not how one law can be more fundamental than another, except only that law of nature that binds us all to obey him, whosoever he be, whom lawfully and for our own safety, we have promised to obey..." (EW VI, pp. 248-249) "For the only fundamental law in every commonwealth, is to obey the laws from time to time." (EW VI, p. 361)

[215] Cf. Tuck, 1979, pp. 58-81; Tuck quotes several definitions of right given by Grotius, for instance, "Right, properly speaking... consists in leaving others in quiet Possession of what is already their own, or in doing for them what in Strictness they may demand." (p. 73) It may been seen from Tuck's discussion that the essence of the modern conception of right advanced by Grotius, is that it is a denial of another's right to rule.

[216] Tuck, 1979, p. 143

[217] Ritchie, p. 9

> one with a natural innate freedom and propriety, even so we are to live, every one equally and alike, to enjoy his birthright and privilege.[218]

In 1647, during the Long Parliament, a Leveller manifesto was published declaring Parliament the world's first responsible representative government.[219]

> That the power of this, and all future Representatives of this Nation, is inferior only to theirs who choose them, and doth extend, without the consent or concurrence of any other person or persons, to the enacting, altering, and repealing of laws... and, generally, to whatsoever is not expressly or impliedly reserved by the represented to themselves.[220]

The Leveller doctrine of representative government based in natural right is at least nominally closer to a system of liberal democracy than Hobbes' idea of absolute sovereignty.[221] Quentin Skinner has argued that Hobbes owes some of his key formulations to the language of the English Levellers, and that Hobbes borrows from his Leveller opponents in order to turn their own principles against them, subverting key ideas of the democratic radicalism in 17th century England.[222] Tuck, on the contrary, downplays the likelihood that the radicals influenced Hobbes,

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[218] Ritchie, p. 9

[219] "That agreement is the first proposal in history for a written constitution based on inalienable natural rights" (Wootton, "Leveller democracy and the Puritan Revolution," *Cambridge History of Political Thought*, p. 412)

[220] Quoted from Gardiner, p. 334; The pamphlets of Richard Overton from 1646 and 1647 furnish examples of this line of argument, connecting natural right to responsible representative government. (Tuck, 1979, p. 149)

[221] We may assume these Leveller demands had circulated in some form before their known publication during the Civil War. That Hobbes well knew the positions agitated by the Levellers, and desired to confront them, is hardly to be doubted. (Cf. Dewey, p. 15; Skinner, 2008, p. 209)

[222] Quentin Skinner argues that "Hobbes's overall strategy in dealing with the democratical writers... is thus to accept their basic premises and then show that completely different conclusions can equally well be inferred from them." (cf. Skinner, 2008, p. 209ff) Richard Tuck prefers to place Hobbes in the context of Hugo Grotius and John

emphasizing instead the common intellectual descent of both Hobbes and the radicals from Grotius.[223] In either case, it is remarkable that English radical articulations of the demand for representation and natural right were in many ways closer to liberalism than Hobbes.

It would be unsatisfactory to characterize Hobbes as an anti-liberal on these grounds. And it would be an even more serious error to deny his immense influence over the subsequent development of liberal thought. More than a century of scholarship has been justified in drawing a connection between Hobbes and the liberal tradition. The only error has been to imagine that Hobbes' system provides a conceptual framework specially, even uniquely, suited to liberalism.[224] Drawing on what we have discussed in the previous chapter, it is necessary to locate Hobbes' essential innovation elsewhere. Liberalism is one development of a broader revolution in political thought set in motion by Hobbes. The argument of this chapter is that by proposing an artificial state built on "armed reason," Hobbes' invents what may be called *ideological politics*.

Selden, describing conservative and radical developments of the Grotian formulation of natural right, and categorizing Hobbes as an atypical conservative. (Tuck, 1979, pp. 4, 141)

[223] Tuck, 1979, p. 4,

[224] Leo Strauss' contention that Hobbes founds both bourgeois capitalism and socialism is discussed below. (cf. Strauss, 1963, p. 1)

2. A Brief History of Ideology

The term ideology which is here foisted (anachronistically, indeed, but not without good grounds) on Hobbes' civil philosophy, has held a variety of meanings at different times. Since the older meanings of the term continue to resonate, it will be instructive to follow briefly the most prominent of these and outline their connection to Hobbes.

Coined in 1796 by the French enlightener and physiocrat, Destutt de Tracy,[225] *idéologie* originally signified a natural science of ideas.[226] This science entailed treating ideas as biological and social facts, rather than true or false approaches to an external reality. It employed a mechanistic-analytical method, free of all metaphysical suppositions. Its aim was "to regulate society in a way that man gets the most possible aid and the least possible harm from his peers."[227] I*déologie* shared all these characteristics with Hobbes' civil science, but transformed them into a collective and institutional enterprise centered at the French Academy and the *École Normale Supérieure*. By

[225] Rehmann, p. 1

[226]The term "idéologie," appears in the title of Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy's work, *Elements of ideology* (1804). De Tracy defines ideology as the "science of ideas"; a science sharing much with what we today call cognitive science, but which de Tracy considered a branch of Zoology. (Cf. de Tracy. 1804 Première partie. Idéologie proprement dite.) De Tracy credits Locke with inaugurating this science, by giving up the search for "the principle and the end of things, or divining the origin or destination of the world," and instead seeking "the source of our perceptions, their certitude and their limits" from a materialistic or zoological perspective. (Ibid. PRÉFACE de l'Édition de 1804.) In this sense, Hobbes too is certainly a practitioner of ideology, prior to Locke. Ideology so conceived is designed to correct and improve ideas by studying their origin and development in the individual organism, rather than by observing or studying their objects in the world. De Tracy, in the heady days of revolutionary and Napoleonic France, hoped his science could facilitate more concord about ideas and ultimately in politics as well. As the argument of this paper will make clear, this early sense of ideology is by no means rejected outright in our usage. Modern ideology remains a system for transforming the political and social world through the systematization of ideas. It is not primarily interested in ultimate origins or truths, in the correspondence of ideas with the world or the things of this world with those of another ideal world. It studies rather the effects or consequences of particular ideas widely shared as convictions and capable thereby of sustaining political order. Contemporary usage of the term ideology, although not the same, remains in large part true to de Tracy's vision.

[227] De Tracy, quoted from Rehmann, p. 17

combining Hobbesian civil philosophy with Baconian institutionalism, it became the first true social science. De Tracy credits John Locke with inspiring *idéologie*, but this was probably mainly in deference to Locke's very favorable reputation in France, since Hobbes is by far the better candidate. In de Tracy's vision, the science of ideology reiterates the promise (first made by Hobbes) of overcoming the unreliable art of politics by means of a methodical and scientifically determined organization of public ideals and opinions.

Precisely the unabashed presumption of scientific infallibility among de Tracy's circle of self-declared *idéologistes,* and their accompanying scorn for religious and traditional motives in politics, caused the emperor Napoleon to resent their political meddling. Napoleon, in common with the most ambitious modern leaders, aspired to control ideology rather than being controlled by it. Coining a new term, he dismissed the *idéologistes* as a "class of *idéologues* and windbags*."*[228] Meanwhile, as a direct result of the emperor's contempt for the newly minted professional class of social scientists, the word ideology gained immeasurably in currency. It appeared a few decades later in Germany, in the pejorative sense of excessively abstract or ungrounded thinking. Among others, the twenty-three year old student, Karl Marx, employed the old Napoleonic term of abuse in his dissertation.[229]

This second career of the word ideology lasted from Napoleon until Marx subsequently endowed it with a third meaning. He redefined *Ideologie* as the "false consciousness" of a class, or the ideal projected socio-political "superstructure" of a given political-economic order. [230] The

[228] Quoted from Rehmann, p. 19
[229] Rehmann, p. 20
[230] Rehmann, p. 20

superstructure meant a system of illusory beliefs, reflecting but simultaneously masking material class interests and entrenched power relations.[231] Marx employed the notion of ideology to arouse suspicion, by drawing attention to the spurious ideal legitimization of existing domination. "The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships," he writes in *The German Ideology*, "hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance."[232] From Marx onwards, ideology became a key term in the political discourse of the left. This history is characterized by a scholastic abundance of distinction that cannot be addressed here,[233] but a few remarks will indicate how the Marxist notion of ideology depends on the prior conceptual groundwork laid by Hobbes.

2.1 Marxist Ideology and Anti-Ideology

Hobbes maintains – like the early Marx but long before him – that all human relations, and especially political relations, can be understood as power relations.[234] The reduction of human sociability to relations of power is, as we saw in the previous chapter, essential to Hobbes' plan to make a new scientific and artificial politics. Second, Hobbes maintains that prevailing ideas and

[231] Cf. Morrison, 1995, p. 50
[232] Marx, pp. 172-173
[233] For an illuminating study of the disputes surrounding the term ideology on the left, see Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, 2014.
[234] This may be seen from many passages in Hobbes' works. "I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death." (Lev., p. 70) "The Value, or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependant on the need and judgement of another... The manifestation of the Value we set on one another, is that which is commonly called Honouring, and Dishonouring. [...] Honourable is whatsoever possession, action, or quality, is an argument and signe of Power." (Lev., 63-65) The same idea informs the argument of *De Cive*: "So clear it is by experience to all men who a little more narrowly consider human affairs, that all free congress ariseth either from mutual poverty, or from vain glory, whence the parties met endeavour to carry with them that same ευδοκιμείν, some esteem and honour with those, with whom they have been conversant." (De Cive, p. 112)

opinions produce powers, since "the world is governed by opinion."[235] Finally, Hobbes understands public ideas and opinions to be independent entities, artificial objects susceptible to rational control. It had been Hobbes' great insight that, by shaping public moral opinion, it is possible to generate specific new powers and destroy old ones. Marx's understanding of ideology begins with a simple inversion of this idea.[236] Opinions and ideals do not rule the world for Marx, but rather emerge automatically from the material circumstances of the ruling class, being at one and the same time "the ideas of its dominance" and "false consciousness." Since the ruling ideas are by-products of economic dominance, one can affect them (if history permits) only by revolutionizing the means of production.

Even though cause and effect are reversed by Marx, there is a certain resemblance between the deceptive workings of what Marx called ideology, and the secret machinations of Hobbes' "confederacy of deceivers," the priests and professors who spread powerful fictions "to obtain dominion."[237] Hobbes adopted as a principle of investigation into the generation of public ideals and opinions the question *cui bono* – who benefits?[238] Marx's insistence that mankind's great deceivers are themselves deceived is simply the intensification of this prototypically Hobbesian suspicion of human motive.

[235] "the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions; and in the wel governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of mens Actions" (Lev. p. 124) Hobbes holds the consistent view that opinion controls politics. In his early *Elements of Law*, he writes that "our wills follow our opinions, as our actions follow our wills. In which sense they say truly and properly that say the world is governed by opinion." (EW IV, p. 70)
[236] Marx takes opinions or beliefs to arise from and reflect existing material conditions and power relations, according to an inverted logic: "If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process" (Marx, p. 154)
[237] Lev., p. 417
[238] Lev., p. 474

The foundational point of disagreement between Hobbes and Marx is something else. Hobbes maintains that systems of public ideals and opinions are essential to all civil order. Hobbes thought, in fact, that in the guise of his "laws of nature," he had discovered the very best and most rational system of opinions. There can be no utopian escape from the natural law. The alternatives are the anarchic misery of the "natural condition," in which no common opinions prevail, and "the kingdom of darkness," in which the credulous mass of mankind is dominated by confederacies of deception. For Marx, on the other hand, ideology signifies the illusory ideals involuntarily projected by the dominating class – a quasi-permanent "kingdom of darkness." He is led thereby to the hope that ideology will cease to exist in the classless and stateless world to come. Marxist utopianism, in its rejection of all forms of domination and control, is essentially an anti-ideology. What unites Marx's anti-ideology and Hobbes' ideology, and distinguishes both sharply from all pre-Hobbesian political philosophy, is the notion that public ideals and political power necessarily form a single, coherent and indissoluble system. For it does not matter whether public ideals create power, or power creates public ideals, if the two are no longer understood as actually or conceptually independent.

The Marxist and post-Marxist left has never arrived at entire satisfaction with Marx's utopian ideology critique outlined above.[239] Even as Marx's critical anti-ideology continued to appeal to utopian spirits, Marxism-Leninism developed a "neutral concept" of ideology, and actually defined itself as the "ideology of the labouring class."[240] The neutral Leninist concept represents the fourth and final significant redefinition of the term ideology (following de Tracy, Napoleon, and Marx.)

[239] Marx himself was unable to maintain a consistently "critical" approach as he waged his struggle on behalf of the working class. According to Louis Althusser, Marx had no choice but to wage "an ideological struggle, conducting himself like a radical left ideologue... in combatting other ideologues, his adversaries." (Althusser, p. 171)
[240] Rehman, p. 63

The neutral attitude to ideology takes ideology to be the ideal or intellectual form of any group's political self-assertion. It is not hard to see why a new relation to ideology would have seemed necessary for a movement that had practical ambitions requiring the use of the state. Leninism had therefore the effect of suspending Marxism's utopian anti-Hobbesianism, and bringing Marxist thought back into the immediate orbit of Hobbesian civil engineering.

Among 20th century thinkers that tried to revive Marx's critical approach to ideology, the most insistent and influential was the French Marxist, Louis Althusser. Althusser considered ideology the necessary concomitant of all state-centered political order, and tried to extend Marx's critical reflections on its operations. Significantly, he recognized not Marx, but Hobbes, as the first explicit *theorist* of ideology.[241] Althusser's own theorizing meanwhile does not escape a typical vacillation between the critical-Marxist and neutral Leninist understandings of ideology. Human subjectivity is constituted by ideology, writes Althusser, by the existing social-political roles we are called to fulfill, and consequently "man is an ideological animal by nature."[242] At the same time, Marx's utopian hope of overcoming ideology persists in Althusser. He writes that "... while speaking in ideology, and from within ideology we have to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subject-less) discourse on ideology."[243] Althusser's paradoxical mode of expression arises from the dilemma of two unacceptable alternatives confronting Marxism. The movement may strive by critique and propaganda to overcome ideology in the classless and stateless (and "subject-less") future

[241] Althusser, p. 171, n. 1
[242] Althusser, p. 262
[243] Althusser, p. 263

utopia,[244] or it may embrace ideology in a political project employing the state. But regardless of whether Marxism is more properly an ideology or an anti-ideology, it is necessary to concur with Althusser that it inhabits the conceptual universe first mapped by Hobbes. As the English historian, A. L. Rowse, remarks, "[Hobbes] might almost be a pre-Marxist, or a precursor of Pareto, in regarding religious disputes as an ideological smoke-screen for the conflict of power, the contemporary form which people's 'thinking' took."[245]

2.2 The Sovereignty of Public Opinion

Public opinion and power, for Hobbes and very many of his successors, are two sides of the same thing.[246] José Ortega y Gasset expounds this Hobbesian insight, taken up by David Hume, as a piece of received wisdom in *Revolt of the Masses (1930)*.

> And the law of public opinion is the universal law of gravitation in political history... Hence Hume's acute suggestion that the theme of history consists in demonstrating how the sovereignty of public opinion, far from being a Utopian aspiration, is what has actually happened everywhere and always in human societies. Even the man who attempts to rule with janissaries depends on their opinion and the opinion which the rest of the inhabitants have of them.[247]

[244] The contemporary utopian Marxist, Slavoj Žižek, carries forward the critical tradition by exploding the foundational ideological bases of liberal and communist states with a gusto, if not equal, at least indiscriminate: "the Really Existing Socialist states were precisely that: positively existing states, whereas communism is in its very notion anti-statist." (Žižek, p. 474)

[245] Rowse, p. 44

[246] This idea can also be traced to Machiavelli, whose recondite wisdom is also subservient to the vulgar wisdom, though Machiavelli altogether lacks Vico's piety: "For the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and outcome of a thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar; the few have a place there when the many have somewhere to lean on." (Mansfield, *Prince*, p. 71)

[247] Gasset, p. 127; This notion of the permanent rule of public opinion rests on the modern epistemology ascribed to Hobbes and his successors, which understands ideas to be independent beings, rather than true or false mirrors

The notion that public opinion is eternally sovereign corresponds to ideology's rejection of personal rule. Yet if it is true that public opinion always rules and cannot be overruled by any person, ideology is precisely such an impersonal tool as is expressly invented to rule by conquering public opinion through a self-reproducing doctrine. (Althusser exceeds Marx in the sophistication of his analysis of the way public opinions are reproduced in ideological contexts). Ideology creates parts in need of a particular whole; it produces liberals or socialists willing and working to form a liberal or socialist state. The strength of an ideology is "increasing as it proceeds," as Hobbes says of power in general.[248] What is true of power in general is doubly true of ideological power, because the opinions and actions demanded from each adherent by the ideology are themselves a further guarantee of the success of the ideology in generating and controlling power. All ideologies tend, in the absence of external resistance, toward an embodiment in absolute sovereignty. With utmost terseness, let us say that ideologies are self-fulfilling systems of moral-political opinion.

We may also note in passing that the principle of the eternal sovereignty of public opinion, first suggested by Hobbes, and announced by Gasset closer to our times as a familiar truth, operates in modern philosophy more broadly. In the coming chapters on Vico we will see how the principle of the eternal sovereignty of public opinion also underpins the modern philosophy of history, which seeks after the laws of the historical development of human ideas and human deeds in their

of an external reality. According to the ancients, public opinion is subservient to the ruler, or it reaches truth despite him. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, Book III, 414e–15c.

[248] Lev., p. 62; The self-reproduction inherent to ideology has been discussed by Althusser from a Amrxist perspective in various essays. Cf. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.*

mutual relation. But let us set aside this principle for the moment and try to further clarify what is meant by *ideology* by comparing it with the mode of politics that preceded.

3. Natural Politics and Ideological Politics

Today a combination of the neutral Leninist and dismissive Napoleonic senses of the word *ideology* dominate, though not without with some lingering notes of Marxian suspicion. The primary definition of ideology in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is simply "a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy."[249] According to this definition and common usage, Marxism is no less an ideology than bourgeois capitalism, or fascism. One might freely choose between these "competing ideologies," and in the twentieth century, one did choose. As a consequence of this manner of speaking, ideology is often opposed to the *apolitical* and the *nonsystematic*, rather than to an underlying material truth. The ideologue, in common speech, is a person who speaks from a purportedly rational and exhaustive political system, rather than from private knowledge, interest or conviction. It is in this sense of the term ideology – according to which liberalism, socialism and fascism are all equally ideologies – that I argue Hobbes invents ideological politics. It is in Hobbes, in other words, that we find, for the first time, the formal and structural features that unite all these modern political systems and distinguish them from the mode of politics that preceded, which I am calling *natural politics*.

3.1 Natural Politics

Natural politics, insofar as this term may be used to describe all pre-ideological politics, means a politics defined by rule. *Anarchy* (non-rule) ceases and government is established among human beings when someone, or some group, comes to rule the community. Because the ruler is a person

[249] Quoted from *The Oxford English Dictionary*, (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ideology) [May 24, 2019]

or persons, natural politics is necessarily personal. Personal rule may be absolute or limited, despotic or consensual, based on customary usage, divine sanction, written law, charisma, or sheer force. It may involve one ruler, or several, or the whole people. As long as there is a ruler or ruling class, politics remains in its pre-ideological or natural state. The primacy of rule in natural politics is reflected, for example, in the still indispensable taxonomy of political regimes we have inherited from the Greeks (*democracy*, *oligarchy, monarchy, etc.*) that names the whole political community after its rulers.

History furnishes a nearly inexhaustible array of types of rulers and modes of rule. In every age and community natural politics has assumed new forms, not least in the age that gave rise to philosophy in ancient Athens. Although the Greek philosophers introduced transformative new reflections on natural politics by appealing to the idea of "natural right," they sought to improve rather than overcome the politics of rule.[250] In the world of the *polis*, democrats pit themselves against kings, oligarchs and tyrants. Philosophy proposed a rational examination of the questions,

[250] What is here called *natural politics* differs from what Leo Strauss in *Natural Right and History* calls "prephilosophic" or ancestral politics. Strauss characterizes prephilosophic life by "the primeval identification of the good with the ancestral." With the rise of philosophy, he argues, comes a questioning of the ancestral way and the "discovery of nature." With the discovery of nature is born the idea of "natural right." Natural right entails the philosophical search for the good, and this determines the best or most natural form of rule. The search for natural right is therefore a fruit of philosophy, contrasted with the intellectually somnambulant mode of life that precedes (Strauss, 1953, pp. 81-84) *Natural politics*, on the other hand, is not as such an ancestral politics, nor does it end with the rise of philosophical or scientific questioning about nature. Since *natural politics* characterizes all forms of personal rule, the term applies independently of the determining principle of rule. Strauss' formulation makes the distinction between custom and philosophical reason the paramount distinction in determining the mode of rule, and on these grounds, emphasizes that the Hebrew Bible reflects the customary and ancestral mode of politics, rather than the philosophical. It may be doubted, however, whether personal rule ever justifies itself on entirely customary grounds. For instance, the "prephilosophic" biblical ruler, King David, is anointed by the prophet Samuel. This depends on many factors exceeding all clearly and previously defined ancestral custom, and indeed, comes very near the beginning of the establishment of an entirely new custom of monarchy in Israel. The conditions God sets for the biblical kings, which Saul failed to achieve, and which David achieves only very imperfectly, are novel conditions in the history of politics, establishing clear limitations on personal rule. David's reign cannot therefore be considered simply philosophic or simply ancestral. It may however be considered the first instance of the explicit limitation of natural politics.

who should rule, and by what *natural right*. It endeavored to know which mode of rule is best according to nature. For instance, Plato identifies seven basic claims or "titles" to rule, whose relative merits the dialogue of the *Laws* is concerned to establish.[251] Similarly, in Books III and IV of the *Politics*, Aristotle discusses the competing claims to rule of the city's democrats and oligarchs. Even Aristotle's praise for "the rule of law" does not in the last analysis depart from the paradigm of natural politics, because, as he writes, "the arrangement of ruling and being ruled is law."[252]

In general, since any assertion of rule will always be deemed more or less acceptable according to the political and cultural environment in which it arises, natural politics is always, to a greater or lesser extent, a traditional or customary politics. The theological politics of divinely sanctioned government (whether in Biblical Israel, Islam, or feudal Europe) is a natural politics, because it orients itself by the ruler's (traditional or divine) claim to rule.[253] The "natural right" of the

[251] The seven "titles to rule" are: 1. parents over children, 2. the well-born over the low-born, 3. the old over the young, 4. masters over slaves, 5. the stronger over the weaker, 6. the wise over the foolish, 7. the fortunate over the unfortunate. (Plato, *Laws* [690a-c]) This is evidently not an exhaustive list of all claims to rule that are made, but rather the ones Plato intends to recognize and incorporate in the constitution of the city sketched in the *Laws*, the "second best" city [739a]. In the best city of the *Republic*, the wise alone are entitled to rule.

[252] "Hence it is no more just for equal persons to rule than to be ruled, and it is therefore just that they rule and be ruled by turns. But this is already law; for the arrangement of ruling and being ruled is law. Accordingly, to have law rule is to be chosen in preference to having one of the citizens do so, according to this same argument." [1287a] Aristotle's preference for the rule of law thus does nothing to alter the character of natural politics as a politics of personal rule, and does not prevent Aristotle from observing that "...every political community is constituted of rulers and ruled." [1332b] Interestingly, Hobbes rejects Aristotle's preference for the "rule of law" very explicitly (Lev., p. 471).

[253] A right to rule need not entail, and indeed usually did not entail, an unlimited right over another. Feudal privilege was understood as a local or limited right to rule: "Speaking generally, we may say that throughout the struggles of the Middle Ages, it was not 'liberty' for which men fought, but 'liberties.' Privileges were claimed because of some real or fancied authority in the past. A town, a district, a corporation, or a social class alleged on its own behalf immemorial custom or some definite royal, imperial, or papal grant or charter." (Ritchie, pp. 6-7) This medieval approach may be contrasted with the reputedly first modern definition of absolute sovereignty given by Jean Bodin in 1576, ""Maiestie or Soveraigntie is the most high, absolute, and perpetuall power over the citisens and subiects in a Commonweale: which the Latins cal *Maiestatem*, the Greeks *akra exousia*, *kurion arche*, and *kurion politeuma*; the Italians *Segnoria*, and the Hebrewes *tomech shévet*, that is to say, The greatest power to command." (Bodin, 1962, p. 84)

philosophers is an attempt to reform the practice of rule, that is, to convert the contest of natural politics into rational argument and thereby to resolve it. It is from the fact of established rule, however it is established, that duties are born. Natural politics graduates from the problem of rule to a concern with the respective duties of the ruled and ruler.[254]

3.2 Ideological Politics

In claiming that Hobbes invents *ideological politics,* I mean to characterize the mode of politics that became increasingly dominant after the French revolution, and which reached its peak during the ideological wars of the mid-20th century. In the ideological condition of politics, people identify themselves with abstract and impersonal political systems that organize and define the state, such as liberalism, fascism, socialism or communism. These antagonistic political systems share a great deal more than might be supposed from their many disagreements. In the first instance, we may contrast the impersonal character of ideological politics with the personal character of pre-ideological or *natural politics*. In ideological discourse attention to the character, identity and personal claims of the ruler and ruled recedes into the background. Ideological politics begins with

[254] While Leo Strauss' formulation of Hobbes' liberalism is not incorrect, it tends to mislead. Strauss writes: "If we may call liberalism that political doctrine which regards as the fundamental political fact the rights, as opposed to the duties, of man and which identifies the function of the state with the protection or the safeguarding of those rights, we must say that the founder of liberalism was Hobbes." (Strauss, 1953, pp. 181-182) It is the case that liberalism begins with the rights of citizens, and determines thereby the duties of the government. But pre-ideological politics begins with the claim of the ruler (formulated by the Greek philosophers according to "natural right"), and determines thereby the duties of the ruled. Natural politics, like liberalism, derives duties from "right," only it understands a right primarily as a *right to rule*, not a *right to be exempted from rule*. Hobbes, when still speaking in the old way, understands his science to involve "a search into the *rights of states and duties of subjects*." (*De Cive*, p. 99; Italics added) The transformation of the concept of right into a liberty, in the sense of exemption from the jurisdiction and interference of others, has been traced by Richard Tuck to the work of Hugo Grotius. (See Tuck, 1979, pp. 58-81). Strauss' implication that prior to liberalism duties were prior to rights is certainly true with respect to the ruled. Whether the primacy of duty applies to rulers as well may however be questioned. Even if the ruler is himself duty-bound to custom, or the gods (an assertion that seems to apply to the essentially limited form of political rule introduced in the Hebrew Bible, but not to the pagan god-kings of antiquity), it may be replied that the will of the gods is made known by humans, who appeal to the divine to establish their right to rule over other humans.

the rejection of the politics of personal rule. It does so by putting forward an abstract and universal claim to rule made in the name of everyone, set against all specific claims. Where everyone is equally entitled to rule, no one in particular is entitled to rule. Ideology is the solution devised by political theory to the problem of satisfying and pacifying a foundational egalitarianism that does not permit anyone to rule.

Of course, natural politics has not come to an end with the rise of ideology, it is the ineluctable and permanent expression of human self-assertion. But when social democrats, libertarians, communitarians, or utilitarians dispute against one another, the bone of contention is not the old questions of Greek political philosophy – *who* should rule and by what *right*? – but the *system of rule* to be universally imposed. Under the influence of ideology, the very categories of ruler and ruled have fallen into disuse and become odious to modern ears, as once the name of king was to the Romans. Or else the politics of rule are rejected under the name of "authoritarianism." It was egalitarianism that disposed both Hobbes and his Leveller adversaries to reject the notion of rule, but it was ideology that made such a rejection theoretically compatible with order. And wherever some form of personal rule remains unavoidable – as in the family, the military, employment, or education – ideology attempts to domesticate human rule under its system. Both the government and the governed are, in the ideal case, judged and justified by the same standard, namely the degree to which they adhere to the system; and this in precisely the same way and for the same reasons that the specific character and identity of the sovereign and his subjects recedes into obscurity in Hobbes' *Leviathan.*

Hobbes' "civil philosophy" – like communism, liberalism or fascism – proposes much more than a legal code. It is the blueprint of an impersonal and total system of government. The system must account for all significant eventualities, since whatever is left undecided in theory constitutes a gap through which disruptive natural political claims can re-enter. Aristotle, although he praises the rule of law, could not escape the need of virtuous rulers to direct the well-governed city. For this reason, he agreed with Plato that a certain kind of wisdom is the greatest title to rule, though tragically the most rarely established. Under conditions of democracy, now as then, the most eligible claims to rule are majoritarian decision and the persuasive force of popular charismatic leaders. In times of crisis, under almost any regime, real or pretended prudence also exercises a persuasive claim to rule. Prudence and charisma are inextricably bound up with the politics of personal rule. To overcome permanently the instability and uncertainty of natural political life, rooted in an interminable struggle for rule and the unreliability of human beings, both Hobbes and modern political ideologies dispense with the state's dependence on wise and virtuous rulers, and work to suppress all adventitious expressions of charisma.[255]

In ideological politics, the expression of political ambition, interest and conviction takes place within the shared framework of the ideological system. All properly ideological systems lend themselves to a dual embodiment by individuals and states. Liberalism and communism, for

[255] Hobbes denigrates the virtues of prudence and personal charisma in various ways. The point is perhaps most clearly stated in *Behemoth: "*But for the government of a commonwealth, neither wit, nor prudence, nor diligence, is enough, without infallible rules and the true science of equity and justice." (EW VI, p. 251) In *Leviathan*, Hobbes compares prudence unfavorably to science (Lev. p. 22), accuses "pretenders to Politicall Prudence" of undermining the state "like the little Wormes" that attack the human body (Lev., p. 230). He also denies that prudence forms any part of philosophy or science (Lev., p. 458). With respect to charisma, Hobbes cautions that the "Popularity of a potent Subject... is a dangerous disease" and that the effects of popularity "may be resembled to the effects of Witchcraft." (Lev., pp. 229-230) In a similar vein, "all rules and precepts necessary to the knowledge of our duty both to God and man, without Enthusiasme, or supernaturall Inspiration, may easily be deduced." (Lev., 259) On the other hand, "when the Sovereign himselfe is Popular; that is, reverenced and beloved of his People, there is no danger at all from the Popularity of a Subject." (Lev. p. 244).

example, name both juridical-political regimes and moral doctrines. There is both a liberal state and a liberal by conviction, a communist state and a communist individual. Unlike the ancient democrat, oligarch or king, we know (or more precisely, we *could* know), everything relevant to the political character of the self-declared and consistent ideologue. Behind ideological individuals and through them speaks a system. And ideological individuals, formed by a given ideology, act in turn to form the ideological state in their own image.

The individual is bound to the system, however, only on the condition that others adhere as well.[256] This means the force of the moral claims of an ideology depend on the fact of the political order established by the ideology. The principle of "free speech" furnishes a typical example. Unlike the ten commandments, or the virtue of charity, its validity depends on state enforcement. And state enforcement is possible only where a critical mass of others adhere voluntarily. For this reason, all successful ideology depends on public indoctrination in the strict sense of the word. Perhaps the most elemental thought driving the ideological revolution begun by Hobbes is this: Mere human virtue is incapable of reliably capturing and holding political power. But armed reason can produce an impersonal system of political order enforced equally at all points. It is generated by popular indoctrination, and it is in turn capable of infallibly generating a great and beneficent political power.

[256] The conditional character of the law of nature is a fundamental principle of Hobbes. (cf. Lev., pp. 92, 96)

4. Formal Features of Ideological Politics

We saw in the last chapter that Hobbes proposes a specific ideology, called by him the "laws of nature." Some features of Hobbes' system are idiosyncratic and particular, but the system as a whole already possesses the formal characteristics belonging to ideology as such. In the first place, just as liberalism or communism do not claim to reflect truth in the same way as simple facts, and still less in the way of Platonic ideals, neither are Hobbes' "laws of nature" true in an absolute sense.[257] Ideology is not a theory of reality, but a blueprint for civil engineering. The ideology of the Hobbesian "laws of nature," consists in a system of coherent and rational propositions or opinions (Hobbes calls them "Conclusions, or Theoremes"[258]) which, if adopted by both state and citizens, invariably produces a desired outcome. This concrete conditionality is one formal feature of ideology. The enumerated list below attempts to capture the most salient formal features common to all ideological systems beginning with Hobbes.

1. The system is impersonal, rational, and publicized in its entirety.
2. The system may appeal to certain generally accepted facts about human nature, but it justifies itself through the material ends it promises to realize by simultaneously organizing politics and reforming human nature.

[257] Consider, for example, Hobbes' argument for the natural equality of human beings which forms one of the central bases of his "laws of nature." Even if people are not equals by nature, he argues, it would be necessary to *consider them so* in order to institute a rational politics: "If nature therefore have made men equall; that equality is to be acknowleged: or if Nature have made man unequall; yet because men that think themselves equall, will not enter into conditions of Peace, but upon Equall termes, such equalitie must be admitted." (Lev., p. 107)
[258] Lev. p. 111

3. Hence the system justifies itself not by its absolute truth, but by its *conditional necessity*. It does not simply reflect reality, but consists in a coherent series of propositions that, when implemented, must uniquely and invariably direct human beings and human society toward the desired ends.[259]

4. The system denies any meaningful distinction between politics and morality, because it defines the virtue of citizens only with respect to a system of government actually in place, and this system of government can be instituted only when citizens individually and collectively adhere to the system.[260]

5. The system is absolute and exclusive. The absolute power granted to the sovereign of Hobbes' *Leviathan* is reflected in the tacit absolutism of all ideologies. Max Weber's famous definition of the *state* as that which wields "the *monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory"[261] in fact describes a key feature of the *ideological state*.

6. Therefore the system presupposes a power of enforcement and is valid only with the backing of state power. Ideology is in this sense a *political morality*, or a system of "armed reason."

7. State power is generated through the voluntary and uniform adherence of citizens to the system, and therefore depends on public indoctrination.

[259] All science for Hobbes is hypothetical. It determines not what must be true of nature in itself, but what must be true given certain verbal definitions or axioms. Civil science is no different: the "laws of nature" are not facts of nature, but "Conclusions, or Theoremes" determined by reason, given the desire for peace and security. (Lev., p. 111)

[260] Hobbes emphasizes the conditional character of the "laws of nature," which come into force only when others agree to accept them. (Cf. Lev., p. 92) In just the same way, it makes no sense to adhere, for example, to the liberal doctrine of "freedom of speech" in the absence of a mechanism of state enforcement and the broad agreement of others. Ideology is either a hopeful vision or it is actual praxis, it is never, like Thomas Aquinas' "natural law," an eternal morality applying under all circumstances.

[261] Weber, 1958, p. 78.

8. The Hobbesian commonwealth and its subjects, like the ideological state and its citizens, are defined with respect to one another, and thus come into being simultaneously. The ideological state and the ideological citizen are both equally the products of the ideological system.[262]

The mutual generation of state and citizen depends on a total system, in which the parts are made to agree with the whole. Immanuel Kant embraces this feature of Hobbesian politics, correcting for his own distinct moral emphasis. He neatly captures the essence of the Hobbesian ideological state in a description of the wholly new type of state actually produced by the French Revolution.

> In that complete transformation, recently undertaken, of a great people into a State, the word 'organization' was frequently used for the establishment of the governing authorities, etc., and even in fact for the whole body politic. For each member in such a whole should not be merely a means, but also an end; and insofar as he contributes to the possibility of the whole, *through this idea of the whole, his position and function should in turn be determined*.[263] [Italics added]

Kant's indication of the connection between Revolutionary France and Hobbes is echoed more explicitly by others. Auguste Comte professed it "rationally necessary" to concur with De Tracy

[262] Hobbes uses the term "systemes" for "any number of men joyned in one Interest, or one Businesse." The common-wealth is therefore an absolute system, "subject to none but their own Representative." (Lev., p. 155) Diderot, in his article "Hobbisme" in the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1765) summarizes: "Qu'est-ce qu'une société ? un agrégat d'intérêts opposés; un système où, par l'autorité conférée à un seul, ces intérêts contraires sont tempérés. Le système est régulier ou irrégulier, ou absolu ou subordonné, etc." (Diderot, p. 29)

[263] Kant [5:375, n. 38] "...So hat man sich bei einer neuerlich unternommenen gänzlichen Umbildung eines großen Volks zu einem Staat des Worts Organisation häufig für Einrichtung der Magistraturen usw. und selbst des ganzen Staatskörpers sehr schicklich bedient. Denn jedes Glied soll freilich in einem solchen Ganzen nicht bloß Mittel, sondern zugleich auch Zweck und, indem es zu der Möglichkeit des Ganzen mitwirkt, durch die Idee des Ganzen wiederum seiner Stelle und Function nach bestimmt sein." (Italics added)

in ascribing to Hobbes "the systematic formulation of the revolutionary philosophy" that led to the French revolution.[264] Comte also saw that Hobbes' consistent denial of transcendent purposes and natural ends, opened up the possibility of Comte's own project of a system of "positive" ideals enforced by the state.

Hobbesian "civil science" may also be conceived as an extension of the Baconian "conquest of nature," but applying specifically to *human* nature. Man, says Hobbes, is both the artificer and the matter of the Leviathan state.[265] Ancient political ideals are visions of human perfection. Ideology, in contrast, is a project of human self-transformation effected through politics, a collective human *self-construction*. It is not the preserve of the virtuous few, the wise rulers, who keep their ends secret, directing the masses according to noble lies. Nor does it rely in the first instance on a class of philosophers or prudent statesmen. The system is necessarily public because it organizes by being universally known and implicitly obeyed. Therefore for Hobbes, as for liberalism or communism, there are to be *no more vulgar* in the sense of incorrigibly ignorant or vicious people threatening the stability of state, fit only to be ruled by force.[266] "For the good of the Soveraign and People, cannot be separated."[267]

[264] "Il n'est pas inutile de noter ici, à ce sujet, que notre honorable concitoyen, le loyal et judicieux métaphysicien Tracy, avait depuis long-temps pressenti, avec la sagacité habituelle de son instinct anti-théologique, cette nécessité rationnelle de rattacher à Hobbes la formation systématique de la philosophie révolutionnaire; comme l'indiquent ses heureux essais pour faire dignement apprécier en France un énergique penseur qui n'y était guère connu que de nom avant cette puissante recommendation." (Comte, p. 713, n. 37)
[265] Hobbes declares in the Introduction to *Leviathan* the human identity of the architects and subjects of the commonwealth: "the *Matter* thereof [sc. the body politic], and the *Artificer*; both which is *Man*." (Lev., p. 10)
[266] Lev., p. 233
[267] Lev., p. 240

It is possible on the basis of all the preceding reflections to hazard a concise summary of what Hobbes invents under the heading of ideology. *Ideology is a public system of political morality generating the state and enforced by the state, justified by the practical ends it achieves, and adopted by each citizen conditionally on the adherence of everyone else.* What John Rawls describes as a "well-ordered society," is simply the ideological state in its formal outline.

> First of all, a well-ordered society is effectively regulated by a public conception of justice. That is, it is a society all of whose members accept, and know that the others accept, the same principles (the same conception) of justice. It is also the case that basic social institutions and their arrangement into one scheme (the basic structure) actually satisfy, and are on good grounds believed by everyone to satisfy, these principles.[268]

Hobbes' *Leviathan,* like Rawls' "well-ordered society," is an imaginary entity. It is however the special function of ideology that its fictions are able to generate and rationalize power.

[268] Rawls, pp. 94-95

5. Egalitarianism and Ideology

We noted above that Hobbes shares the Levellers' egalitarian point of departure and a good number of their arguments. Rowse remarks that "there was an equalism in Hobbes's mind, if not an egalitarianism – none of the sacramentalism of the true Royalist."[269] Skinner has argued that "Hobbes's overall strategy in dealing with the democratical writers... [is] to accept their basic premises and then show that completely different conclusions can equally well be inferred from them."[270] Even if Skinner is mistaken to imagine that Hobbes' political philosophy is primarily a response to the arguments of the Levellers, a very significant fact is indicated by the commonalities in their reasoning. Ideology and modern mass democracy emerge at the same time, being both outgrowths of a foundational egalitarianism. Indeed, the argument of the *Leviathan* makes very clear that Hobbes' intention is to bridle and organize mass democracy's anarchic tendencies. He never lost an opportunity to disparage democracy, but his starting point is no less democratic for that reason: the common-wealth is instituted through the covenanting of each and every equal member of a multitude.[271] Even the criticism of democratic sovereignty in the *Leviathan*[272] takes on a different coloring when read in conjunction Hobbes' earlier formulation of democracy as the original regime – "the first in order of time" – on which all the others are based.[273] The Leviathan is a great tamed democracy. The public and persuasive character of Hobbes' civil philosophy –

[269] Rowse, p. 43
[270] Skinner, 2008, p. 209
[271] Lev., p. 121
[272] Cf. Lev. 133
[273] In the *Elements of Law* (1640) Hobbes is explicit that democracy precedes the other forms of government and generates them: "The first in order of time of these three sorts, is democracy; and it must be so of necessity, because an aristocracy and a monarchy, require nomination of persons agreed upon, which agreement in a great multitude of men, must consist of the major part; and where the votes of the major part involve the votes of the rest, there is actually a democracy." (EW IV, pp. 138-139)

like that of liberalism and socialism – rests on the appeal of an egalitarian logic to the masses. Each member, or at least most members of the common-wealth, must be convinced of the advantageousness of relinquishing their "natural right." With ideology, everything depends on voluntary individual adherence and therefore on indoctrination, i.e., on the putting of the doctrine in people. On the success of this indoctrination depends, among other things, adherence to the foundational law of equality.

But in exactly what sense is Hobbes an egalitarian, and to what extent is his egalitarianism shared by all ideologies? The *Leviathan* actually contains several, quite different, arguments in this regard. By considering these, first in the context of Hobbes' system, and then in light of later developments in egalitarian thought, we observe that the connection between egalitarianism and ideology is both vital and extremely fluid. Or perhaps it would be better to say that egalitarianism is the question to which ideology is designed to supply answers.

5.1 The Egalitarian Calculus: Equal Fear, Equal Hope, Equal Benefit

The core of Hobbes' initial argument about equality in the *Leviathan* is that the evident natural differences among men are insufficient to establish any claim to a benefit "to which another may not pretend."[274] This is the natural condition that Hobbes rejects, in which claims and counter-claims to rule rebound violently and interminably. Next, Hobbes argues that by nature "the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest,"[275] producing an equality of lethal power. Furthermore, since everyone *imagines* himself the equal of others in "faculties of the mind," wisdom has "yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength... For there is not ordinarily a greater signe of

[274] Lev., p. 86
[275] Lev., p. 87

the equall distribution of any thing, than that every man is contented with his share."[276] Behind this wry little joke is a reiteration of the serious point that since all think themselves equal, none are likely to grant preeminence to another.

In this set of arguments, a significant but quite uncertain degree of human equality is presented as a natural fact. A very certain equality of human pretension to receive benefit of others supplies a motive for killing. An equal ability to kill serves in turn as the potential realization of human equality.[277] The consequence of this sub-bestial struggle is that all men are equally vulnerable, and equally in need of the protection of the state. No one is in a position to claim natural superiority; at first because all are too weak and fearful, and later because all are awed to pacific obedience by the sovereign. Leo Strauss has therefore well observed that "in the movement from the principle of honour to the principle of fear, Hobbes's political philosophy comes into being."[278]

Certainly, an equal fear of being killed is the most rhetorically persuasive element in Hobbes' argument, and everything suggests that Hobbes means it seriously. Yet the danger of being killed only arises, following Hobbes' tight chain of logic, from a *supposed* "equality of ability" that produces an *observable* "equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends."[279] Is it not possible that the more fundamental principle of Hobbesian egalitarianism, deeper and more original than equal fear, is equal hope? In fact, according to Hobbes, the perpetual war among men has three causes:

[276] Lev., p. 87
[277] As Hobbes formulates it in *De Homine*, "They are equals, who can do equal things one against the other; but they who can do the greatest things, namely, kill, can do equal things." (DH, p. 114)
[278] Strauss, 1963, p. 128
[279] Lev., p. 87; cf. *De Cive* p. 114

competition, fear ("diffidence") and the desire for glory.[280] The first and third of these are driven by hopes, and even fear itself here signifies the fear of another's hope.

The whole involved complexity of this question is dropped when Hobbes comes to discuss the ninth law of nature, "*That every man acknowledge other for his Equall by Nature*."[281]

> If Nature therefore have made men equall, that equalitie is to be acknowledged; or if Nature have made men unequall; yet because men that think themselves equall, will not enter into conditions of Peace, but upon Equall termes, such equalitie must be admitted. And therefore for the ninth Law of Nature, I put this, "That every man acknowledge other for his Equall by Nature." The breach of this Precept is Pride.[282]

In this passage, the "equality of hope" dominates the supporting logic: it is because of everyone's hopeful insistence on an equality of desert and benefit, that the law of equality is necessary. The law itself is of course not an argument, but rather one of a finite number of "Conclusions, or Theoremes" that people ought to reach "concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves."[283] The laws of nature function as precepts of Hobbesian ideology, rules of conduct, grounded in the hypothetical necessity of achieving peace and security. And beginning from the same "theoreme" that all acknowledge their fellows for equals, Hobbes derives the version of the golden rule he takes to summarize his laws of nature – "Do not that to another, which

[280] Lev., p. 88
[281] Lev., p. 107
[282] Lev., p. 107
[283] Lev., p. 111

thou wouldest not have done to thy selfe."[284] The law stipulates a reciprocity of restraint quite separate from the supposed fact of natural equality. As Hobbes well understood, natural equality tends to make men not moral egalitarians, but militantly hopeful.

5.2 Ideology Resolves the Egalitarian Demand

There are a series of meaningful logical complications in Hobbes' two approaches to the question of human equality. The first set of arguments – addressing the equality of pretensions to benefit, lethal power, mental faculties, hope and therefore also fear – prepares the reader to abandon the conceit of natural politics, namely the existence of indisputably worthy claims to rule. The ninth law of nature, on the other hand, is a precept forming an integral part of the system of government itself. Equality is here not a natural fact, but a principle of action determining both the state and the citizen. The uncertain natural fact of equality generates equal fear; the natural law of equality satisfies equal hope. Are we yet in a position to determine if the egalitarian demand is more fundamentally based on fear or hope?

Marx had a clear answer to this question. He criticizes "equal right," in the *Critique of the Gotha Program,* as merely a form of "*bourgeois right*."[285] He rejects the principle of Hobbes' ninth law on the grounds that, enjoining a merely juridical equality, it is blind to actual natural inequalities. Since equal right upholds bourgeois inequality, in practice "one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on."[286] To solve the problem of unequal benefit,

[284] Lev., p. 109; In *De Homine* Hobbes presents the golden rule less as the summary, than as the source of his political and moral doctrine. "In this precept are contained both universal justice and civil obedience." (DH, p. 73)
[285] Marx, p. 530
[286] Marx, p. 531

argues Marx, "right instead of being equal would have to be unequal."[287] There is no difficulty tracing the argument from here to the communist solution. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"[288] In this vein, Marx rejects both the natural fact of equality, and the great liberal principle of Hobbes' ninth law that everyone be acknowledged as equals. He maintains nonetheless a principle of equality in determining the end of politics, and this is the hope of equal benefit. It should be well noted that very similar if not identical reasoning has been deployed to reshape liberalism in the 20th century, for example in John Rawls' theory of justice.

Ideological politics are necessarily egalitarian in one way or another. Lending his authority to this supposition, Alexis de Tocqueville, writing a bit under two centuries after Hobbes, testifies that no political authority founded on anything but egalitarian principles could survive in the democratic age that had dawned.

> All those who try to base liberty on privilege and on aristocracy will fail. All those who want to attract and keep authority within a single class will fail. There is today no sovereign power clever enough and strong enough to establish despotism by reestablishing permanent distinctions among its subjects; nor is there any legislator so wise and so powerful who is able to maintain free institutions if he does not take equality as first principle and as symbol.[289]

[287] Marx, p. 531
[288] Marx, p. 531
[289] Tocqueville, p. 1264

Hobbes joined other Englishmen of his generation in taking equality as a "first principle and as symbol."[290] And he led the way with his synoptic and broad considerations of the question. Hobbes was certainly aware that the natural fact of human equality is at best a very uncertain fact. His logic is careful to take this into account. The challenge of an egalitarian logic is the absence of any simple and straightforward calculation of human equality poised to silence the various natural or traditional assertions of human inequality. Most fundamentally, the egalitarianism at the root of ideology is not identical with the assertion of an objective fact about all human beings, nor with any determinate principle of political action. The moral demand that egalitarianism places on ideology is to satisfy the abstract and universal claim to rule made in the name of everyone. In the natural condition man "had a Right every one to reigne over all the rest."[291] Ideology is set against all such natural and specific claims to silence them. The mechanics of a universal claim to rule – the method and manner of satisfying it – are the province of each ideology to resolve in its own way. Fear is the explicit basis of Hobbes' system, and equal right is its instrument.

[290] For example, Hobbes' contemporary and incessant critic, the roundhead James Harrington, presents a plan for an ideal English republic in *The Oceana* (1656), a work dedicated to Cromwell. Harrington distinguishes commonwealths into the equal and unequal, claiming this division "is the main point" that has been "hitherto unseen." "The third division [of commonwealths] (unseen hitherto) is into equal and inequal, and this is the main point, especially as to domestic peace and tranquillity; for to make a commonwealth inequal, is to divide it into partys, which sets them at perpetual variance, the one party endeavouring to preserve their eminence and inequality, and the other to attain to equality: whence the people of Rome deriv'd their perpetual strife with the nobility and senat. But in an equal commonwealth there can be no more strife than there can be overbalance in equal weights; wherfore the commonwealth of Venice, being that which of all others is the most equal in the constitution, is that wherein there never happen'd any strife between the senat and the people." (Harrington, p. 51)

[291] Lev., p. 246

6. Fascist Ideology

All ideology is egalitarian in its rejection of natural politics, and in an underlying recognition of equal hope. This claim raises a puzzle regarding the ideological status of fascism, which is not typically considered an egalitarian doctrine. Mussolini, although he began his political career in the Socialist Party, and considered fascism a development of socialism,[292] was apparently so far disabused of egalitarianism that in *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932) he praises "the incurable and fruitful and beneficent inequality of men."[293] Mussolini's doctrine of course decisively breaks from the spirit of Hobbes in a variety of other ways. To mention a few, it embraces tradition,[294] history,[295] nationalism,[296] Catholicism,[297] and war.[298] In the coming chapters on Vico, we will see how many of these supposedly irrational aspects of political life, rejected in the Hobbesian natural law, are reabsorbed by later ideologies, including later versions of liberalism. But let us here try to determine if it is correct to connect fascist ideology to an egalitarian point of departure, notwithstanding fascism's *prima facie* embrace of anti-egalitarianism.

In fact, Musollini's fascism is egalitarian in the same broad sense in which all ideology is egalitarian. The *Doctrine of Fascism* attacks democracy in the spirit of Hobbes' attack of Parliamentary supremacy, as a regime "under which the people are deluded from time to time into

[292] Mussolini, pp. 19-24; "... a fairly large part, if not, indeed, the very nucleus, of the Fascist movement has been built up of ex-Socialists who abandoned their party because of, or in consequence of, the war." (Gini, p. 104)
[293] Mussolini, p. 28
[294] Mussolini, p. 13
[295] "Apart from history, man is a nonentity." (Mussolini, p. 13)
[296] "In the Fascist theory of history, man is such only by virtue of the spiritual process to which he contributes as a member of the family, the social group, the nation..." (Musollini, p. 13)
[297] Mussolini, pp. 40-41
[298] "War alone keys up all the energies of man to their greatest pitch and sets the mark of nobility on those nations which have the bravery to face it." (Mussolini, p. 24)

the belief that they are exercising sovereignty, while all the time real sovereignty belongs to and is exercised by other forces, sometimes irresponsible and secret."[299] After rejecting parliamentary democracy as a screen for *de facto* oligarchy, Mussolini presses the inverting qualification that "if democracy be understood as meaning a regime in which the masses are not driven back to the margin of the State," then fascism may be defined as "as an organized, centralized, authoritarian democracy."[300] It is nearly impossible not to recognize, in this and other remarks by Mussolini, a particularly Hobbesian egalitarian absolutism, whose lines of influence travel from Hobbes, by way of the French Revolution, into the early 20th century.

> The Fascist negation of socialism, democracy, liberalism, should not, however, be interpreted as implying a desire to drive the world backwards to positions occupied prior to 1789, a year commonly referred to as that which inaugurated the Democratic and Liberal century. History does not travel backwards. The Fascist doctrine has not taken De Maistre as its prophet. Monarchist absolutism is of the past, and so is Church rule. Dead and done for are feudal privileges and the division of society into closed, secluded castes.[301]

Corrado Gini, a pioneering statistician, and Mussolini's chief economist, addressed the question of fascism and equal right in his once famous 1927 article, "The Scientific Basis of Fascism."[302] Gini argued that numerical majoritarianism is no correct indication of the "order of magnitude" of

[299] Mussolini, p. 28, Cf. Lev., p. 164; EW IV, p. 141; EW VI, pp. 359-360; *De Cive*, p. 232
[300] Mussolini, p. 30
[301] Mussolini, pp. 33-34
[302] Gini was also the inventor of the *Gini coefficient of economic inequality* still in use.

competing interests in the state,[303] and that these interests cannot in any case be properly balanced without taking account of the interests of future generations.[304] Fascism thus aspires to be more profoundly egalitarian than its competitors: "the postulate which we may call that of the right of the majority may be generalized and transformed into the postulate of the paramountcy of interests, according to which the government is to be administered by the part of the population which represents the prevailing interests."[305] It is not egalitarianism that distinguishes liberalism and socialism from fascism, according to Gini, but rather the organic conception of the state, grasped in its full significance only by fascism.[306] Hobbes, of course, also speaks of the common-wealth in organic terms,[307] so that the organic view of the state tends rather to associate Hobbes and fascism than to distinguish them.[308]

In fact, fascism's debt to Hobbes is quite equal to liberalism's. Hobbes demands that the subject submit his will and judgement to the sovereign's will and judgement, and "acknowledge himselfe to be the Author" of the sovereign's acts.[309] The result, as Hobbes emphasizes, is "more than

[303] Gini, pp. 101-102
[304] "These interests result from the coordination of the desires for the time being of the current generation together with the interests of all the future generations which are to constitute the future life of the nation." Gini, p. 103
[305] Gini, p. 100
[306] "The essential difference between Fascism and the Socialistic current of thought, which has drifted off from the original programs of Communism and Collectivism, consists to-day in the concept of organic unity to which the interest of the individual must be subordinated." (Gini, p. 104) "We may to-day speak appropriately of society as a true and distinct organism – that is to say a totality of elements mutually bound one to the others, existing in a state of equilibrium and possessing the qualities necessary for self-preservation..." (Gini, p. 107) Gini further argues that the organic conception of the state is in fact truer than in the past, due to the growth of the interdependence of all sectors of the state.
[307] The "common-wealth... is but an Artificiall Man... in which the Soveraignty is an Artificiall Soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body; The Magistrates... artificiall Joynts... Reward and Punishment... the Nerves... Concord, Health; Sedition, Sickness; and Civil war, Death." (Lev., p. 9)
[308] The Hobbes scholar Sergei Prozorov is typical in assuming the shared "artificial" approach of liberalism and Marxism (and Hobbes), in sharp contrast with the fascist or Nazi "naturalistic account of the political community as the expression of the vital substance of a people, nation or race." (Prozorov, p. 51)
[309] Lev., p. 120

Consent, or Concord; it is a reall Unitie of them all."[310] Similarly, Mussolini's fascism "recognizes the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with the State... [and] reasserts the rights of the State as expressing the real essence of the individual."[311] Hobbes sees only an undifferentiated multitude prior to the formation of a people through the state.[312] Mussolini concurs that "it is not the nation which generates the State... It is rather the State which forms the nation."[313] Hobbes' Leviathan is generated through the universality of the "natural law." Mussolini's fascist state is likewise "the expression of a universal ethical will."[314] Hobbes' sovereign has the exclusive right to determine the categories of good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice.[315] "The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values may exist, much less have any value."[316]

Carl Schmitt, whose interpretation of Hobbes is perhaps best categorized as specifically *National Socialist*, indicates Hobbes as the political philosopher to whom he stands in the greatest debt. "Across the centuries we reach out to him," Schmitt concludes the study he published in 1938, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, "*Non jam frustra doces*, Thomas Hobbes!

[310] Lev., p. 120
[311] Mussolini, p. 14
[312] Lev., p. 120
[313] Mussolini, p. 16
[314] Mussolini, p. 17; "Today I hold that Fascism as an idea, a doctrine, a realization, is universal; it is Italian in its particular institutions, but it is universal in the spirit, nor could it be otherwise. The spirit is universal by reason of its nature. Therefore anyone may foresee a Fascist Europe. Drawing inspiration for her institutions from the doctrine and practice of Fascism; Europe , in other words, giving a Fascist turn to the solution of problems which beset the modern State, the Twentieth Century State which is very different from the States existing before 1789, and the States formed immediately after. Today Fascism fills universal requirements; Fascism solves the threefold problem of relations between State and individual, between State and associations, between associations and organized associations." (Message for the year 1 October 27, 1930, in *Discorsi del 1930*, Milano, Alpes, 1931, p. 211).
[315] Lev., p. 90
[316] Musollini, p. 14

[Thomas Hobbes, now you do not teach in vain!]"[317] Hobbes, "the great decisionist" as Schmitt calls him, was the first to come to the important realization "that ideas... are political weapons,"[318] to grasp the surpassing power of the modern state, to aim through the state for "a mythical totality composed of god, man, animal and machine,"[319] to conceive of the police state,[320] to see that the "sovereign-representative person is much more than the sum total of all the participating particular wills."[321]

> The positivist law state (*Gesetzesstaat*) began as a historical type in the nineteenth century. But the idea of the state as a technically completed, manmade *magnum-articium*, a machine that realizes "right" and "truth" only in itself – namely, in its performance and function – was first grasped by Hobbes.[322]

Schmitt works hard to disassociate Hobbes from the liberal tradition, offering a shockingly conspiratorial and anti-Semitic account of the liberalizing sabotage carried out against Hobbes by generations of Jewish thinkers.[323] Schmitt's attempt to recover a fascist Hobbes is more

[317] Schmitt, p. 86
[318] Schmitt, p. 18
[319] Schmitt, p. 19
[320] Schmitt, p. 31
[321] Schmitt, p. 33
[322] Schmitt, p. 45
[323] Hobbes' first mistake, according to Schmitt, was to select the Leviathan as his symbol. According to a kabbalistic myth, before the end of the world the sea-monster, Leviathan, will battle the land monster, Behemoth, both representing the warlike pagan nations. After the battle, when both are dead, the Jewish people will be given the cooked flesh of Leviathan to feast upon. Hobbes was unable to overcome this myth, according to Schmitt, a myth in which the "totally abnormal condition and attitude of the Jewish people toward all other peoples became discernable." (Schmitt, p. 8) Spinoza liberalized Hobbes, by preferring the private to the public sphere and performing a "small intellectual switch emanating from the nature of Jewish life." (p. 57-58) The elevation of the private sphere over the public in liberal thought was accomplished by various forces, but "above all, the restless spirit of the Jew who knew how to exploit the situation best..." (p. 60). Following Spinoza, successive generations of Jewish thinkers worked together, much more by instinct than agreement, each doing "his work as a Jewish thinker – that is, he did his part in castrating a leviathan that had been full of vitality." (p. 70)

tendentious even than today's prevalent liberal readings. Nevertheless, more explicitly than Mussolini's official doctrine of fascism, Schmitt's unevenly brilliant scholarship exposes fascism's debt to Hobbes. The priority of the state over the individual is the Hobbesian principle most clearly embodied in fascism. It rests on a prior rejection of all claims to natural superiority, an implicit egalitarianism. This is true even though the individuals composing the fascist state emerge as wholly unequal members of the state. Like Marx, fascism denies the fact of natural equality. And like Marx, it demands that each member contribute according to his ability. If fascism does not also enjoin the state to provide for each member according to his needs, this is because, like Hobbes, it sees the individual as a part bearing the will of the whole. As an ideology, fascism is concerned primarily with the inequality of serviceable parts of the state, not with natural inequality.[324] It is possible that even Nazism is no exception.[325]

Fascism clarifies the ways in which human equality, the egalitarian hope, is no simple and straightforward demand. It is not even a natural or spontaneous demand, but one that is constructed by reason in the recognition of innumerable competing individual hopes. The artificial hope of human equality serves ideology as a first principle, a conceptual point of departure from which no system of natural politics can form. And since the egalitarian claim to rule is formulated universally, ideology correspondingly recognizes only a universal entitlement to rule. Particular ideologies may be understood likewise as more or less successful argument-blueprints of universal

[324] "But, on the other hand, when the state is regarded as an entity, that is, as an organism standing apart with its own objects and its own requirements, and when individuals are regarded as means to satisfy such objects and such requirements, it is natural that individuals be called upon to participate in the political life of the nation in no other proportion than that of the importance which they assume in the life of the state." (Gini, 1927, p. 106) The difference between Hobbes and fascism on this point is one of emphasis only. (Cf. Lev., p. 126)

[325] "I decide who is a Jew and who is Aryan," Hermann Göring is supposed to have said in the case of Erhard Milch, one of a handful of Jews recognized by the Nazi party as Aryans.

rational rule; all aim in different ways to satisfy and silence the anarchic demands of universal freedom and equality. Foundational egalitarianism gives rise to the problem of *universal human rule*, and ideology is its science.

7. The Struggle of Ideology and Nature

This chapter and the last have set out the argument that Hobbes inaugurates a new mode of politics best described as *ideological politics*. In chapter one, we saw how three historical developments in particular – growth in the size of the political community, the spread of literacy and quickening of communication, and the new mechanistic science – inspired Hobbes to arrive at novel conceptions of nature and artifice, and to seek after a new and more impersonal mode of organizing the state. By conceiving of human art in light of the machine, and public ideas and opinions as fictional entities subject to rational-systematic control, Hobbes emerged as history's first civil engineer. By defining the natural law as a human invention prior to both the state and its subjects, Hobbes produced a conception of the state simultaneously organic and artificial. In this artificial or ideological politics, the will of the state and the will of its subjects are determined and fixed alike by a prior system of law justified not by its truth, but by its effects. Finally, by proposing the wholesale appropriation of the institutional infrastructure of Medieval Christianity to the end of effecting a rational indoctrination in the natural law, Hobbes arrives at the self-justifying and egalitarian mode of propaganda on which the ideological state's civil religion depends. With this entire system of "armed reason," Hobbes thought to have overcome the art of politics and replaced it with an infallible science.

In the current chapter, we turned to consider some of the broader implications of Hobbes' theoretical revolution. Rather than viewing Hobbes as a "proto-liberal," we proposed regarding him as the father of all modern ideologies, and demonstrated how the most influential modern ideologies share formal features with Hobbes' system. Marxism and fascism, when juxtaposed

with liberalism and considered in relation to Hobbes, clarify the ways in which human equality – or perhaps we should say rather *the egalitarian hope* – is no simple and straightforward demand. How, after all, is the doctrine of equality before the law to be reconciled with social inequities? How can a regime of "equal right" leading to material and social inequalities be justified in light of a universal demand of equal benefit? These perennial questions are the inherited dilemmas of the foundational egalitarianism at the root of ideology. Hobbes reminds us that egalitarianism is not a natural posture or opinion, but one constructed through a reasoned and introspective reflection on the consequences of the innumerable competing and unbridled hopes and fears animating the human machine. The artificial hope of human equality serves ideology as a first principle, a conceptual point of departure from which no system of natural politics can form. And since the egalitarian claim to rule is formulated universally, ideology correspondingly recognizes only a collective entitlement to rule. Just as natural politics begins by asking *who should rule and by what right*, so ideology begins by formulating a systematic solution to the problem of *universal collective rule*.

From everything that has been said so far, it may be conceived that the various ideologies organizing modern politics represent distinct arrangements or rearrangements of the elements of the artificial mode of politics invented by Hobbes. When institutionalized social science arose with Destutt de Tracy, it arrogated to itself the task of maintaining, correcting and adjusting the ideology by subjecting its logical coherence to oversight and providing new social research to extend its application. Social research is an instrument of ideology, and all ideologies employ it. The family resemblance of ideological systems does not of course make them equivalent to one another, nor would any sane observer consider liberalism and fascism equally acceptable solutions to the

original problem of establishing a moral-political order of impersonal rule. We nevertheless observe a surprisingly high degree of fluidity and mutual influence among these systems. Late twentieth and twenty-first century liberalism, for instance, has very obviously been adulterated from its original or Lockean form by Marxist arguments. Contemporary liberals keep their focus on equality of benefit and the "social" injustices endangered by juridical "equal right." Less obviously, but no less certainly, liberalism leans, in time of crisis or whenever the integrity of the state is called in question, toward a fascist subordination of the individual to the state. Liberalism, socialism and fascism thus represent the three primary polarities of ideological politics, each determining the relationship between the citizen and state in a different way. These primary ideologies correct one another in practice; pure or classical liberalism, which may lead to extreme wealth inequality or render military virtue impossible, is tutored by public discontent and social science, in the interests of self-preservation, to adopt certain Marxist or fascist corrections. A new "prudence of experts" forms from within the ideological rejection of prudence, consisting in the practice of reconciling, recombining and reengineering ideological principles in light of changing needs. The essential kinship of all ideologies and the continuum of ideological discourse is one very important truth to be gleaned from Hobbes. Among other things, it allows us to see how the contemporary challenge to liberal democracy is bound up with a broader challenge to ideological politics in general.

7.1 The Natural Challenge to Liberal Democratic Ideology

The victory of ideology over what I have called natural politics is of course never a full and complete victory. The old natural political classifications of democracy, oligarchy, etc., maintain all their descriptive relevance. Ideology, we may say, does not succeed in wholly replacing natural

politics, as it intends in its theoretical purity. Rather, it has the effect of changing the character of natural rule, taming it, and bringing it more or less under the constraints of ideological system. Let us once more consider the example of the liberal principle of "free speech." Hobbes keenly understood the power of speech to shape opinion, and he understood that one's initial and natural reaction to the speech of another is to support or oppose that speech as it supports or opposes one's own opinions, projects and desires. This is the "natural" posture of the will. Bridled under the principle of "free speech," however, one refrains from opposing speech. The beneficial promised consequence is that no one will oppose one's own speech. One and the same liberal man has effectively two wills. His "natural" will persists, still hungering to answer its untrammeled yay or nay to everything. His "artificial" will upholds the "right to free speech," even when he finds the speech most adverse. Perhaps there is even a point where his "natural" will overcomes his "artificial" will, for no one can doubt that in this or that particular instance even a very liberal man will feel compelled to silence some particular speech with force. People are always breaking ideological character, and ideological government has learned to cope with this. But we know at this late date that Hobbes calculated the basic consequences more or less correctly; when politics is really in the ideological condition, the "artificial" will does most often prevail. It is not the first appetite of each man, nor usually the strongest desire in itself, but it is very often the last, because the citizen reflects on that opinion's power to effect desirable consequences, the futility of opposing that opinion directly, and the power of the system it upholds in providing security and comfort to himself. All this changes the instant the "artificial will" appears ineffectual; now immediately the natural will reappears in all its heedlessness of success and failure, that is to say in all its uncalculation. Thus the artificial and the natural commingle in real individuals and in the real ideological state.

Particular individual and class interests, tribal loyalty, traditional religion, the ambition to attain high honor or to efface some mark of public shame, the irrepressible force of great charisma – none of these and the many other natural political passions have disappeared with the rise of ideological politics. If they have been constrained to express themselves at times more circumspectly than in the past, so too do they surge up intermittently with all the additional force that comes of long suppression. The 20th century was an age marked by violent ideological struggle, and such struggle is unlikely to cease. But before ideologies confront one another armed on the battlefield, ideology as such has always first to overcome a primal opponent in natural politics. Hobbes' special and renewed relevance today follows because we begin to recognize again clearly that the monstrous artificial birth of the Leviathan is never permanently over and done with, it is always beginning afresh.

The absolutism of the Leviathan is, of course, explicitly rejected by John Locke and subsequent liberals. It is important nonetheless to recall that the overawing power of the Leviathan exists for the sake of the ideology, and not the ideology for the sake of that power. The modern liberal state, too, maintains a strict monopoly on the use of force. If it does not enforce an equally strict government of opinion, this is only because enough of its members hold liberal opinions as to make this unnecessary. Liberalism expects men to be peaceable, industrious, acquisitive and, above all, inclined toward a posture of egalitarian compromise and mutual self-restraint. On the other hand, pure or formal democracy – the rule of the majority – accepts men as they are; it places no demands on them, and responds to their existing or changing character and opinions. Liberalism

is a system of *political morality*, whereas democracy is merely one form of the natural politics of personal rule.

Liberal democracy is the marriage of these two principles; it is the democracy of a people formed by liberal ideology. To the extent that a democratic people has been made more completely liberal by culture and ideological conditioning, no active contradiction appears. To the degree that a democratic people, or portions of it, are given to opinions and aims not liberal, the principles of democracy and liberalism stand in ever more violent confrontation. The study of Hobbes is dispensable for modern liberals when the threat to the liberal order comes from a competing ideology, such as socialism, communism or fascism. Here, Hobbes' liberal successors are more useful. The study of Hobbes only becomes indispensable for liberals when the threat to liberalism comes from pre-ideological or natural political forces. A natural or supernatural politics, according to Hobbes, is inherently prone to violence and chaos. Worse, it tends to the semi-organized oppression and exploitation of a superstitious "kingdom of darkness." The ideological Leviathan is destroyed, and returned to darkness and chaos, by an unchecked proliferation of conflicting fundamental public ideas and opinions in a state. And this is precisely the type of challenge confronting the contemporary liberal-democratic Leviathan, as it faces down resurgent pre-ideological forces and institutions, such as populism (charisma), tribalism (family), identitarianism (biology), and also traditionalist religion.

The grand American ambition of spreading liberal democracy throughout the world gave rise in the second half of the 20th century to the field of Political Development Studies, devoted to the theory of how new liberal democracies are established. And it came to be seen – by the public

before the social scientists and exceedingly gradually – that imposing liberal institutions on peoples innocent of the ideological condition, and subject to powerful natural political associations, does not of necessity produce liberal democracy. The slowness of this realization can be blamed in some measure on the attitude that considers Hobbes a "proto-liberal" milestone on the way to a more perfected and self-sufficient liberal doctrines of John Locke and others. This attitude dismisses as outdated Hobbes' insistence that the ideological condition requires the threat of overwhelming state force, alongside a process of acculturation, a unified enterprise of state indoctrination, and the public worship of a civil religion. Liberal state institutions superimposed on peoples lacking this prior ideological machinery must fail to achieve their aims because, as Hobbes understood, ideology overcomes natural politics not by administrative forms alone, but by endowing both the state and its citizens with an identical artificial will. Hobbes furthermore reminds us through his very systematic and thorough appropriation of the institutional infrastructure Medieval Christian that the success of ideology depends on the existence of honored institutions and ingrained habits of worship.

This last point explains why the "development problem" in the "developing world" has its exact counterpart among long established liberal democracies. Here too, it sometimes comes about that a majority or a powerful minority simply rejects what is considered liberal according to received wisdom. Preserving liberal order in such cases has often required limiting democracy or imposing order undemocratically. Once enough of the people show themselves to be of any persuasion other than liberal, it becomes acutely embarrassing for liberal ideologues of a Lockean persuasion to determine the course of action demanded by a liberal politics, which refuses the strongest and most

effectual tools Hobbes deploys to make men submit to the Leviathan. This embarrassment might be called liberalism's Hobbesian quandary.

The liberal project is now threatened by calls for precisely greater democracy of an unideological variety. All across the globe, political communities old and new demand their voices be directly represented. They refuse any longer to allow the Leviathan to "represent them to themselves." Liberals begin to face, for the first time in a long time, the Hobbesian task of constructing or reconstructing liberal man on undemocratic principles, or risk losing him at sea in the strong tides of resurgent natural politics. Today few churches, schools and universities are disposed to inculcate the old doctrine that served under past conditions to maintain the liberal state. These institutions pull in different directions, more or less ideological, but often at cross purposes to one another and to the state. The state itself becomes more unpredictable. The essential tragedy of the genuine liberalism of individualism, which has forgotten its Hobbesian origins, is that the greater its success, the more widespread and total the rights and freedoms it guarantees, the weaker the tools at its disposal to sustain the common liberal civil religion.

It is very unlikely that we are now facing the final end of the ideological age, but the ideological condition is being tested and disrupted as never before in living memory. This is to be observed precisely in the dizzying proliferation in the public discourse of incomplete or deformed ideologies that hector and confuse the modern liberal, and which sometimes ignite civil strife. It is to be seen no less in the scattered reawakening of the great philosophical and religious questions concerning human ends, all of which lie before or beyond ideology.

7.2 Progress and Hobbesian Ideology

Institutional decay and resurgent natural political ambitions are not the most critical threats to liberalism, or let us rather say that since these threats are permanent, they are not the cause of liberalism entering a crisis. A far graver ill afflicting the liberal order is simply the widespread impression that liberal progress is failing. The theme of progress, however, takes us beyond Hobbes. Hobbes offers no specific doctrine of necessary and gradual political or moral improvement. The revolution announced by Hobbesian civil philosophy is a singular and repeatable event. Progress, on the other hand, is an intelligible and unidirectional historical movement toward the better. Hobbes is no progressive. Yet not only liberalism after Kant and Mill, but also Marxism, and even fascism, are progressive ideologies.

The fact that contemporary liberalism is generally a progressive ideology means we will need to look beyond Hobbes to understand its particular crisis. We will need to see how progressive ideology formed when the Hobbesian philosophy came to be modified by the philosophy of history. For belief in progress in the sense I have just indicated – recognition of an intelligible historical improvement – is one fruit of that modern project that undertook to render a rational and intelligible account of the course of human history under the heading of the *philosophy of history*.

The next two chapters form a study of Giambattista Vico's philosophy of history and his political theory, both formulated in a spirit of opposition to Hobbes. Though not among the most widely read or influential of great philosophers, Vico is nevertheless the earliest and arguably the most profound critic of Hobbes' ideological approach to politics. We first ask how and why Vico invented the philosophy of history in his reaction against Hobbes, Descartes and other figures of

the early Enlightenment. Once we have answered this, we will be in a position to understand how the liberal theory of progress came to be formed by uniting Hobbesian ideology with the very philosophy of history Vico and his successors intended as a refutation of Hobbes. There is an unstable synthesis of ideology and the philosophy of history at the heart of the liberal theory of progress. If we are to understand the crisis of liberal progress, we must first understand the original opposition between these two streams of modern philosophy. We turn our attention now, therefore, to Vico and his *New Science* of history.

Chapter 3

Vico's *New Science*: The Modern Philosophy of History

"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

- Genesis 50:20

1. The Philosophy of History

This chapter explores the thesis that the characteristically modern philosophy of history began with the publication of Giambattista Vico's *New Science* in 1725, and that this important branch of modern philosophy was the twin and rival of the philosophies of Hobbes, Descartes and other early enlighteners. After we have seen in this chapter and the next what these diverging schools of early modern philosophy share and how they differ, we will be in a position to revisit the liberal theory of progress, whose heart is the synthesis of Hobbesian ideology and the modern philosophy of history.

There is of course a broader sense in which the philosophy of history is something older than modernity or Vico. So long as philosophy has existed, there have been attempts to obtain by reasoning what had been promised by the priest's art of divination. Philosophers given to the study and theory of history have tended to form a recognizable type. They seek to render the course of history intelligible and to grasp the shape of the future. Often they emerge from this study chastened in their zeal to establish the political ideals of philosophy, and with a keen sense for the transience of historical possibility and constraint. As a rule they lean toward conservatism, expressing an attachment and reverence for ways and institutions that have formed over long periods of time. The philosophy of history has, as often as not, an evident concern with the growth and decay of human institutions, and a preoccupation with the difficulty of altering human things against the grain of their growth. The problem of civilizational decline is for the philosophy of history what the problem of mortality is for the philosophy of man.

This spirit was not alien to the classical period. It appears clearly in passages of Plato, Polybius and others. Polybius (264–146 BC) is known for expounding a cyclical doctrine of regime change, which he presents under the ponderous name of "the theory of the natural transformations into each other of the different forms of government."[326] He concludes his "digression" of several pages on the cycle of regimes with a reflection on the significance of this branch of knowledge.

> Such is the cycle of political revolution, the course appointed by nature in which constitutions change, disappear, and finally return to the point from which they started. Anyone who clearly perceives this may indeed in speaking of the future of any state be wrong in his estimate of the time the process will take, but if his judgement is not tainted by animosity or jealousy, he will very seldom be mistaken as to the stage of growth or decline it has reached, and as to the form into which it will change. And especially in the case of the Roman state will this method enable us to arrive at a knowledge of its formation, growth, and greatest perfection, and likewise of the change for the worse which is sure to follow some day. For, as I said, this state, more than any other, has been formed and has grown naturally, and will undergo a natural decline and change to its contrary.[327]

There is political wisdom to be gained in the knowledge of historical necessity. It is possible, according to Polybius, to extend the natural life of a regime by mixing the principles (i.e. the ruling elements) of the regime, as at Rome, or as Lycurgus did when he realized "that every variety of regime which is simple and formed on one principle is precarious, as it is soon perverted into the

[326] Polybius, p. 277
[327] Polybius, p. 289

corrupt form which is proper to it and naturally follows on it."[328] Polybius' philosophy of history, like ancient medicine, is an art that furthers natural ends by counselling accommodation to natural necessities. It restrains and conditions the pursuit of ideals rather than rejecting it, just as the wisdom of life teaches that it is most desirable to be young and healthy, but also teaches how best to comport oneself in age and sickness.

Despite very wide differences of doctrine and perspective, Polybius's posture of active accommodation to historical necessity resembles Alexis de Tocqueville's. Similar expressions of statesmanlike acquiescence in the inevitable course of things appear, for example, in Tocqueville's brief but weighty reflections on history in the introduction to *Democracy in America* (1835).

> It is not necessary that God himself should speak in order to disclose to us the unquestionable signs of His will; we can discern them in the habitual course of nature, and in the invariable tendency of events: I know, without a special revelation, that the planets move in the orbits traced by the Creator's finger. If the men of our time were led by attentive observation and by sincere reflection to acknowledge that the gradual and progressive development of social equality is at once the past and future of their history, this solitary truth would confer the sacred character of a Divine decree upon the change. To attempt to check democracy would be in that case to resist the will of God; and the nations would then be constrained to make the best of the social lot awarded to them by Providence.[329]

[328] Polybius, p. 291
[329] Citation in Democracy in America.

Tocqueville indicates a progress of history quite distinct from Polybius's recurrent cycles. What then shall we say is the essence of the philosophy of history – the attitude common to Polybius and Tocqueville – if it be thought insufficient to say simply that it is the *divination by reason of historical necessity*? Karl Löwith maintains that the philosophy of history is a specifically modern invention, first appearing with Voltaire's *Universal History*.[330] He argues that this philosophy came to be through the "secularization"[331] of the belief in providence: "the very existence of a philosophy of history and its quest for meaning is due to the history of salvation; it emerged from the faith in an ultimate purpose."[332] Faith in an ultimate purpose is traced by Löwith, very naturally and with persuasive learning, to the teachings of the Old Testament and subsequently Christianity. That is why he holds that "a *philosophy* of history would have been a contradiction in terms" for the Greek thinkers with their immutable and recurrent cosmic orders.[333] With precise intent to uphold this fundamental distinction between ancient Greeks and modern post-Christians, Löwith defines the *philosophy of history* as "a systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning."[334] The definition simply indicates again that the philosophy of history is the "secularization" of the tradition of Judeo-Christian salvific history that Löwith traces from "Isaiah to Marx, from Augustine to Hegel, and from Joachim to Schelling."[335]

[330] Löwith, p. 1; Vico is "precisely on the border line of the critical transition from the theology to the philosophy of history and, therefore, deeply ambiguous." (Löwith, p. 135)
[331] Cf. Löwith, p. 19, "the moderns elaborate a philosophy of history by secularizing theological principles and applying them to an ever large number of empirical facts."
[332] Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 5
[333] Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 4
[334] Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 1
[335] Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 18

Polybius has no philosophy of history in Löwith's particular sense. Would Löwith recognize the Muslim philosopher Ibn-Khaldun's work's *Muqaddimah* (1377) [*Introduction to History*] as a philosophy of history? This seems unlikely, since Ibn-Khaldun's theory is cyclical like that of Polybius, not obviously progressive or centered on a vision of historical unity of universal scope. Yet it would be difficult indeed to deny that this remarkable work is both a philosophy of history and in some ways modern. The *Muqaddimah*, as Ibn-Khaldun writes, "has its own particular object – that is, human civilization and social organization."[336] The special study of "social organization," he declares, is "something new, extraordinary, and highly useful."[337] In describing it, he very nearly coins the phrase *philosophy of history*: "The inner meaning of history involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events. (History,) therefore, is firmly rooted in philosophy. It deserves to be accounted a branch of (philosophy)."[338]

Polybius' philosophy of history – a "digression" that nevertheless sets the tone for his whole project of narrating Rome's rise to world power – is oriented toward explaining transformations in the natural politics of rule. There are six original forms of government according to Polybius, though these may be mixed. "The first of these to come into being is one-man rule, its growth being natural and unaided."[339] For Polybius, as for the ancients in general, politics means the activity of ruling and being ruled. Political transformation is the transformation of the city's ruling part; all other kinds of change are derivative or extraneous.

[336] Muqaddimah, I.77
[337] Muqaddimah, I.77
[338] Muqaddimah, I.6
[339] Polybius, p. 275

The intervention of the monotheistic religions complicates this picture considerably. All rule is said to come from God. For Ibn-Khaldun what drives change over history is not in the first instance the change of ruler, but changes in the customs, character and outlook of entire peoples: "When there is a general change of conditions, it is as if the entire creation had changed and the whole world been altered, as if it were a new and repeated creation, a world brought into existence anew."[340] Ibn-Khaldun has an acute sense that human beings have perceived the world in very different ways at different times and places, and that human perception is a group activity; he is fully modern in his awareness of the importance of cultural difference in determining changing human ends.

The *Muqaddimah* measures the rise and fall of any human community's strength by the extent and intensity of its members' mutual loyalty or "group feeling."[341] It also sketches the human character in its transitions from the Bedouin nomad to the sedentary personage of the wealthy city, and then back again toward the wilderness. The work explains and illustrates the rise and fall of ruling dynasties in predictable and perceptible stages marked by distinct habits and "traits of character," such as military virtue, traditionalist rigor, scholarship, luxury, refined liberality, or unmanly excess. Just as group solidarity wanes over time, so Ibn-Khaldun thinks dynasties have a natural life span of approximately four generations or one hundred twenty years: "The four generation can be explained as the builder, the one who has personal contact with the builder, the imitator, and

[340] Muqaddimah, I.65

[341] "Religious propaganda cannot materialize without group feeling – This is because... every mass (political) undertaking by necessity requires group feeling. This is indicated in the aforementioned tradition: 'God sent no prophet who did not enjoy the protection of his people.' If this was the case with the prophets, one would (expect it to apply) all the more so to others. One cannot expect them to work the wonder of achieving superiority without group feeling." (Muqaddimah, I.322)

the destroyer."[342] A tribe, nation or dynasty behaves like a living being; it is ambitious, aging and mortal: "conditions within the nations and races change with the change of periods and the passing of days."[343] The evident milestones that mark the life-course of political communities are to be identified by the philosopher and heeded by the wise statesman.

These are but brief indications that Ibn-Khaldun's "philosophy of human civilization or social organization" is both a genuine philosophy of history and in some ways modern. The great imaginative advance on Polybius is a function of the insight that "changes of conditions" in the state are experienced "as if the entire creation had changed and the whole world been altered." Ibn-Khaldun is able to radically divide his perspective, to see the world simultaneously as though it had undergone several creations, in a manner basically foreign to the ancient Greeks, but which is suggested in many places in the Hebrew Bible and in the Christian and Muslim sacred literature built upon it. For this reason, it is also possible to understand Ibn-Khaldun's enhanced flexibility of perspective in terms of what Rémi Brague has called the "secondarity" of modern civilization, namely its birth and growth on the foundations of a preserved and revered classical literary civilization.[344] Certainly, the *Muqaddimah* stands in a clear relation of "secondarity" with respect to the Hebrew Bible, Greek antiquity, and especially the founding age of Islam. The concept of "secondarity" might lead Brague to consider Ibn-Khaldun as belonging in spirit to the moderns, whereas Löwith maintains that the cyclical theory of history is always the characteristic hallmark of pre-modernity.

[342] Muqaddimah, I.281
[343] Muqaddimah, I.56
[344] Cf. Brague, *Eccentric Culture*

The coming section argues that there is a more useful and enlightening way of distinguishing the modern philosophy of history beginning with Vico from what precedes it. But from what has already been stated, it is possible to surmise a simple truth about the philosophy of history generally. Philosophies of history – modern and ancient, cyclical or progressive, pagan as well as monotheistic – are reason's attempt to perfect the art of divination. The end is always knowledge by reason of historical necessity or fate.

2. The Modern Philosophy of History

Löwith and Brague each indicate important truths about the new philosophy of history of early modern times. Brague's "secondarity" has been a genuine socio-psychological fact at least since the Renaissance. It engenders habits of historical self-reflection that have transformed philosophy, art and human self-understanding more generally. "Secondarity" is nevertheless not equivalent to the modern philosophy of history, even if it is one of its preconditions. Löwith, who defines the philosophy of history as *secularized salvific history*, points us toward the important and mysterious phenomenon of "secularization." When Löwith affirms that the *idea of progress* is a "secularization" of the *idea of providence*, he places the cyclical theories of the ancients on one side of a divide, and post-Christian progressive approaches to history, on the other.[345] Thinkers like Vico (and Ibn-Khaldun) who straddle these worlds or do not fall neatly into one or the other of them fascinate and perplex Löwith.

> [Vico] neither replaced providence by progress, like Voltaire, nor introduced, like Bossuet, orthodoxy into history. When he investigated history as a philosophical historian, he never intended to discard revelation; and when he asserted, from the first to the last page, that providence is the first principle for the understanding of history, he did not distort the sociopolitical history by an eschatological viewpoint. His leading idea is neither the progression toward fulfilment nor the cosmic cycle of a merely natural growth and decay, but a historiocyclic progression from *corso* to *ricorso* in which the cycle itself has providential significance... Vico's

[345] "... the moderns elaborate a philosophy of history by secularizing theological principles and applying them to an ever large number of empirical facts." (Löwith, p. 19); cf. Löwith, pp. 1-3, 6, 19, 60, 104.

> perspective is still a theological one, but the means of providence and salvation are in themselves historionatural ones... Vico's philosophy of history is a "rational civil theology," halfway between Voltaire and Bossuet, vindicating God's providence directly as history. It is precisely on the border line of the critical transition from the theology to the philosophy of history and, therefore, deeply ambiguous.[346]

To the question whether Vico is a religious or secular thinker, Löwith here gives the best and truest possible answer. Nevertheless, Löwith's total identification of modernity with an opaque process of "secularization" focuses his attention too narrowly on the theoretical role God does not play in the system. "Secularization" might well be taken to mean something more than the conceptual cancellation of God and his replacement by an algebraic *x*. It might entail replacing God with man, if not altogether, then at least gradually or in one way or another. If we take the great secularizer Hobbes at his word, man is able to imitate "Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governs the World)" and "make an Artificial Animal" with an "artificall life."[347] Although Vico is a pious and religious thinker, genuinely appalled by Hobbes' irreligion, even he does not hesitate to speak at times of man and not God as the creator of history.

> The world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone

[346] Löwith, p. 135
[347] Lev., p. 9

> knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, which, since men had made it, men could come to know.[348]

It is possible on the basis of this statement alone to draw a relatively sharp dividing line between older philosophical approaches to history and the modern philosophy of history. The modern philosophy of history begins with Vico's *New Science*. The novelty is just that in Vico and after him, the philosophy of history becomes the art or science of using the history of human ideas and opinions (the "modifications of the human mind") to divine the meaning of human history. This project is only possible if ideas and opinions are conceived as the moderns conceive them and not as the ancients did. Ideas that reflect nature or are themselves natural do not have a history. There can be no history proper to the Platonic ideas or the Aristotelian forms. Ibn-Khaldun, for all his modern awareness of cultural difference, does not pass from an elaboration of the principle that "traits of character are the natural result of the peculiar situations in which they are found"[349] to the view that ideas have a history. But ideas evidently do have histories if, as Hobbes and Vico both believed, ideas have been made by men, and if they can be remade over time.

Hobbes had observed that "the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people"[350] and meant thereby to indicate that public opinion and belief are the real foundations of political power. This outlook logically generates the truism José Ortega y Gasset expressed as the principle of "the sovereignty of public opinion."[351] Not one but two streams of modern philosophy follow from this principle. First, because in the modern view ideas are not

[348] NS 331
[349] Muqaddimah, I.353
[350] EW VI, p. 184
[351] Cf. Gasset, p. 127

infused into the human consciousness spontaneously by nature, but made by men, the Hobbesian project of ideological or artificial politics is born. Second, because ideas are made by man and yet also form the content of man's mind, their history reflects the history of man's self-formation. This is the modern philosophy of history. After Hobbes had invented the ideological or artificial mode of politics, Vico countered with the modern philosophy of history, whose entire aim is to narrate the true history of human ideas and thereby disarm the revolutionary project of *armed reason*.

Hobbes is wholly blind to the second modern possibility developed by Vico. He systematically neglects to research the real origins of ideas and opinions. In the *Leviathan* and elsewhere, Hobbes proposes that religious ideas and opinions arise and spread when unwholesome visions engendered by bodily distempers or fearful ignorance are exploited by Machiavellian "confederacies of deception." This is an egregiously one-sided and unsatisfactory account of the history of religion. It is no accidental failing. The Hobbesian ambition to rationalize opinion by science can have little esteem for the infinite chronical of ideas and opinions past; like Descartes, Hobbes recognizes the history of human ideas only to pronounce it meaningless.

Ancient and modern philosophers agree at least that ideas and opinions are the medium by which we understand whatever we do understand. But if the moderns are right, the very fact that ideas are human artifice makes the "history of ideas" the record of human self-creation.[352] The modern philosophy of history, beginning with Vico, employs this insight to narrate a history of the human mind. Vico is explicit on this point. The *New Science* is a "science that is both a history and

[352] Cf. NS 347

philosophy of humanity."[353] It studies the "modifications of our own human mind"[354] in order to unearth "the principles of the history of human nature."[355] The modern philosophy of history, from Vico onward, means the project of divining the higher reason that unites the history of human deeds with the history of human ideas. Its conscious aim is not "secularization," but the replacement of the God of nature exiled by modern science with the God of providential history. In these things, Vico and Hegel are one.

[353] FNS 23
[354] NS 331
[355] NS 368

3. The Study of Vico's *New Science*

It is widely acknowledged that Vico is one of the most important of early modern philosophers, yet he remains among the least studied. A variety of causes have conspired to produce this long neglect and obscurity. Vico's literary style is baroque, his Italian intentionally archaic and idiomatic, his thought has a "diffuse and torrential quality."[356] The profundity of his ideas and the fundamental soundness of many of his precocious historical discoveries are here and there obscured by a galling film of strange factual error and fantasy that offends the punctilious conscience of the modern scholar. His professions of piety antiquate him in secular eyes, while his explosive theoretical radicalism fails to endear him to the faithful. Vico also lacked sympathetic and comprehending readers in his own age; his influence, hard to trace even in instances where it is certain, began in earnest only a century after his death. This solitary and isolated Neapolitan thinker seems to have realized his own fear of being "alone in wisdom" in his time. He appears to us like an apparition, untimely and out of sequence in any account of the development of modern philosophy. What is one to do with a thinker who writes like a humanist at one moment, at the next with terse Machiavellian brutality, and then without warning expresses himself in the spirit, and almost the very words, of Kant, Hegel, Marx or Freud? "He is constantly rediscovered and as constantly laid aside," Isaiah Berlin writes in his admiring study, adding with generous exaggeration, "he remains unreadable and unread."[357]

[356] Mazlish, p. 49
[357] Berlin, p. 146

Vico furthermore plays no essential role in the chain of influence in early modern political philosophy that moves from Machiavelli and Grotius through Hobbes, Locke, Kant and beyond.[358] Montesquieu, and especially Rousseau, would strikingly echo many of his key ideas, and may well have read him, though no definitive proof of this has been found.[359] Even the German thinkers, Goethe, Jacobi, Hamman, Herder, and later, Hegel, who share so much with Vico, and who certainly did know of his work, seem not to have read him very closely, or to have done so only after their most characteristic ideas had already formed.[360]

Yet in contrast to his negligible influence prior to the mid-19th century, contemporary interpreters are largely agreed that Vico anticipates whole developments in philosophy decades and even centuries before they took hold.[361] Karl Löwith observes of the *New Science*:

> It is the fruit of a lifelong search into the depth of historic humanity. It anticipates not only fundamental ideas of Herder and Hegel, Dilthey and Spengler, but also the more particular discoveries of Roman history by Niebuhr and Mommsen, the theory of Homer by Wolf, the interpretation of mythology by Grimm, the historical understanding of laws by Savigny, of the ancient city and of feudalism by Fustel de Coulanges, and of the class struggles by Marx and Sorel.[362]

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[358] Verene, 1981, p. 22

[359] Cf. Autobiography, pp. 72-73; Hösle, p. 171; Berlin, p. 139; Stone, p. 315; For a full account of Vico's early reception in Germany, including source material, see Petrone, "Von Neapel nach Weimer. Vicos 'deutsche Reise'," in König, pp. 25-46.

[360] Cf. Autobiography, pp. 67-69; Hösle, pp. 171-172; Auerbach, pp. 188; Berlin, p. 121, 141; Jacobi thought he had found in Vico an anticipation of Kant's transcendentalism. (Cf. König, pp. 30-33, 45-56)

[361] Cf. Mazlish, p.12; Berlin, pp. 455-479; Donskis, p. 73

[362] Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 115; Vittorio Hösle writes "the theories of Feuerbach, Marx, Darwin, Weber, Frazer, Freud, Piaget, and Lévi-Strauss were... contained in him *in nuce*." (Hösle, p. 3) Mark Lilla, less sympathetic than other scholars of Vico, concedes, "Today Vico is the domesticated property of the university, where he is honored as an important forerunner of modern sociology, anthropology, psychology, and social history, and has

By the mid-19th century Vico had begun to exercise a real, albeit limited influence. He first achieved an international reputation in 1827 when the *New Science* was discovered and translated by the French republican historian Jules Michelet, the first to call the *Renaissance* by that name. Vico has since inspired poets and writers, and especially political thinkers of all stripes: Catholics, Marxists, conservatives, nationalists, liberals and fascists.[363] Up to the 21st century, Vico's greatest appeal has perhaps been to Marxists.[364] Marx himself warmly recommended Vico to Ferdinand Lasalle,[365] and refers to him in an important footnote in *Das Kapital*.[366] Georges Sorel affirmed that "among all philosophers who wrote about history before Marx, none is more worthy of study than Vico."[367] Max Fisch explains Vico's appeal to Marxists as follows: "Vico shares with the Marxists and existentialists the negative view that there is no human essence to be found in individuals as such, and with the Marxists the positive view that the essence of humanity is the ensemble of social relations, or the developing system of social institutions."[368] The Soviet

been claimed by every imaginable school in these disciplines – by positivists, Marxists, phenomenologists, structuralists, post-structuralists, and many more." (Lilla, p. 3) Without attempting to be exhaustive, Löwith's list of Vico's anticipations must at least be extended to include Rousseau's theory of language and human "perfectibility"; Feuerbach's theory of religion; Jung's archetypes; and Freud's understanding of the sublimation of the libido.

[363] Among important or influential political thinkers who express great admiration for Vico are Comte, Marx, Engels, Sorel, Trotsky, Gramsci, De Maistre, Samuel Coleridge, J. S. Mill, Bernadetto Croce, and Edward Said. For accounts of Vico's influence on 19th and 20th century figures, see *Autobiography*, pp. 61-107; Hösle, pp. 168-178; Gianturco (1937); Lifshitz (1948); Said (1967).

[364] Lifshitz admires Vico's "deep understanding of the agrarian basis of world history, the splendid analysis of the class struggle among ancient peoples, the theory of the state as a means of defending the prevailing form of property." (Lifshitz, p. 402); Trotsky and Gramsci and read and cited Vico. (Cf. Hösle, pp. 174-175) Georges Sorel wrote *Study on Vico* in 1896.

[365] Marx recommended Vico's works in a letter to Lassalle, writing that in them "are to be found in embryo Wolf's Homer, Niebuhr's History of the Roman Emperors, the foundations of comparative philology (although fantastic), and in general many a gleam of genius." (Cf. Autobiography, p. 104)

[366] "...since, as Vico says, the essence of the distinction between human history and natural history is that the former is made by man and the latter is not, would not the history of human technology be easier to write than the history of natural technology?" Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 13, quoted in *Autobiography*, p. 105

[367] Sorel, p. 270.

[368] NS, p. xxxix

philosopher Mikhail Lifshitz perhaps best captured why Vico is significant in particular for a study of the modern theories of progress, whether liberal or Marxist.

> What is the historical theory of knowledge? It is that *new science* forecast in the early eighteenth century by Giambattista Vico. Without it, it is impossible to make the step from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom (namely, the rational control of human society over the development of its own creative forces), the step from hazy semi-consciousness to lucid comprehension of the historical prerequisites of culture, to its *self-consciousness*.[369]

Lifshitz's reference to the realms of necessity and freedom employs Kantian or Marxist terminology alien to Vico. Moreover Vico's theory of history is neither straightforwardly progressive nor two-staged. Yet Lifshitz's observation agrees with the central argument presented here in a deeper sense. The idea of historical necessity is wholly indistinguishable from blind fate so long as the laws governing historical necessity are thought to be unknown. The moment these laws are believed to have been discovered and made known, as Vico believed he had, the very act of discovery seems to promise a higher consciousness and a higher freedom. Vico is the first to employ the history of ideas to explain how mankind came into reflective self-consciousness. Kant and Hegel are among his illustrious followers in this enterprise, while Polybius, Ibn-Khaldun and Voltaire all alike subscribe to the older epistemology of ideas.

[369] Lifshitz, p. 393; "Marx and Engels' historical theory of knowledge is already to be discerned in the genial sketches of Vico." (Lifshitz, p. 405)

4. Vico's Life and Work

Vico's life, recounted in one of the earliest specimens of intellectual autobiography, reads like a romantic tale of misunderstood genius. Told in the third person, it begins with the story of a fateful accident that befell the young Giambattista at his father's bookshop in Naples in 1675 when he was seven.

> He fell head first from the top of a ladder to the floor below, and remained a good five hours without motion or consciousness... The surgeon, indeed, observing the broken cranium... predicted he would either die or grow up an idiot. However by God's grace neither part of his prediction came true, but as a result of this mischance he grew up with a melancholy and irritable temperament such as belongs to men of ingenuity and depth, who, thanks to the one, are quick as lightning in perception, and thanks to the other, take no pleasure in verbal cleverness or falsehood.[370]

Vico read widely, outgrew all his teachers, and successfully taught himself law. None of this prevented his living most of his life in poor health and genteel poverty, barely able to provide for his large family. His wife was sickly and lame. He was forced to tutor the sons of the rich and write encomiums and wedding odes for the Neapolitan nobility to supplement his meager income as a lecturer in Rhetoric at the University of Naples. Driven obsessively by the desire to attain new and profound wisdom, he studied and wrote daily for decades amidst the cries and jostling of his troublesome brood of children. Naples, Europe's third most populous city and very overcrowded,

[370] Autobiography, p. 111

was a city under foreign domination. In Vico's view, while still basking in the last rays of its former glory, the city was sliding or had slid into economic, political and cultural decline.[371] In Naples, all the streams of scholastic, humanistic, and early enlightenment learning flowed together, under the watchful eye of the Inquisition, into what seemed to Vico and others like an increasingly stagnant and even malarial pool.[372]

After his ecclesiastical patron, Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini, the future Pope Clement VII, abruptly withdrew financial support, Vico was forced to pawn valuables and shorten the first edition of the *New Science* in order to publish it at his own expense in 1725.[373] When the book did appear, it received meager praise and little understanding. "In this city I account it as fallen on barren ground," Vico wrote to a friend, "I avoid all public places, so as not to meet the persons to whom I have sent it."[374] But he also consoles himself: "this work has filled me with a certain heroic spirit, so that I am no longer troubled by any fear of death, nor have I any mind to speak of rivals."[375]

In his *Autobiography,* Vico describes his great project in the following terms:

> Vico finally came to perceive that there was not yet in the world of letters a system so devised as to bring the best philosophy, that of Plato made subordinate to the

[371] Burke, pp. 11, 18
[372] Vico's relationship to the Inquisition was complicated. On the one hand, he writes with great care to avoid running afoul of it, on the other hand, after Locke had been placed on the Index in 1734, Vico suppressed his criticism of the English thinker. (Cf. Stone, p. 291) Two of the three friends to whom Vico dedicates his early work of metaphysics, *De Antiquissima* (1710), had been imprisoned for years by the Inquisition for heresy. (cf. Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, pp. 8, 44; Stone, pp. 43-44)
[373] Vico nevertheless dedicated the *First New Science* (1725) to Cardinal Corsini, and may have received ecclesiastical protection from censorship from the future Pope . (Cf. Stone, p. 265)
[374] Autobiography, p. 14
[375] Autobiography, p. 15

> Christian faith, into harmony with a philology exhibiting scientific necessity in both its branches, that is in the two histories, that of languages and that of things; to give certainty to the history of languages by reference to the history of things; and to bring into accord the maxims of the academic sages and the practices of the political sages.[376]

Such impenetrable concision is typical of Vico. The *New Science* shepherds various aims, one of which is to heal the modern breech between abstract philosophical reasoning and humanistic learning ("philology"). In Vico's time, the foot soldiers of Cartesian philosophy had stormed the republic of letters, and the knowers of human things – the humanists, poets, jurists, artists and historians – seemed to have become mendicants in their own house. Vico resisted this development, the first wave of the modern scientific rationalization of learning, in which he saw only a process of dehumanization and moral impoverishment. Descartes, like Hobbes, aimed to establish a sort of intellectual tyranny, to impose a new scholasticism every bit as rigid as the old.[377] The Cartesians everywhere discouraged and disparaged historical and linguistic learning.[378] In publically denouncing the study of languages and the reading of old books, Descartes, himself a learned man, showed himself a deceiver, a kind of metaphysical Machiavellian, seeking to "gather the fruit of that plan of wicked politicians, to destroy completely those men through whom one has reached the peak of power."[379] Fear and loathing of Machiavellianism and, even more, Cartesianism, drive Vico, who is a wildly creative but fundamentally reactive thinker.

[376] Autobiography, p. 155
[377] Reference; For an account of Descartes' precipitous ascendancy over modern though, see Hazard, pp. 130-133
[378] Cf. *Autobiography*, pp. 132-133 ; *De Antiquissima*, pp. 184-185 ; *Study Methods*, pp. 14ff, 33
[379] *De Antiquissima*, pp. 184-185; Cf. Lilla, p. 51

Vico was also a humanist educator and rhetorician by vocation. His pedagogical concern is constant, and it drives his engagement with the so-called *querelle des anciens et des modernes* as to the relative merit of ancient and modern science, art and philosophy. Vico's largely overlooked contribution to this long simmering dispute is outlined in a work called *On the Study Methods of Our Times* (1709), a short treatise proposing a third way combining the best of the ancient and modern modes of study. Vico hoped to preserve the technical-scientific gains of the moderns, while correcting their tendency to excessive abstraction, their failure of vital imagination, and their neglect of political prudence, rhetoric and letters.[380] This educational problem continued to occupy Vico for as long as he wrote, and evidently embodied for him a broader and deeper struggle over the character of European civilization which perhaps still continues today, and which has largely followed the course Vico most feared.

Besides his reprehension of Cartesian analysis and his devotion to humanist ideals of rhetoric and political prudence, Vico is a defender of religious piety and an opponent of the ascendant atheism of the Enlightenment. He understands religion to constitute the original and eternal principle of social order; modern atheism therefore appears to him a recurrence or reiteration of the ancient displacement of Plato and Aristotle by the individualistic and antisocial philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism. The *New Science,* he emphasizes, belongs essentially to the school of the "political philosophers,"[381] i.e., the Platonic and (to a lesser degree) Aristotelean philosophies. Since Vico characterizes his philosophy as fundamentally political, it is natural to begin with the novel politics emerging from Hobbes and others that Vico sought to discredit and replace. Vico's

[380] For a good account of Vico's relation to this debate and especially his position as outlined before the *New Science*, see Levine, 1991.
[381] Cf. NS 130, 1109

criticisms, as I show, are largely well founded; what he found unsatisfactory in early modern political theorists such as Hobbes, would in time come to seem unsatisfactory to the great generality of European thinkers.

5. The Problem of Political Origins

The collapse of the old order during and after the Reformation necessitated the re-founding of political theory on a new basis. Up to Vico's time this had been attempted mostly by Protestant thinkers, including especially the legal philosophers Vico calls the three "princes" of the modern natural law doctrine: Hugo Grotius, John Selden and Samuel Pufendorf. [382] Besides the Protestants, Vico also grapples with the reputed atheists, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Spinoza. These were authors Vico knew well and had considered deeply, but whose works were suppressed and criminalized in Naples by the Spanish and then Papal Inquisitions, and which it would therefore have been ill-advised for him to cite too often or too openly.[383]

Vico's profound disagreements with all these early modern political thinkers begins with an instructive point of agreement. Like his antagonists, Vico has a special concern with political origins. Because the *ancien régime* had been called into question, at least since the Reformation, on the basis of the teaching of an original or foundational human equality, the question of political origins now assumed unprecedented urgency and importance. In face of the new default position of a "state of nature," characterized by unbounded freedom and equality, theories of political origins now assumed the function of justifying political order as such against the originary egalitarian anarchy. This, at any rate, was the problem taken up by Vico along with all the other

[382] Cf. FNS 15; Vico does not hesitate to praise Grotius and honor him as one of his principle "four authors" (the others being Plato, Tacitus and Francis Bacon). In his Autobiography, Vico even credits him with suggesting the project of combining the disciplines of history and philosophy. Yet after once beginning a commentary on Grotius, Vico abandoned it because, as he also tells us in his Autobiography, "it was not fitting for a man of Catholic faith to adorn with notes the work of a heretical author." (Autobiography, pp. 138-139, 154-155)

[383] Vico writes sparingly about Machiavelli, Hobbes and Spinoza, and what he writes is not sympathetic. Cf. *Keys to the New Science*, p. 181, Vici Vindicae 51, NS 179, 1109; FNS 119. For Vico's relationship to the Inquisition, which had imprisoned some of his closest friends for heresy, see *Autobiograpy*, p. 34; Stone pp. 33-35, 43-44

great early modern political thinkers beginning with Grotius, and continuing onward through Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke.

On this point, Vico accuses the modern natural law theories of falling into a common error due to their unhistorical thinking. None of them could account plausibly for the emergence of political order out of the real and historical "state of nature," when the world had been populated by literal cavemen of bestial stature and sensibility.[384] Vico's "first men" are no hypothetical philosophical abstractions, but such creatures as those whose remains have subsequently been uncovered by archaeologists: "huge beasts, wholly bewildered and ferocious,"[385] strange creatures "all robust sense and vigorous imagination[386]" yet "almost all body and almost no reflection."[387] Grotius, Hobbes and Pufendorf, in their haste to construct hypothetical origins, had not hesitated to commit the absurdity of making the cavemen into reasonable and civilized philosophers.

Vico devotes the first section of final edition of the *New Science* (1744) to establishing the truth of Biblical chronology, especially against the claims of the antiquity of the world put forward by the Egyptians and Chinese. His own account of the origins of the gentile nations begins after the Universal Flood with the sons of Noah: Ham, Japhet and Shem.[388] Vico argues that the sons of Noah and their descendants (excepting the single pious line descending through Shem), degenerated physically and morally over a long period of time, growing to bestial proportions, gradually losing their memory of the God of Adam and Noah, and even the use of speech. At

[384] No less than Rousseau after him, Vico is indebted to Lucretius' highly unflattering and realistic description of early man in Book V of *De Rerum Natura*.
[385] FNS 13
[386] NS 375
[387] NS 819
[388] Cf. NS 369-373

length, they were transformed into the savage giants who are the *nefilim* and the "sons of God" mentioned in Genesis 6:1-4, and who are also the true factual basis of the heroes of the Greek myths, and the ferocious primitive men described by Homer as Cyclopes. It is by recreating the minds of these early men that Vico's philosophy really begins.

5.1 No Original Consent

In the first edition of the *New Science* (1725) which is more polemical than the final edition of 1744, Vico dwells on the weakness of the natural lawyers' hypothetical and unhistorical theorizing. Their theories are unable to make sense of the little we do know about the origins and customs of peoples, as found in archaeological remains, and especially as reflected in the Bible and ancient pagan religion, law, poetry, myth and fable.[389] It is evident, moreover, that the purely rational natural law of the philosophers "has never been practiced in the customs of the nations."[390] Nor are the supposed universal laws of reason able to account for the specifically national character of peoples, who develop at first largely in isolation of one another, and are in practice everywhere divided by religion, language and custom.[391] Grotius, Selden and Pufendorf "begin with nations reciprocally related in the society of the entire human race,"[392] whereas "the natural law that arose individually in the [different] cities must have been that which gave these different peoples customs and habits such that, on the occasions when they later come into contact with one another, they found themselves sharing a common sense, without one nation having acquired it from another..."[393]

[389] FNS 21
[390] FNS 20
[391] FNS 22
[392] NS 318
[393] FNS 22

Such errors, caused by "the conceit of scholars, who will have it that what they know is as old as the world"[394] had blinded the natural lawyers to the historical truth that philosophers did not arise to formulate any idea of "natural equity" for "some two thousand years"[395] after the founding of the first nations. In this way, Vico dismisses more or less out of hand the notion of a consensual or conventional origin of political life: Political order could not have emerged through a reflective reasoning on the necessity or utility or justice of constituting a governing authority and laws, because the "first men" and families, and even the clans that were the "first nations," were wholly incapable of any such reflection; they "had no understanding or sense of the strength of society and were able to attend only to what belonged specifically to each of them."[396]

5.2 Just Force, No Fraud

Vico is also aware that the natural lawyers do not insist that the social contract was an historical fact; they leave open the possibility that the real birth of political community happens in an altogether different way. For this reason, his more sustained attention is focused not on the misleading fiction of an original agreement, but on the real belief he takes to underlie it. This was Machiavelli's notion that political order emerges through force and fraud.[397] Vico finds this supposition both more plausible and more dangerous than the other. It stands to reason that if the origin of political life is unjust violence and deceit, political order will be maintained, even if only

[394] NS 127
[395] NS 329
[396] FNS 114
[397] Vico chooses, or is constrained by the atmosphere of Inquisitorial censorship at Naples, to mention Machiavelli only sparingly. He nevertheless can only have Machiavelli in mind when he rejects "those false principles of evil politics: that civil governments were born either of open violence or of fraud which later broke into violence." (NS 522) In this passage, rather than attacking Machiavelli directly, Vico suggests that the theory of Jean Bodin and "all political theorists, that the first form of civil government in the world was monarchic" leads to the "false principles of evil politics."

secretly, by the same unjust means. The natural lawyers had not in fact evaded the Machiavellian trap, which Vico alludes to in several places as the doctrine of "wicked politicians."[398] In Vico's view, nothing but inconsistency or willful blindness separates the social contract theory from the thesis of originary force and fraud. Hobbes, more honest than the rest, had all but declared as much when he argued that commonwealths founded by armed conquest or "acquisition" are no more based on fear, and no less legitimate, than those founded by consent or "institution."[399]

These considerations supplied Vico with a powerful motive to discredit the Machiavellian premise of unjust origins. "Let Hobbes," scoffs Vico, "see how the kingdoms could have begun in that violence in which he would turn arms into law."[400] Could the bare use of force have imposed political union under the circumstances of the historical "state of nature," that is, in the time in which isolated but stable families first emerged and a rudimentary humanity had begun to appear? Would not "the family fathers, when they were but recently emerged from their savage bestial liberty... have allowed themselves to be slain along with their entire families rather than endure inequality?"[401] As for fraud, "lack of reflection does not know how to feign."[402] And what might these emergent cavemen have pretended to offer one another? According to Vico, there are but three possibilities: "liberty or power or wealth." Yet in these primitive conditions, they were

[398] FNS 134; *De Antiquissima*, pp. 184-185; NS 522

[399] "And this kind of Dominion, or Sovereignty, differeth from Sovereignty by Institution, onely in this, That the men who choose their Sovereign, do it in fear of one another, and not of him who they Institute: But in this case, they subject themselves, to him they are afraid of. In both cases they do it for fear: which is to be noted by them, that hold all such Covenants, as proceed from fear of death, or violence, voyd: which if it were true, no man, in any kind of Commonwealth, could be obliged to Obedience." (Lev., pp. 138-139)

[400] "Hence, let Carneades, and the sceptics, see how the kingdoms could have begun from a deception, whose daughters, he claimed, were the laws. [But] if the rich occupied the fields of the poor by force, how could this have happened when those who were rich in fields were few and those who were poor in them were many? Hence, let Hobbes see how the kingdoms could have begun in that violence in which he would turn arms into the law." (FNS 119)

[401] NS 1011

[402] NS 817

already free and sovereign in their families. They were furthermore sullen and averse to all strangers, and so naturally also to the exercise of power. "And wealth, in those simple and frugal first times, had no meaning at all."[403] Therefore "it is possible to imagine two and no more modes in nature through which the world of the gentile nations began: either a few sages established it through reflection or some bestial men together through a certain common sense."[404]

5.3 Imagined Republics: Plato's Error

Before his historical turn, Vico had himself subscribed to idea that ancient sages had founded great cities of the ancient world through their far-sighted powers of reflection. But from the time he had begun to write *New Science*, Vico had come to realize the impossibility of this hypothesis, which he names the "conceit of scholars." "Even Plato," who Vico credits as dimly recognizing the real origins of civilization, and who, virtually alone among the philosophers respected (if inconsistently) "the vulgar wisdom of religion and law," had fallen into the "conceit of scholars" when devising his *Republic.*[405] When Plato formulated the "best city in speech" he had ignored the origins entirely. Consequently, Plato "meditated on an ideal state and an equally ideal justice, wherein not only would the nations not be ruled and led by the common sense of the whole of mankind but, alas, be required to distort and abandon it."[406]

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[403] NS 1013

[404] FNS 27

[405] FNS 13; Vico's criticism of Plato's inconsistency seems to point primarily to the disjunction in the *Republic* between the account of the rise of the first "city of necessity" culminating in the "true city" or "healthy city" [369a-374a] and the account in Book VIII of the various regime types, presented as corruptions of the "best city" ruled by kings "who have proved best in philosophy." [543a] The ascent from the "city of necessity" is never shown to reach the "best city," while the corrupted forms of the "best city" never descend to the "city of necessity." In this way, Vico indicates that there is a fundamental inconsistency between Plato's idealism and his recognition of the real historical origins of the city, the cause being Plato's inconsistent acceptance of the principle of providence. Platonic idealism, which Vico is concerned to defend against Machiavellian realism, is to be salvaged by showing the providential necessity of the first city's violent ways. Vico acknowledges however that Plato stated "obscurely [Laws 626a:], that the commonwealths were born on the basis of arms." (NS 588)

[406] FNS 13

If Plato had kept in mind how primitive the "first men" really were, and how incapable of conceiving any kind of philosophical ideal, he would not have been "tempted to a vain longing for those times in which philosophers reigned or kings were philosophers."[407] Here Vico infers an essential kinship between Plato's ideal of the philosopher king and the common Greek belief, expressed by Polybius and many others, that the founders of early cities were great sages endowed with philosophic rather than vulgar wisdom.

> From Plato onwards, however, [those who favored] the tradition of recondite wisdom of the first founders of Greece have wished in vain for a state of affairs in which philosophers ruled or kings philosophized. But both the kingship and priesthood of these fathers were consequences of their vulgar wisdom..."[408]

Plato's conceit of the philosopher king and his historical error regarding the founders rest on the same false premise that human nature is unchanging and political ideals eternal. Vico remonstrates that the ideas and feelings of cavemen and primitives cannot be the same as those of philosophers and statesmen. In order to preserve the ideal while doing justice to the actual origin and development of ideas, Vico is led to historicize the ideal, to display it as an unfolding over time. The *Autobiography* notes the switch of perspective, which occurred sometime between the publication of *Universal Law* (1720), and the first edition of the *New Science* (1725).

[407] NS 522, 253
[408] FNS 132

> Vico is dissatisfied further with the *Universal Law* because he tried therein to descend from the mind of Plato and other enlightened philosophers into the dull and simple minds of the founders of the gentile peoples, whereas he should have taken the opposite course; whence he fell into error in certain matters.[409]

Vico's return to the origins thus answers multiple purposes. It refutes at once Plato's idealistic excess and the modern natural lawyers' thesis of originary consent. And it modifies and disarms the Machiavellian thesis of "wicked politicians" by taking up primitivism as a necessary stage on the way to civilization. Isaiah Berlin observes,

> The notion that men could have been rational, virtuous, wise from the beginning – that savagery and barbarism could, but for the intervention of forces beyond human control, have been avoided; that religious obscurantism and the fear and ignorance that led to it were either disastrous accidents, which need never have occurred, or unintelligible mysteries – this seemed to him blindness to man's nature as historically evolving entity, failure to understand what it is to be a man.[410]

[409] *Autobiography*, p. 194
[410] Berlin, p. 114

6. Knowing and Making

Although Vico is especially eager to correct the modern natural lawyers with regard to political origins, in order to do so he first borrows and adapts the important Hobbesian principle that *we know only what we make*.[411] Early modern philosophy was exercised by the challenge of skepticism; by the need to demonstrate how we gain reliable knowledge of things in the absence of the kind of direct and unmediated access to the external world assumed by the Scholastics and by the dominant schools of ancient philosophy. Descartes famously proposes the indubitable *cogito*, from which point he seeks to prove the existence of God and the truth of all clear and distinct ideas. In place of the *cogito*, Hobbes proposes the principle that *we truly know only what we ourselves have made*. He writes,

> Of arts, some are demonstrable, others indemonstrable; and demonstrable are those the construction of the subject whereof is in the power of the artist himself, who, in his demonstration, does no more but deduce the consequences of his own operation. The reason whereof is this, that the science of every subject is derived from a precognition of the causes, generation, and construction of the same; and consequently where the causes are known, there is place for demonstration, but not where the causes are to seek for. Geometry therefore is demonstrable, for the lines

[411] Löwith, however, observes that Vico does not ascribe his principle to Hobbes or mention him in the context of presenting it. (Löwith, "Geschichte und Natur," p. 153) This would not be out of character for Vico, who refrains from crediting his opponents Machiavelli, Hobbes and Spinoza, probably in order not to offer any public praise for these reputed and proscribed atheists. But it is nearly certain that Vico knew Hobbes' Latin works well. (Cf. Sergio, "The *Leviathan* in Naples"). Milibank has also argued plausibly that Vico's *verum/factum* principle is the independent development of a biblical-renaissance tradition of *homo creator*, begun with Philo of Alexandria (1st century BC), and further developed in the metaphysics of Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) and Herbert of Cherbury (1582–1648). (Cf. Milibank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico 1668-1744*)

> and figures from which we reason are drawn and described by ourselves; and *civil philosophy is demonstrable, because we make the commonwealth ourselves*. But because of natural bodies we know not the construction, but seek it from the effects, there lies no demonstration of what the causes be we seek for, but only of what they may be.[412]

The reason our knowledge of nature can only be probable, according to Hobbes, is that we do not make or truly know nature's elements, and so must explain natural things by way of our senses and causal hypothesis only. Whereas, on the contrary, our knowledge of geometrical truth is not probable but "demonstrable," because it lies wholly in the power of our mind to construct geometrical objects. The Hobbesian principle that "we know what we make" is for this reason often referred to as "constructivism." Vico agrees entirely with this principle: "there is no other way in which skepticism can be refuted, except that the criterion of the true should be to have made the thing itself."[413]

Vico's early metaphysical work, *The Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians (1710)* proposes in language similar to Hobbes that "*verum* (the true) and *factum* (what is made) are interchangeable, or to use the customary language of the Schools, they are convertible."[414] Echoing Hobbes again, Vico writes "the specialist in geometry is like a god in his world of figures just as God omnipotent is somewhat like a geometer in the world of minds and bodies."[415] Vico maintained this thesis as

[412] EW VII, p. 183
[413] *Ancient Wisdom*, p. 56; Milibank argues, however, that "*verum-factum* belongs to a gradual infiltration and transformation of Greek metaphysics by Christian theology." (Milibank, p. 91)
[414] *Ancient Wisdom*, p. 45
[415] Vivi Vindiciae 22, *Keys to the New Science*

a kind of solid core of his evolving ideas. He remarks in the *New Science* that even sensation involves a kind of making: "the natural philosophers, by sober observations, found it to be true that the senses make the qualities called sensible."[416]

6.1 Vico's Early Metaphysics of Making

On The Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians has already recast Hobbes' constructivism in line with Vico's own Christian Platonism. He appeals to certain "prototypes the human mind possesses in itself"[417] from which we have an ability to "construct a hierarchy of ideas."[418] These ideas are at the same time "created and activated in the mind of men by God."[419] Human making, in other words, is not for Vico simply analogous to God's making, as for Hobbes, but is a limited delegation of God's activity of creative knowing and making.[420] "The truth," writes Vico in one of his responses to contemporary critics of his metaphysical system, "is that God thinks in me."[421] And "the divine will becomes true and proper motion of our will through our mind, which is the particular form of each of us."[422] What Vico calls "metaphysical points" (these entities he takes to be the most fundamental principle of created existence) both inspire us by their intellectual illumination to construct the ideal geometrical point needed for the science of mathematics, and at the same time serve as God's instrument in creating physically extended bodies.[423] Whatever Vico's debt to Hobbesian constructivism, a yawning spiritual gulf evidently separates the two

[416] NS 706
[417] Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 60
[418] Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 61
[419] Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 90
[420] In the *New Science*, human making is understood to approach divine making as human nature evolves over history to become less visceral and more mental (Cf. NS 376)
[421] Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 124
[422] Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 135
[423] Cf. Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, pp. 70, 74

thinkers. This can be appreciated by comparing Hobbes' principle that *there is nothing in the world but matter in motion,* with Vico's statement that "physical facts are opaque, that is to say, they are formed and finite, and in them we see the light of metaphysical truth."[424]

Vico's little book of metaphysics holds an independent interest and contains its own set of interpretative difficulties that cannot be addressed here. For our purposes, it suffices to observe that Vico's constructivism, even when employed in the explanation of mathematical objects, resists any notion of an absolute human independence; geometry is a human "making" indeed, but it depends on our dim participation in divine ideas, our partial and tenuous vision of the metaphysical truths that God uses to make real things. So the principle that we know what we make is modified by the further principle that what we make participates in divine reason. This particular form of constructivism is directed not only against the epistemological skeptic, but also against the very uncompromising modern rejection of theology and metaphysics that we may trace in part to Hobbes and his followers. Vico sought to develop (sincerely, I believe, if not entirely consistently or successfully) what he himself terms, "a metaphysics consonant with Christian piety."[425] Against many of Vico's interpreters, it is necessary to affirm with Isaiah Berlin: "Unorthodox Vico plainly was; heretical perhaps; but unswervingly religious."[426]

[424] Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 66
[425] Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 109
[426] Berlin, p. 126; Cf. Vaughan, p. 33

6.2 The Making of the Civil Universe of Nations

As his contemporary critics alleged, Vico's system of metaphysics, although original and suggestive, is extremely concise and at times positively oracular.[427] It would probably not command our serious attention today if Vico had not been subsequently inspired in the *New Science* to apply his idealist version of constructivism to the problem of political origins. The *New Science* intends to correct the individualistic or solipsistic ("monastic" and "solitary"[428]) tendency of Hobbes and the other members of the modern epicurean and stoical schools, such as Gassendi, Descartes and Spinoza. The making of politics, of religion, of the whole "civil universe,"[429] could not, Vico was sure, be limited to or wholly contained within the isolated individual mind, or even a number of individual minds. Furthermore, it is not mathematics, whose objects are strictly unreal, but history that is most truly *made*. Jacob Klein argues that in so reasoning, Vico replaces the universal mathematical physics of Galileo and Newton with History. Klein writes,

> The science of nature becomes mathematical physics, begins to dominate all human understanding and gradually transforms the conditions of human life on this earth. The only force opposing this development is History with its claim to universality, first attributed to it by Vico and maintained with increasing vigor up to this moment.

[427] The only contemporary published review of Vico's *De Antiquissima* alleges that Vico "crowds speculations without number into every page and even every line and with such brevity that to touch on everything, even slightly, would be to write a review as large as the whole book. And that makes one think that, in putting together this booklet, the author meant to give us only an outline and a specimen of his metaphysics, not the metaphysics itself." Vico, rejoining with what he calls "my customary brevity," asserts that "nothing in [the book] lacks proof." (*De Antiquissima,* p. 117-119*)*

[428] ""This axiom [129] dismisses from the school of our Science the Stoics, who seek to mortify the sense, and the Epicureans, who make them the criterion. For both deny providence, the former chaining themselves to fate, the latter abandoning themselves to chance. The latter, moreover, affirm that the human soul dies with the body. Both should be called monastic, or solitary philosophers. And on the other hand [this axiom] admits to our school the political philosophers, and first of all the Platonists..." (NS 130)

[429] FNS 526

> It is significant, I think, that Vico's idea of an "ideal eternal history" is a derivative of the idea of a Universal Mathematics, a shadow, as it were, that the latter casts.[430]

Vico's science of history, like mathematical physics, provides the universal reason unifying otherwise contingent and disconnected facts. Perhaps then it is the principle of the artificiality of ideas, constructivism, that forms the common core of mathematical physics, ideology and the modern philosophy of history. With an unrelenting inventiveness, Vico seeks out a fitting expression for his discovery that history is the intelligible record of man's providential self-creation. These include: an "ideal eternal history traversed in time by the histories of all nations,"[431] "a science that is both a history and philosophy of humanity,"[432] "a philosophy of humanity and a universal history of the nations,"[433] "a metaphysics raised to contemplate a certain common mind of all the peoples,"[434] "a philosophy and history of the law of mankind,"[435] "the principles of the history of human nature,"[436] a system "at once the history of the ideas, the customs, and the deeds of mankind,"[437] "a jurisprudence of mankind,"[438] "a science of humanity, i.e. of the nature of nations"[439]; and perhaps the most oracular and complete formulation: "a rational civil theology of divine providence."[440]

[430] Klein, p. 134
[431] NS 113
[432] FNS 23
[433] FNS 399
[434] FNS 40
[435] FNS 248
[436] NS 368
[437] NS 368
[438] FNS 41
[439] FNS 27
[440] NS 385

In applying the principle that *we know what we make* to "the world of nations," Vico is obliged to expand and modify it significantly. The world of nations is a collective human making answering to intelligible divine reason. It is manifestly not made by the "civil philosopher" in any sense directly analogous to the individual geometer's making of theorems. It is made, in the first place, by historical nations themselves. And these nations, as Vico does not tire of emphasizing, are at first the very contrary of reasonable in their modes of thinking and acting. Even much later, after "mild law" and philosophy have both emerged,[441] civil law continues to draw on a pre-reflective foundation, invariably and necessarily failing to attain to the empty geometric perfection of the "natural law of the philosophers."

[441] Cf. NS 327

7. Certainty and Common Sense

Hitherto the philosophers had neglected to apply philosophical reasoning to what we know of past and present human customs, religions, laws, institutions, languages and cultures, the study of all which Vico calls by the generic name "philology." And the philologists, in their study of these human institutions, had failed to seek after philosophical reason.

> the philosophers failed by half in not giving certainty [*non accertarono*] to their reasons [*ragioni*] by appeal to the authority of the philologians, and likewise the latter failed by half in not taking care to verify their authority by appeal to the reasoning of the philosophers. If they had done this they would have been more useful to their commonwealths and they would have anticipated us in conceiving this science.[442]

To grasp Vico's full meaning, it will be necessary to expand on some of the Vichian terminology. By "philology" Vico means "the doctrine of all the institutions that depend on human choice; for example, all histories of the languages, customs, and deeds of peoples in war and peace."[443] Vico elects to name all these incidences of human making "certain" (*certo*). The certain (*certo*) is thus a particular sub-species of what is made (*factum/fatto*). The term *certain* in fact comes to eclipse the term *made* through most of the *New Science*. Now religious, legal, linguistic or customary institutions are made *certain* for at least two reasons and in at least two respects.

[442] NS 138
[443] NS 7; Cf. NS 139

First, a *factum* is certain insofar as it carries a certain authority, as for instance the fixed meanings of words in a particular language are *certain*. The honor code of dueling in aristocratic times and the virtually universal human custom of covering one's private parts in public are two further examples of the *certain* that appear in the *New Science*.[444] "The certain in the laws," Vico writes, "is an obscurity of judgment backed only by authority."[445] (Since the *New Science* aims to elucidate this obscurity of judgment in law, custom, language and elsewhere, it receives from Vico yet another name: "a philosophy of authority."[446]) The certain is therefore first of all something that is made generally authoritative within a particular scope.

Second, what is *certain* is an artifact of human choice or will that is no longer wholly free; it is in some way determined, or made certain. "Human choice, in its nature most uncertain, is made certain (*accerta*) and determined by the common sense (*senso cumune*) of men with respect to human needs or utilities."[447] Human choice, being uncertain, is not an object that can be directly known. But inasmuch as human choice is determined by a "common sense" it is to that degree made certain and knowable. For instance, the three most fundamental and universal "common senses" proposed in the *New Science* are religion, and the institutions of marriage and burial: "all nations... keep these three human customs: all have some religion, all contract solemn marriages, all bury their dead."[448] The "first nations" developed these customs independently of one another.

[444] Cf. NS 27, 667,
[445] NS 321; According to Vico, it is of the essence of law to contain obscure judgments backed only by authority, but in civilized nations, judgment "benignly bends the rule of law to all the requirements of the equity of the causes." (NS 940) Law in civilized times, without entirely giving up its essential element of *certainty*, becomes more reasonable and less *certain*. In corrupt times, it becomes both unreasonable and *uncertain*.
[446] NS 386
[447] NS 141
[448] NS 333

As important as differences in custom may be, they interest Vico less than the ineluctability and repetition of human custom as such. What brought each of the first nations to establish these *certain* things is a foundational "common sense" shared by all the first nations, refracted it may be by the various and changing contingencies and occasions of history, but evolving regularly in time together with human nature itself.

Common sense (*senso cumune*) is therefore another key concept for the *New Science*. It is defined by Vico as "judgement without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race."[449] Vico's notion of "common sense" encompasses Ibn-Khaldun's "group feeling," the notion of a *Volksgeist* inspired by Herder, as well as Mathew Arnold's *Zeitgeist*. It can also assume the form of "class consciousness," as Marxists have recognized.[450] More broadly, *common sense* is what underpins a worldview (as we say) or "world systems" (*sistema mondano)* as Vico expresses it in one place.[451] In so far as *common sense* is upheld through whole nations and classes, and sometimes by the whole human race, Vico also calls it by the name "vulgar wisdom (*sapienza volgare*)" : "Vulgar traditions must have had public grounds of truth, by virtue of which they came into being and were preserved by entire peoples over long periods of time."[452] We saw in the last chapter that Hobbes believed the cause of the rise and persistence of certain public ideas and opinions were "confederacies of deception," and that Marx inclined to see most public ideas and opinions as projections of existing "relations of

[449] NS 142
[450] Cf. Lifshitz, "Giambattista Vico (1668-1744)." For an account of Gramsci's debt to Vico and a comparison of his notion of the "philosophy of non-philosophers" with Vico's "common sense," see Jacobitti, "From Vico's Common Sense to Gramsci's Hegemony" in *Vico and Marx. Affinities and Contrasts;* Lavin, "Common Sense and History in Gramsci and Vico," 1992.
[451] NS 726
[452] NS 149

domination." Vico stands decisively against the Hobbesian-Marxist school of suspicion, not indeed by rejecting its psychology outright, but only by denying that the first cause of anything at all can be a deception. Persisting or recurring ideas and opinions must therefore be rooted in "public grounds of truth," not in deception. The Roman historian Livy, under the influence of the philosophers, recounts that Romulus falsely convinced the stragglers who joined the Roman people that they were born from the sacred wood in which the city was founded.

> But Livy's belief that this was an expedient or artifice perpetrated by the founders of cities was based on the false view that kingdoms were all founded by deception... there was no deceit in the first founders of the cities of Latium or any of the other cities in the world. There was [only] their nature, and that the magnanimous nature of the heroes who were incapable of lying, which is base and cowardly, for they truly understand themselves to be the children of the buried, from whose ranks their women still come.[453]

Livy lacked the historical sense to understand what the early Romans really meant to express by saying that they were born from the sacred wood. The *New Science* offers, among other things, a historical narration of the emergence of different "common senses" and an exposition of the "public grounds of truth" on which they rest. Vico proposes that human institutions and the "common sense" are always related in fact and are mutually elucidating by way of philosophical reflection.

[453] FNS 146

Philosophy itself emerges only with the late developing *common sense* of popular government and "mild law."[454] It is a late fruit in the life of a nation. Another central principle of the *New Science* is that "the order of ideas must follow the order of institutions."[455] Vico emends Spinoza's axiom about the parallelism of the order of ideas and the order of things, but Vico is thinking rather in terms of the "sovereignty of public opinion" suggested by Hobbes. If public opinion is truly sovereign, it is possible to reason from opinion to institutions. Why, Vico asks, did Hobbes not investigate the primitive public opinions that must have formed the first historical human communities?

> Thomas Hobbes... prided himself on being the initiator of the doctrine of natural law... but he was instead mistaken in this self-praise because he did not consider Divine Providence. Such a consideration would have illuminated for him the route he was seeking that would lead back to a knowledge of the obscure origins of humanity, lost in the nighttime of antiquity.[456]

[454] NS 1043

[455] NS 238; Scholars have noted the similarity of this principle to Spinoza's famous dictum of the parallelism between the attributes of extension and thought: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." (Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2.7) It should be noted that while Vico's claim is verbally similar and perhaps inspired in its formulation by Spinoza, Vico is not arguing that ideas as such parallel things. Rather human ideas (most of which are not "true" but only "certain") and human institutions undergo a parallel development.

[456] Vici Vindicae 51, in *Keys to the New Science*

8. Providence

Now, "philology" consists of what has been instituted and made *certain*, and what is *certain* is made by human will and choice under the sway of a *common sense*. But how exactly is it possible to move through this complex to arrive at the shifting "public grounds of truth" underpinning historical development? In the *First New Science*, Vico succinctly expresses the whole movement he has discovered, "this unique truth" as he calls it.[457] Vico's science converts the *certain* into the *true* of philosophy by way of the notion that "common sense" is a human-divine coproduction, an ordered series of ideas and institutions made by providence through the human mind of the nations. In this way, *common sense* comes about without any reflective effort of individual human reasoning.

> [...] in this long, dense night of darkness, this one light alone gleams forth: that the world of gentile nations was certainly made (*certamente fatto*) by men. Hence, in this vast ocean of doubt, there appears this one isle upon which we may stand firm: that the principles of this world must be discovered within the nature of our human mind and through the force of our understanding, by means of a metaphysics of the human mind. Hence metaphysics, which has hitherto contemplated the mind of individual man in order to lead the mind to God as eternal truth, which is the most universal theory in divine philosophy, must now be raised to contemplate the common sense of mankind as a certain human mind of the nations, in order to lead

[457] FNS 40

> the mind to God as eternal Providence, which would be the most universal practice in divine philosophy... we must search for this metaphysics in fact...[458]

Like Hegel, the *New Science* undertakes the union of philosophy with historical fact. In proposing this union, Vico asserts that human activities and institutions are transparent to reason in a way that mere accidents cannot be. Vico's union of philosophy and history depends on the course of history being in some sense already reasonable. Vico is able to assert that history is reasonable because in the "the common sense of mankind" understood "as a certain human mind of the nations" he believes he has found a path leading to the contemplation of "God as eternal providence."

8.1 Vico's Science of Providence

In order therefore to convert the *certain* of philology into philosophical truth, Vico proposes a science of providence that is also a "metaphysics of the human mind."[459]

> Such a science teaches how, upon the occasion of new human necessities or utilities, as it passed through various customs and, hence, various times and states, the mind of solitary man developed through the primary end of wanting to conserve his nature, first through the conservation of the families, then that of cities, next that of nations, and finally through the conservation of the whole of mankind. Moreover it demonstrates that it was Providence which, for this end, drew impious men from the state of solitude, through certain marriage, into the state of the

[458] FNS 40
[459] FNS 40

> families, from which the first gentes were born, i.e. the clans or houses that later gave rise to the cities.[460]

Many of Vico's modern interpreters have argued that his repeated appeals to "divine Providence, who is the architect of this world of nations"[461] are unnecessary, ornamental, deceptive, or self-deluded.[462] This argument rests on two misunderstandings. The first is a simple misunderstanding of Vico, who gives ample evidence that he believed that he had developed a science or philosophy capable of exposing to reasoned reflection the divinely directed course of human history.

> The clear and simple observation we have made on the institutions of the entire human race, if we had been told nothing more by the philosophers, historians, grammarians, and jurisconsults, would lead us to say certainly that this is the great city of the nations that was founded and is governed by God. Lycurgus, Solon, the decemvirs, and the like have been eternally praised to the skies as wise legislators, because it had hitherto been believed that by their good institutions and good laws they had founded Sparta, Athens, and Rome, the three cities that outshone all others in the fairest and greatest civil virtues. Yet they were all of short duration and even of small extent as compared with the universe of peoples, which was ordered by such institutions and secured by such laws that even in its decay it assumes those

[460] FNS 41
[461] FNS 45
[462] Cf. Croce, p. 21; Pompa, pp. 51-61 ; Vaughan, pp. 41-45 (Vaughan argues that Vico seeks to "subtly refute providence"(!)); Mazlish, pp. 45-49; Sorel, p. 270; Nisbet, p. 636. Bedani and Tucker argue on the contrary that the idea of providence is essential to Vico's system. Cf. Bedani, pp. 215-230; Tucker, 1993.

> forms of states by which alone it may everywhere be preserved and perpetually endure. And must we not then say that this is a counsel of superhuman wisdom?[463]

The second misunderstanding is really a self-misunderstanding on the part of interpreters themselves. None of them denies that Vico believes that history follows a meaningful and predictable path, and that this path is not consciously determined by the minds of the individuals and nations that act in history. They believe, however, that what Vico is really proposing is not "providence" but something better described as natural or spontaneous order.[464] At root, this is the same nearly tautological argument in which Löwith opposes providence to secular progress, and then defines progress as providence without God.

In fact, current concepts of natural or spontaneous order are late reflections of Vico's idea of providence, which resembles also Kant's.[465] In asserting this, we leave open the question as to whether Vico intentionally or unwittingly "secularizes" the notion of providence by abandoning the traditional idea that the ways of providence are inscrutable. Discussing the birth of the modern philosophy of history, Leo Strauss observes that the "'secularization' of the understanding of

[463] NS 1107

[464] Vaughan, pp. 41-45; Gianturco, pp. 99-100

[465] The word spontaneous derives from the Latin *sua sponte*, "of its own accord." Spontaneous order, a term popularized by Fredrich Hayek, denotes nothing but order that appears of its own accord, so to speak, without any cause. One of the key aspects of such an order is that it appears to emerge without anyone willing it, independently of the intention of the individuals constituting the emergent order. This is the idea behind Adam Smith's invisible hand, Darwin's natural selection, Hegel's "cunning of reason," Marx's dialectical materialism, and indeed, all modern sciences and philosophies of history. They share a notion that this movement is reasonable or meaningful, that it is governed by laws or patterns, and that it operates without human consciousness of its aims, and that it is generally predictable. But this movement can only be understood as "spontaneous" from the perspective of the individual who does not will it. From the perspective of history itself, the existence of order either remains wholly without explanation or appeals (even if tacitly) to a guiding mind. Cf. Luban, "What is Spontaneous Order?" Luban argues persuasively that the concept of "spontaneous order cannot bear the analytical weight that has been placed on it." (p. 68)

Providence culminates in the view that the ways of God are scrutable to sufficiently enlightened men,"[466] and this, at any rate, does characterize Vico's understanding. Providence, in Vico's view, employs human passions, ideas and institutions to accomplish its larger aims in regular, recurrent and predictable ways. Although Vico is inspired more profoundly by the Bible than Homer, he scrupulously and nearly consistently excludes the supernatural (and therefore inscrutable) Judeo-Christian line of revealed revelation from the purview of the *New Science*.[467] Unlike Löwith, Vico does not think to oppose providence to progress. He rather distinguishes two branches of providence. The first branch is that providence of human making which directs the civil world of the nations. The second consists in the Jewish and Christian revelations, whose divine truth Vico maintains and defends.

As Vico understands it, there are only three philosophical systems that can explain the course of the world. The Epicurean system teaches that everything is chance (he assigns this doctrine to Machiavelli and Hobbes[468]). The Stoic system believes in blind fate (this doctrine he assigns to Descartes and Spinoza[469]). The third is the providential system, dimly understood by Plato and the great Roman jurists, and revealed clearly in the Bible; according to it, the world moves toward certain ends. It would not have occurred to Vico that things might move toward certain ends "of

[466] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 317. Strauss also argues that "in proportion as the providential order came to be regarded as intelligible to man, and therefore evil came to be regarded as evidently necessary or useful, the prohibition against doing evil lost its evidence" (p. 317). In the case of Vico, this must be qualified by noting that providence also includes a supernatural revelation to the Jews and Christians, providing an eternal standard of the good. Providence has also arranged things, in Vico's view, so that in later or "human times" providence leads the gentile nations without special revelation to approximate the Biblical standard of good.
[467] This is rather a "supernatural faith, superior not only to the senses but to human reason itself." (NS 366)
[468] NS 1109
[469] NS 1109; Key to the New Science, p. 87

themselves" or "spontaneously" for the simple reason that the thought is not really coherent, as Kant, for example, emphasized.[470]

8.2 The Heterogenesis of Ends

To explain the operations of providence, Vico appeals to a principle sometimes called the "heterogenesis of ends" and frequently associated with Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714). According to this principle, self-regarding and narrow human actions and intentions are the means by which providence achieves collective human preservation. Vico expresses the principle as follows:

> Providence disposes the things that particular men or peoples order for their own ruin, towards a universal end, beyond, and very often contrary to, their every intention; [...] using these same particular ends [of men and peoples] as her means, she preserves them. It will be shown throughout the whole of this work that, with this foresight, Providence governs the natural law of the nations in its entirety.[471]

The *New Science* decrypts "the long and deceptive labour of Providence"[472] which, in language that will sound still more familiar to readers of Kant and Hegel, secures "a good always superior

[470] History, according to Kant, is moved by "that great artist *nature* whose mechanical process makes her purposiveness visibly manifest... If we regard this design as a compulsion resulting from one of her causes whose operation are unknown to us, we call it *fate* [*Schicksal*], while, if we reflect on nature's purposiveness in the flow of world events, and regard it to be the underlying wisdom of a higher cause that directs the human race toward its objective goal and predetermines the world's course, we call it providence* [*Vorsehung*]." Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, ([8:360], see also note *).

[471] FNS 45

[472] FNS 116

to that which men have proposed to themselves."[473] Thus Vico affirms that "this world without doubt has issued from a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men had proposed to themselves; which narrow ends, made means to serve wider ends, [providence] has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth."[474] It is alone due to providence that the human race ever arose from its bestial origins to *become* human. The workings of Providence in the realm of the "civil universe" are discoverable and transparent, however, only because providence works through modifications of the human mind, and these modifications of the human mind are knowable only because they are also the result of human making. This is why Vico can refer to "the world of nations, which, since men had made it, men could come to know,"[475] and in the same breath invoke "divine Providence... the architect of this world of nations."[476]

8.3 Why the Ancients Lacked a Science of Providence

With no pretense of false modesty, and with a frank sense of historical curiosity, Vico wonders why this insight had not occurred to Plato. Why indeed did Plato not devise a science of providence? Vico answers very concisely and instructively that Plato was "shut off from it by ignorance of the fall of the first man."[477] Plato was ignorant, this is to say, of the immense and irretrievable distance between man and the ideal, and this most particularly at the point of origin when civilized life first emerged. Plato erred by raising "the barbaric and rough origins of gentile humanity to the perfect state of his own exalted, divine and recondite knowledge, whereas he

[473] NS 343
[474] NS 1108
[475] NS 331
[476] FNS 45
[477] Autobiography, p. 122

ought, on the contrary, to have descended from his 'ideas' and sunk down to those origins."[478] Plato, in other words, did not understand that ideas have a history. He lacked this understanding because, being ignorant of the Fall, he did not understand the initial darkness and struggle of reason, its inherited and permanent alienation from nature. From a Christian perspective, we might say that Plato philosophized as though man were still living in the Garden of Eden.

Vico's philosophy of providence proposes to unite the ideal and the real, Plato and Tacitus, "for with an incomparable metaphysical mind Tacitus contemplates man as he is, Plato as he should be."[479] In this striking formulation, Tacitus may also stand for Machiavelli, as he did for other Neapolitan writers [480] Certainly, Machiavelli's polemic against "imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth"[481] is echoed over and again in the *New Science*. In Vico's view, because Plato's "recondite wisdom" dispensed with the *certainty* and reality of human "common sense," its idealism has a character of both impiety and unreality. Plato "thought that there could be a republic of sages who held their women in common."[482] Plato ought rather to have understood that providence is the "queen" of "human affairs" by "working through customs."[483] And that "subservient to this divine architect is human will."[484]

[478] FNS 13
[479] Autobiography, p. 138
[480] Cf. Stone, p. 99; Burke, p. 20. In the dedication to *De Antiquissima* (1710), Vico refers explicitly to "the evil arts of rule which Cornelius Tacitus and Niccolò Machiavelli endowed their prince." (p. 44)
[481] *The Prince*, Mansfield, p. 61
[482] FNS 269
[483] NS 525
[484] FNS 47

As we have already seen, criticism of Plato's ahistorical ideal does not prevent Vico from asserting that his own system follows "the political philosophers" [485] who understand human nature to be sociable or political, and whose "prince is the divine Plato, who shows that providence directs human institutions."[486] The way to correct Plato's obtuseness with respect to *certain* human custom and his reprehension of the "vulgar wisdom" is to make a Platonism all at once Christian and historical and empirical. Vico accuses Plato of ignorance of the Fall and consequently of erring by not descending to the true origins. Vico's correction of Plato is however not simply Christian, but also new and modern, because in turning to Providence and returning to the origins, it is "following the best ascertained method of philosophizing, that of Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, but carrying it over from the institutions of nature... to the civil institutions of mankind."[487] Thus Vico takes up the history of human ideas using the tools of constructivist epistemology (Hobbes), inductive empiricism (Bacon), comparative jurisprudence (Grotius), and political realism (Tacitus/Machiavelli).

[485] NS 130, 1109
[486] NS 1109
[487] NS 163

9. The Meaning of the Philosophy of History

The meaning of history, Hobbes implies, is that it is made by man. Since our passions are given form and directed by our ideas, the most human activity, driven by the peculiarly human passion of curiosity, is the making of ideas. Hobbesian ideology is philosophy turned to the problem of constructing the most useful and beneficial public ideas, according to a perspicacious calculation of consequences. History, therefore, presents itself to Hobbes as the merest chronicle of human success and failure in this one task. This is the basic reason why an attitude of peremptory judgement toward history very naturally characterizes the entire tradition of ideological politics Hobbes founded.

Vico, who turned to history to oppose Hobbes, counters that man is for the most part incapable of calculating the consequences of his ideas, most of which are inherited and shared, all of which stand on a concealed foundation of earlier ideas. No really new idea is generated by means of the calculation of consequences. Man's growing self-understanding is the product of his accruing ideas. The most essential and ineluctable of these are the primitive ideas formed in each man's childhood and in the childhood of the nation and the human race. The meaning of history is to be found in contemplation of the higher providential calculation of "necessities and utilities" guiding man in the making of ideas and the perfecting of himself. The history of the human mind is where God and man truly meet.

Hobbes and Vico thus exemplify the antagonism between the active and contemplative moods in modern philosophy and culture. The former seeks exclusively to change the world, the latter only to understand it. Vico's appeals to providence do not represent a blind reversion to tradition or an incomplete movement of "secularization"; they are no different from Kant's appeal to "nature's plan for creatures who have no plan of their own," or Hegel's appeals to the World Spirit and the "cunning of reason." By steadfastly denying that accident can be the ultimate cause of man's reason or his ideas or his existence, Vico simply continues the Platonic and biblical traditions under the conditions established by the new scientists: If nature can have no inherent meaning, then history must. The essence of the modern philosophy of history is the appeal to an intelligible higher necessity governing man's historical activity of self-creation. This philosophy, directed at first with one eye toward the record of world history, is really the search for transcendent meaning within the human mind itself. The God known exclusively through introspection, first called upon by Vico, has proven the God most congenial to the particularly modern religious spirit.

The whole opposition between Hobbes and Vico takes place within their agreement that nature is inaccessible to reason. In the Aristotelian philosophy, by contrast, nature is wholly accessible to reason. The active virtues are directed toward *good things* and the contemplative virtues toward *true ideas*. Although a tension between these natural ends was recognized, a reconciliation was also possible in the form of the pursuit of the *truly good things*, i.e. in the realization of nature's ideals. The modern principles of the inaccessibility of nature and the artificiality of ideas make the old and rather precarious way of reconciling activity and contemplation within a single philosophy strictly impossible. Hobbesian science, in its project to control the making of ideas, provides no scope at all to contemplation. Vico falters in providing a doctrine of action, but he is certain "the

reader will experience in his mortal body a divine pleasure as he contemplates in the divine ideas this world of nations."[488] In history Vico sought a path back to Platonic idealism and religious contemplation in spite of the apparently irrefragable inaccessibility of nature.[489] According to our thesis, this is the origin of Vico's philosophy of history and of the modern philosophy of history more generally.

[488] NS 345, NS 113

[489] Milibank believes that the essence of Vico's radical break with the past consists in the declaration that man is the creator of ideas. This was "a subversion of the Platonic paradigm of truth" that ideas precede human knowing. (Cf. Milibank, pp. 86-91). Milibank's further observations on this delicate point are just, but they do not account for Vico's own insistence, mentioned elsewhere, that the *New Science* is an essentially Platonic philosophy.

10. Leo Strauss on Historicism

In *Natural Right and History,* Leo Strauss sketches an account of the genesis of the modern philosophy of history that shares a good deal with the one I have presented here, but which also differs in significant ways. It may therefore serve to clarify one or both accounts to summarize here Strauss' complex and many-sided argument as briefly as possible, and to identify the important points of disagreement.

Strauss maintains that the modern philosophy of history emerged as part of a conservative reaction to the French revolution and "to the natural rights doctrines that had prepared that cataclysm" beginning with Hobbes.[490] The invention of modern natural right rested on a specific modern creed: "All intelligibility or all meaning has its ultimate root in human needs."[491] As a consequence of this creed, political philosophy, now supposed to replace metaphysics as the master science, became "the most important kind of knowledge."[492] The "politicization of philosophy" resulted, as follows: "Originally, philosophy had been the humanizing quest for eternal order, and hence it had been a pure source of inspiration and aspiration. Since the seventeenth century, philosophy had become a weapon, and hence an instrument."[493] Wielded as an instrument in the hands of the revolutionists, who subjected all meaning to the standard of human needs, philosophy lost its true and natural character; it failed to provide either the inspiration or the aspiration of an eternal order. The doctrine of modern natural right consequently issued in a series of protracted intellectual and spiritual crises.

[490] Strauss, p. 13
[491] Strauss, p. 177
[492] Strauss, p. 177
[493] Strauss, p. 34

Hence arose an intellectual reaction aiming at "preserving or continuing the traditional order."[494] Since the threat to the traditional order emanated from the specific principles espoused by modern natural right theorists, the conservatives ought to have appealed in preference to classic natural right. Instead they adopted the misguided strategy of refuting the modern theory of natural right by means of the blanket denial of all natural right, i.e. all "universal or abstract principles."

> This [s.c. defense of the traditional order] could have been done without a critique of natural right as such. Certainly, premodern natural right did not sanction reckless appeal from the established order, or from what was actual here and now, to the natural or rational order. Yet the founders of the historical school seemed to have realized somehow that the acceptance of any universal or abstract principles has necessarily a revolutionary, disturbing, unsettling effect as far as thought is concerned and that this effect is wholly independent of whether the principles in question sanction, generally speaking, a conservative or revolutionary course of action.[495]

The "historical school" had initially hoped to replace universal principles with the "particular and concrete standards"[496] of history, on which the traditional order seemed to them to rest. History, however, failed to reveal particular or concrete standards to make up for the absence of universal principles. The philosophers of history "had thought that historical studies would reveal particular

[494] Strauss, p. 13
[495] Strauss, p. 13
[496] Strauss, p. 17

or concrete standards. Yet the unbiased historian had to confess his inability to derive any norms from history: no objective norms remained."[497] And also: "The historical school had obscured the fact that particular or historical standards can become authoritative only on the basis of a universal principle."[498] The turn to history therefore revealed itself by degrees as pure nihilism.[499] "By denying the significance, if not the existence, of universal norms, the historical school destroyed the only solid basis of all efforts to transcend the actual."[500]

By making human need or utility its highest principle, modern natural right had rejected the transcendent from the very beginning: "The effort of the revolutionists was directed against all otherworldiness or transcendence."[501] The historical school, by denying the universality even of human needs, revealed itself as the intensification of anti-transcendent modern natural right, rather than its antithesis. Although it is indeed the case that the historical school had first emerged "under the protection of the belief that knowledge, or at least divination, of the eternal is possible,"[502] yet, Strauss continues, by rejecting natural transcendent principles, it "gradually undermined the belief which had sheltered it in its infancy."[503]

The rejection of objective norms – of all transcendence – unifies modern natural right and the modern philosophy of history in a single progress toward open nihilism. Both are products of "political hedonism" and its principle that "all intelligibility or all meaning has its ultimate root in

[497] Strauss, p. 17
[498] Strauss, p. 17
[499] Strauss, p. 13-18
[500] Strauss, p. 15
[501] Strauss, p. 15
[502] Strauss, p. 12
[503] Strauss, p. 12

human needs."[504] Strauss indicates that this principle, in its turn, emerges in Hobbes as a part of a sophisticated attempt to restore intelligibility to the world in light of the modern conviction that "a teleological cosmology is impossible," and given that "a mechanistic cosmology fails to satisfy the requirements of intelligibility."[505] By making human knowledge (and ultimately human need) the first principle, rather than natural cosmology, Hobbes politicizes philosophy. This, however, entails the self-destruction or self-abasement of philosophy: "For the politicization of philosophy consists precisely in this, that the difference between intellectuals and philosophers... becomes blurred and finally disappears."[506]

It appears to Strauss, therefore, that one of the irreducible origins of both the modern philosophy of history and modern natural right, is the conviction that "a teleological cosmology is impossible." Deeper still, modern philosophy is founded on the nominalist principle that "the natural is the individual, and the universal is a creature of the understanding."[507] Consistent nominalism implies a rejection of intelligible transcendence, and hence of true philosophy. "The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns concerns eventually, and perhaps even from the beginning, the status of 'individuality.'"[508]

Strauss' account of the genesis of modern natural right and the modern philosophy of history, as briefly summarized above, differs from the one proposed in this study in a few ways. Strauss begins with the nominalism of the modern conceptions of nature and the individual, whereas our account

[504] Strauss, p. 177
[505] Strauss, p. 176-177
[506] Strauss, p. 34
[507] Strauss, p. 323
[508] Strauss, p. 323

begins with two other principles, possibly derivative of nominalism, but more specifically modern: 1) the inaccessibility of nature, and 2) the artificiality of human ideas. Strauss insists that philosophy's turn to history was an unnecessary mistake. He does not say, indeed, that a teleological cosmology *is* now possible. He implies rather that a return to classical natural right, to transcendent moral and political meaning, is possible without it. He implies, moreover, that upholding the true and proper distinction between the philosopher and the intellectual or sophist keeps open the possibility of an intelligible transcendent order even in the absence of a teleological cosmology. But in this way, we may say that Strauss himself submits to the same privileging of the particular and individual over the universal that he criticizes in the moderns. After all, a teleological cosmology is universal in a way that this or that mortal philosopher's life and mental praxis is not.

Modern natural right, according to Strauss' argument, emerges from the principle that "all intelligibility or all meaning has its ultimate root in human needs."[509] When Hobbes adopts this principle, Strauss says he creates "political hedonism, a doctrine which has revolutionized human life everywhere on a scale never yet approached by any teaching."[510] What Strauss calls "political hedonism" and "politicized philosophy" together describe what has been called in this study by the name of *ideology*. I argued in chapter two that the distinction between natural politics and ideological politics turns on the question of rule. Classic natural right is philosophy's attempt to answer the natural political question: who by right should rule? Whereas ideology emerges in light of a universal claim to rule that denies all particular claims and promises the satisfaction of equal hope. Strauss' "political hedonism" and *ideology* are therefore overlapping but genetically distinct

[509] Strauss, p. 177
[510] Strauss, p. 169

concepts. Hedonism, moreover, was one of several competing moral doctrines in classical times. One could reject it on the basis of the others. Perhaps Strauss means to insinuate that one ought now to reject "political hedonism" on the basis of "political Platonism." Ideology, on the other hand, is an artificial politics modelled on the machine, able to deliver stable order under modern conditions of mass education, population density and technological science. One does not hesitate to reject it on theoretical grounds (it offers meager scope for contemplation) but on practical grounds: Its function is the taming of the actual egalitarianism that, in its fury of frustration, was tearing the old Europe to pieces in seventeenth century and preventing the establishment of a new order. This same egalitarianism continues to drive our politics like a powerful undercurrent and constitutes an established social fact that was absent in the ancient world. The modern philosopher is not at liberty to reject this fact, as he might choose to reject hedonism and nominalism, or to embrace them.

Strauss is correct that ideology or modern natural right obscures the search for truth and disrupts contemplation. Perhaps the ancients still speak to us because we do not in fact consistently believe in the inaccessibility of nature. Strauss argues that opposition to Hobbes and other forms of modern natural right should have taken the form of a return to classical natural right and "could have been done without a critique of natural right as such." But could it? Christian Platonism and Aristotelean Scholasticism were two classically derived systems of natural right that continued to register their protests against modernity in Vico's time and afterward. If these systems had diverged widely from the teachings of Aristotle and Plato, so also had they answered many urgent questions on Plato and Aristotle's behalf which had not yet arisen in ancient times and were never put to those venerable philosophers. Such questions, emerging from every field of science and human

experience, must needs have been adequately answered before there could be any thought of restoring classic natural right as the ruling principle of an existing political community. It was not for lack of effort that scholastics and Platonists failed to stem the broader tide of Cartesianism and Hobbesian ideology. The obsolescence of classical philosophy was assured by the success and power of the new modern concept of nature promoted by Copernicus, Bacon, Galileo, Hobbes, Descartes, Newton and others. This early modern concept of nature has since germinated into a great luxuriance of branches of knowledge and fields of experience, and continues to present an impassable obstacle for the wholesale return to ancient philosophy. It is unclear, perhaps intentionally so, why Strauss believes transcendence should be possible in the sphere of politics and morals, but not possible in the sphere of external nature. We may nevertheless say that Vico's philosophy of history emerges precisely in answer to this question, and that Vico's political concerns overlap with Strauss' to a remarkable degree.

Strauss' other criticism of the historical school is that it degenerated into nihilism when it was shown to be empirically impossible to find "norms" in history: "To the unbiased historian, 'the historical process' revealed itself as the meaningless web spun by what men did, produced, and thought, no more than by unmitigated chance – a tale told by an idiot."[511] Strauss here denies the possibility of what Vico calls *common sense*. But is an "unbiased historian" any less likely to find such "objective norms" in history than an unbiased scientist is to find them in nature? In both cases, it would seem, the presence or absence of "objective norms" follows not from brute perception, but from willingness to seek them and the faith that they are there. According to Vico,

[511] Strauss, p. 18

the decisive proof of the providential order of the "common senses" is that its contemplation illuminates human facts while providing "a divine pleasure."[512]

Strauss' defense of the principle of transcendence is powerful and persuasive, but it does not succeed in showing the way to recover it. There can be no thoroughgoing return to the ancients without faith in the accessibility of nature. And there can be no faith in the accessibility of nature so long as the human mind is taken to be prior to nature, and so long as philosophy remains in the first person perspective it adopted with Descartes and has never truly relinquished. Indeed, our very approach to the ancients requires preparatory historical study. On this point, Strauss and Vico agree entirely in their denaturalized and historicized modernity.

[512] "Thus the proper and continual proof here adduced will consist in comparing and reflecting whether our human mind, in the series of possibilities it is permitted to understand, and so far as it is permitted to do so, can conceive more or fewer or different causes than those from which issue the effects of this civil world. In doing this the reader will experience in his mortal body a divine pleasure as he contemplates in the divine ideas this world of nations in all the extent of its places, times, and varieties. And he will find that he has thereby proved to the Epicureans that their chance cannot wander foolishly about and everywhere find a way out, and to the Stoics that their eternal chains of causes, to which they will have it the world is chained, itself hangs upon the omnipotent, wise, and beneficent will of the best and greatest God." (NS 345)

11. Vico's Philosophy of History

This chapter has indicated the primary motives that led Vico to invent the modern philosophy of history. Like Polybius' cyclical theory and Ibn-Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, Vico's *New Science* is an attempt by reason to divine the meaning of history. Like those older philosophies, it serves as a check on the pretensions of philosophical reason to reform the world. And like them, it is conservative. Men, Vico writes, "are naturally impelled to preserve the memories of the laws and institutions that bind them in their societies."[513] But the *New Science* is also quite different from everything that preceded. If a synthesis of action and contemplation was somehow possible for the ancients, who believed in the accessibility of nature, it becomes much more problematic in the human universe introduced by the moderns, wholly populated by artificial ideas. The disagreement of ancient and modern thought does not ultimately begin with transcendent principles or "objective norms," whose existence had already been questioned by skeptics and cynics in ancient times.[514] The most basic disagreement concerns the order of priority between nature and the human mind. Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes and Vico, so opposite in many ways, are equally modern in their acceptance of the priority of the human mind over nature.

The coming chapter discusses aspects of Vico's philosophy relevant to his opposition to Hobbesian armed reason, including the *New Science*'s cyclical theory and its teaching about progress and decline. Philosophy always comes to explain itself in the end, but Vico's philosophy of history

[513] NS 201

[514] Strauss argues that "historicism" is ultimately the intensification of the same revolutionary attitude underpinning modern natural right: "The effort of the revolutionists was directed against all otherworldliness or transcendence." (Strauss, p. 15)

does so with a difference, explaining philosophy as a human institution, obedient to the evolving "common sense," but also standing above it in contemplation. In doing so, the *New Science* applies the principle of "sovereignty of public opinion" to all human activity, including the activity of philosophy.

The danger here, which Strauss represents so well, is that on this principle history can be used to deny that philosophy arrives at truth. We might say that philosophical nihilism consists in the theory of the impossibility of true theory. This is the reason Strauss seems to take the position that the modern philosophy of history is or was an unnecessary error. But Vico, modernity's first philosopher of history and likewise its first true intellectual autobiographer, explains why it is the destiny of philosophy to play first a constructive and then a destructive role in the progress of any civilization. In common with Strauss, Vico attempts to rehabilitate philosophy at a remove from politics. Vico's philosophy comes to teach a new human self-understanding and, in our times, a therapeutics of civilizational aging.

Man's historicity implies not only change but also continuity. The myths, religions and poetry of the age of "theological poets" and subsequent ages form for Vico an essential element in human self-understanding. The human whole is trans-historical: "the theological poets were the sense and the philosophers the intellect of human wisdom."[515] In different ways throughout the *New Science*, Vico calls on philosophy to show more humility before the "vulgar wisdom" embodied in our collective inheritance of custom, law, language and religion. Sublime poetry and the religious imagination characterizes the childhood of the race, just as reason and calculation characterizes its

[515] NS 779

old age. Echoing Francis Bacon, though with a different intention, Vico writes that "it is we who are the old while the founders of nations were the young."[516] With this insight comes the warning not to despise religion: "Religion alone has the power to make us practice virtue, as philosophy is fit rather for discussing it."[517]

The history of human nature is legible to us only because it persists in a certain way in us, in the modifications of our mind, and in the complex layering of our humanity and our institutions, whose vitality is drawn from what is submerged. Vico's philosophy of history expresses at once the three modern orientations toward history that would come to be called *romanticism* (desire to resurrect the past), *conservatism* (desire to sustain the present) and *progressivism* (desire to accelerate the coming of the future). These three orientations are latent in Vico's *New Science* in just the same way as ideological polarities of liberalism, socialism and fascism are latent in Hobbes' *Leviathan*.

[516] FNS 42
[517] NS 503

Chapter 4

"Vulgar Wisdom" and the Politics of History

"In the epoch of the origins of nations, it is the heads of states who create the institutions, and afterwards it is the institutions which form heads of state."

- Baron de Montesquieu

"Abraham's spiritual poverty and the inertia of this poverty are an asset, they make concentration easier for him, or, even more, they are concentration already – by this, however, he loses the advantage that lies in applying the powers of concentration."

- Franz Kafka, "Abraham"

1. Vico's Politics of History

The task of this chapter is to indicate in general terms the political teaching of Vico's *New Science* and to evaluate the theoretical basis of Vico's refutation of Hobbes in particular. From the great abundance of plausible and highly interesting theses Vico sets forth, I have selected for this purpose Vico's treatment of religion, justice, poetry and philosophy. These topics trace the theoretical core of a mighty rejoinder to Hobbesian armed reason by way of appeal to the *common sense* and the "vulgar wisdom" of nations. We have already observed that Vico attacks Hobbes with direct logical argumentation, but the persuasive force of the *New Science* comes primarily by way of an intelligible account of historical patterns that Hobbes and the other modern natural lawyers had chosen to ignore, and for which their philosophies can provide no satisfying explanation. Vico's overall polemical strategy is to refute Hobbes and Descartes indirectly by drowning them in their own theoretical poverty.

There is a persuasive force to the Vichian logic even in instances where the argument appeals to mistaken historical information or fantastical etymologies. This is because the arguments so often disclose real theoretical deficiencies and genuine mysteries covered over and forgotten by ideology. The teaching of the *New Science* can therefore prepare us to understand in a new light why thinkers such as Rousseau, Kant and Hegel elected to modify the Hobbesian project of ideology by combining it with their own philosophies of history. These later thinkers develop and further elucidate many ideas first appearing in Vico, but it would be unwarranted to assume that they always surpass Vico in acuity or coherence. On the contrary, Vico can often clarify the

positions of the later philosophers of history by redressing the obscurities and uncovering the unspoken presuppositions in their fundamental logic.

1.1 Vico's Mode of Proof

Vico's mode of demonstrating his claims about "ideal eternal history" stands in sharp contrast to Hobbes' geometrical method of proof. Whereas Hobbes appeals to clear definitions and the calculation of consequences, Vico appeals to an intellectual perception of the coherence of the whole of human knowledge. In his early book of metaphysics, he had ascribed knowing to the mind's faculty of genius or wit [*ingenium*] rather than to reason: "knowledge is nothing but making things correspond to themselves in beautiful proportion, which only those endowed with *ingenium* can do."[518] Vico's *ingenium* casts its light over the civil world of nations and everywhere discovers hidden causes and similarities that illuminate the coherence of the historical manifold.

Vico therefore rejects altogether the judgement, implicit in Descartes and Hobbes, and articulated at length by Kant, that the philosopher is not a natural or spontaneous genius like the artist or poet, but a mere follower of method.[519] To those preferring the rigor of geometric proof to the vagaries

[518] Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 97

[519] "Every one is agreed that genius is entirely opposed to the *spirit of imitation*. Now since learning is nothing but imitation, it follows that the greatest ability and teachableness (capacity) regarded *quâ* teachableness, cannot avail for genius. Even if a man thinks or invents for himself, and does not merely take in what others have taught, even if he discovers many things in art and science, this is not the right ground for calling such a (perhaps great) *head*, a genius (as opposed to him who because he can only learn and imitate is called a *shallow-pate*). For even these things could be learned, they lie in the natural path of him who investigates and reflects according to rules; and they do not differ specifically from what can be acquired by industry through imitation. Thus we can readily learn all that *Newton* has set forth in his immortal work on the Principles of Natural Philosophy, however great a head was required to discover it; but we cannot learn to write spirited poetry, however express may be the precepts of the art and however excellent its models. The reason is that *Newton* could make all his steps, from the first elements of geometry to his own great and profound discoveries, intuitively plain and definite as regards consequence, not only to himself but to every one else. But a *Homer* or a *Wieland* cannot show how his Ideas, so rich in fancy and yet so full of thought, come together in his head, simply because he does not know and therefore cannot teach others." (Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 5:308-309]

of genius, Vico had already replied at length in his metaphysical work, showing that all methods of reasoning, ancient as well as modern, depend ultimately on the irreducible and imaginative faculty of *ingenium*, i.e. "the creative power through which man is capable of recognizing likenesses and making them himself."[520] Contrary to what the Cartesians were everywhere professing, method alone can no more discover the laws of physics than it can generate the human truths of poetry and eloquence.[521] "Thus the proper and continual proof here adduced will consist in comparing and reflecting whether our human mind, in the series of possibilities it is permitted to understand, and so far as it is permitted to do so, can conceive more or fewer or different causes than those from which issue the effects of this civil world."[522] In the *New Science,* the coherence of the theoretic whole is buttressed on all sides by "a continuous or uninterrupted sequence of the facts of humanity"[523] which are brought into coherent unity and thereby converted into truth. For example, Vico describes the demonstrative force of his account of early man as follows:

> Our test takes the form of asking whether, in the foregoing reasoning, which is based upon principles laid down solely by the force of our understanding, we have succeeded in entering the nature of the first men who founded the gentile nations... Or let us see whether, on the other hand... we can forget these principles, and thus,

[520] Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, p. 102
[521] Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, pp. 102-104; "Let us finally conclude that [experimental] demonstration, and not the geometrical method, ought to be introduced into physics... This is the one thing the English are today seriously concerned about, and for that reason they are prohibited from publicly teaching physics according to the geometrical method." (p. 103)
[522] NS 345, cf. NS 348
[523] "... this Science must provide, at one and the same time, a philosophy and a history of human customs, which are two parts required to complete the kind of jurisprudence which is our concern, i.e. the jurisprudence of mankind. And it must do so in such mode that the first part unfolds a linked series of reasons while the second narrates a continuous or uninterrupted sequence of the facts of humanity in conformity with these reasons, [just] as causes produce effects that resemble them, and in this way lead to the discovery of the certain origins and uninterrupted progress of the whole universe of nations." (FNS 90)

in what follows, continue with current practice and allow ourselves to rely with tranquil mind upon the vulgar traditions that the ancients have left us in written form. For if we find ourselves unable to do so, this will be a true test that the things expressed here are identical with the innermost substance of our soul, i.e. that we have done nothing more than let reason unfold, so that we would need to abandon our human nature in order to deny these things."[524]

1.2 The Politics of the *New Science*

But what political doctrine or practical use follows from this divinatory and contemplative science of historical man? Vico seems to have wrestled for many years and in different moods with the problem of deriving a general doctrine of action from the teaching of the *New Science*.[525] Like Polybius and Ibn-Khaldun, he espouses a theory of the inevitable recurring cycle of the "civil history of the nations," whose regular movements he calls the *corsi* and *recorsi.* In common with the older philosophers of history, Vico counsels the pursuit of universal political ideals only after reflection on the question of what is possible and beneficial in the particular historical and cultural circumstances. For example, a human act that Vico shows to be necessary and even just for the first men who dwelt in caves and among the gods they had created – the forceful capture and sovereign subjection of vagabond women ("for in such a savage state they must have been extremely indocile and shy")[526] – would signify in us the most complete barbarism and injustice. Between then and now, the human moral and conceptual landscape had changed fundamentally. It is "as if the entire creation had changed and the whole world been altered," as Ibn-Khaldun had

[524] FNS 80
[525] Cf. FNS 11, 397, 473, 476; NS 14, 1008, 1405-1411 [Appendix: Practic of the New Science]
[526] NS 301; Cf. FNS 55-56

vividly observed.[527] Crucially, however, Vico's three ages – of gods, heroes and men – form a trans-historical unity, "an ideal eternal history, in accordance with which the histories of all nations proceed through time."[528] Vico philosophizes about history, as Leo Strauss expressed it, "under the protection of the belief that knowledge, or at least divination, of the eternal is possible."[529]

The *New Science* avoids any question of relativism; from ideal eternal history it extracts,

> a diagnostic art, as it were, which, regulated in accordance with the wisdom of mankind, provides the stages of necessity and utility in the order of human affairs, and thus, as its final consequence, provides this Science with its principle end: knowledge of the indubitable signs of the state of the nations.[530]

The signs of the state of nations are general indications how the nations may be drawn toward their "acme, or state of perfection." The *acme* of nations, or the age of their mature humanity, arrives at a mid-point between the "barbarism of sense" in which the nations are born, and the "barbarism of reflection" in which they expire. The civilizational acme has the same character of transience and recurrent eternity as the ages of the individual human life. Just as the individual's season of greatest strength and maturity serves as the measure of his current stage of life, so likewise the acme of nations is that by "which to measure the stages through which the humanity of nations

[527] Muqaddimah, I.65
[528] FNS 90
[529] Strauss, p. 12
[530] FNS 391

must proceed and the limits within which, like all else mortal, it must terminate."[531] There is, then, no possibility of what Hobbes called the Leviathan's "artificiall eternity of life."[532]

The idea of the acme thus grounds the most immediately political and actionable of Vico's theoretical principles: "the ακμή [acme], i.e. perfect state, of the nations, ... is enjoyed when the sciences, disciplines and arts, all of which draw their being from religion and the law, are in service to religion and the law."[533] Had the philosophers of the past developed the *New Science,*

> they would have gained scientific apprehension of the practices through which the humanity of a nation, as it rises, can reach this perfect state, and those through which, when it declines from this state, it can return to it anew... so that the recondite wisdom [*sapienza riposta*] of the philosophers would aid and support the vulgar wisdom [*sapienza volgare*] of nations and, in this way, the distinguished members of the academies be in agreement with the sages of the republics [*sapienti delle repubbliche*]. Thus the science of civil things, divine and human, i.e. of religion and law, which constitute a theology and morality of command acquired through habit, would be supported by the science of natural things, divine and human, which constitute a theology and morality of reason, acquired through reasoning. Hence a life beyond such maxims would be the true [state of] error, i.e. of wandering, of man and beast alike.[534]

[531] FNS 11
[532] Lev., p. 135
[533] FNS 247
[534] FNS 11; "For recondite wisdom must serve the vulgar wisdom from which it is born and for which it itself lives, with the end of correcting and supporting that wisdom when it is weakened, and guiding and leading it when it wanders astray." (FNS 398)

This passage is from the *First New Science* (1725), where Vico writes with some optimism about the possibility of controlling or reversing the progress of the cycles by the exercise of his new wisdom.[535] Such hope is more muted in the final edition of 1744. But at least the principle of political action by way of the Academy remains unaltered in the unpublished late manuscript appendix to the *New Science*, '*Practic of the New Science'*: "the practic of the science that we as philosophers offer is such as can be completed within the academies."[536] The *New Science,* in common with Polybius and Ibn-Khaldun, tends to foster a conservative and medicinal political wisdom, in opposition to all projects of ideal reform or revolution. It is a wisdom of sustainers, educators, and Academicians. It exudes the rarefied air of the republic of letters, and enjoins an almost Confucian contemplative praxis of piety.

1.3 Beyond Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment

In a landmark study of Vico, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, Isaiah Berlin remarks in passing that Vico is a conservative in "the spirit of Hooker, Matthew Hale, Montesquieu, Burke, Hegel, even Joseph de Maistre."[537] Yet Vico is plainly no *theoretical* conservative. The *New Science*'s radically modern defense of tradition led Berlin and others to find in Vico the founder of the so-called Counter-Enlightenment. Berlin, in contrast to many others, looks on this accomplishment with admiration. Vico, he writes, is the first modern "pluralist" aware of the "variety of human cultures; together with the radical implications for aesthetics, anthropology, and of course, the entire range of the historical sciences, of such an approach to human activity."[538] Since Berlin is

[535] Cf. FNS 398
[536] NS 1406
[537] Berlin, pp. 181-182
[538] Berlin, p. 17

mainly interested in tracing the "pluralist" or perspectivist correction which Vico has indeed helped to supply to Enlightenment thought (though Herder is its more immediate and witting source), he largely passes over Vico's conservativism as a curious irrelevancy.

Berlin's disregard of Vico's political aims, and his application of Vico's theoretical principles in a manner alien to Vico's political intention, is partly justified by the fact that Vico's influence has tended to have just such a loose and adaptive character. It nevertheless fails to do full justice to the coherence and meaning of Vico's work. Mark Lilla's counter-study, *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern*, on the other hand, suffers from the opposite fault. Lilla proposes a one-sided and unsympathetic understanding of Vico's political aims, attacking the Italian thinker's "primitivism and anti-rationalism."[539] Vico appears in the pages of Lilla as a champion of a regressive and "aggressive spirit of opposition to modern life."[540] As Lilla sees it, the one great alternative facing modernity is a stark choice between reason and blind dogmatism, and Vico falls at the head of the wrong camp. "Either one resigns oneself to living within the broad Enlightenment tradition that values reason, skepticism, and freedom, or one sets off with the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers who abandoned those principles in the pursuit of order, authority, and certainty. *Autaut*: the modern world offers no third alternative."[541] Lilla's manicheanism and his unfavorable judgement of Vico is echoed still more strongly in Zeev Sternhell's *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition,* which blames Vico as "the first great enemy of rationalism, natural law and a world from which providence was

[539] Lilla, p. 13
[540] Lilla, p. 13
[541] Lilla, p. 13

absent."[542] According to Sternhell, it is but a short and slippery slope from Vico to Enlightenment's antithesis, irrationalism and fascism.[543]

While Berlin largely ignores Vico's political intention, Lilla and Sternhell badly misjudge it. No enemy of reason could write as Vico does about ancient Greece: "refinement is the fruit of philosophy, wherefore Greece alone, which was the nation of philosophers, shone with all the fine arts that human genius has ever discovered..."[544] In Vico's telling, the human age, in which the acme of nations occurs, is an age characterized by highly developed reason and philosophical habits of reflection. Its creed is that "the rational nature (which is the true human nature) is equal in all men."[545] This acme is also an age of profound historical learning. The "vulgar wisdom" includes not only custom and dogma, but the whole active study of the ancient languages and literatures. In fact, the vulgar wisdom of seventeenth century Christendom included for Vico the whole of what is now called *the humanities*.

> Christian Europe is everywhere radiant with such humanity that it abounds in all the good things that make for the happiness of human life, ministering to the comforts of the body as well as to the pleasures of mind and spirit. And all this in virtue of the Christian religion, which teaches truths so sublime that it receives into its service the most learned philosophies of the gentiles and cultivates three languages as its own: Hebrew, the most ancient in the world; Greek, the most delicate; and Latin, the grandest. Thus, even for human ends, the Christian religion

[542] Sternhell, p. 20
[543] Sternhell, p. 8
[544] NS 45
[545] NS 29

> is the best in the world, because it unites a wisdom of authority with that of reason, basing the latter on the choicest doctrine of the philosophers and the most cultivated erudition of the philologists.[546]

The reader encounters no longing to return to the savage forests of the ferine first men in the *New Science*, which observes "how empty has been the conceit of the learned concerning the innocence of the golden age..."[547] To the age of heroes belong "crude, course, wild, savage, volatile, unreasonable or unreasonably obstinate, frivolous, and foolish customs."[548] In drawing our attention to the effectual authority of a pre-reflective *common sense* in sustaining civilization, and arguing that philosophy ought to serve and perfect this sense, Vico looks primarily to strengthen and lengthen the truly human and rational phase in human history:

> In the same way, the stages of the utility of recondite wisdom are revealed. For recondite wisdom must serve the vulgar wisdom from which it is born and for which it itself lives, with the end of correcting and supporting that wisdom when it is weakened, and guiding and leading it when it wanders astray.[549]

Vico's rejection of Descartes' and Hobbes' reasoning is therefore very far from constituting a rejection of reason. His argument is rather that the Cartesians and natural lawyers dangerously misunderstand and misuse reason. In appealing to the "vulgar wisdom," Vico means to divert philosophy from critically dissolving the social and political authority of the human *common sense*

[546] NS 1094
[547] NS 518
[548] NS 786
[549] FNS 398

under which it thrives. This he believed had once already happened when Stoicism, Epicureanism, skepticism and atheism combined to undermine the *common sense* contained in the customs of the Roman nation and above all in the principles of advanced Roman jurisprudence, which had attained the highest level of legal humanity known to the ancient world.[550] Ancient philosophy ought rather to have supported those institutions through which not only the nation lives, but also philosophy itself.

> And here we determine the ακμή [acme], i.e. perfect state, of the nations, which is enjoyed when the sciences, disciplines and arts, all of which draw their being from religion and the law, are in service to religion and the law. Hence when the nations conduct themselves in a different way, as they would with the Epicureans and Stoics, or with indifference to it, as with the sceptics, or contrary to it, as with the atheists, they proceed to their downfall, losing their own dominant religions and, with them, their own laws. And because they do not value their own religions and laws as being worthy of defense, they proceed to lose also their own arms and languages and, with the loss of these properties, the further property of retaining their own names within those of other dominant nations...[551]

By examining a selection of connected and illustrative arguments Vico makes about the "vulgar wisdom," this chapter sketches out what Vico means by philosophy in the service of "vulgar wisdom" and "common sense," and why he thought such intellectual service essential to the preservation of society and of reason itself. Vico's fear of philosophy's emancipation from the

[550] Cf. FNS 12
[551] FNS 247

tutelage of *common sense*, as demanded by Hobbes and Descartes, appears anything but irrational; reason is really capable of self-dissolution, as has been proven by the various philosophical nihilisms that have emerged since Vico, and which continue to cause the party of the Enlightenment unease. Lilla and Sternhell's bipolar narrative of Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment furthermore leaves no room for Vico to teach us anything. Because they are so narrowly focused on Vico's supposedly irreducible anti-reason, they fail to notice that Vico, perhaps to a greater degree than any other modern thinker, intended to forestall the very crises of identity always threatening progressive liberal politics.

2. Return to the Origins: Birth of Humanity in Religion

A very central and important principle of the *New Science* is that all human society, the earliest as well as the most civilized, rests on an evolving *common sense* beginning in and maintained through religion. The "gentile religions" of the pagan peoples are seen to be false in the light of both Christianity and fully developed human reason, but they are not for that reason either senseless or fraudulent. It is in these religions, born independently of one another in the various nations, but developing according to certain inexorable regularities, that the origins of human society and political order are to be discovered. Like our contemporary comparative anthropologists, Vico holds that "uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth."[552] The course traversed by the nations through a series of ideas, institutions and customs is for Vico the true dynamic natural law. "The natural law of the gentes is coeval with the customs of the nations, conforming one with another in virtue of a common human sense, without any reflection and without one nation following the example of another."[553]

Religion is the first provision of the providential "natural law of the gentes." The "first men" newly arisen from complete animality were of a different nature than us, "almost all body and almost no reflection."[554] Vico accepts the premise that mankind begins in a state of childhood, analogous to the childhood of the human individual. (He grants however that the analogy is imperfect, because the child of later times is immediately inducted into a civilizing process by being taught to speak an articulate language). The "first men" did not speak with articulate language, but grunted and gestured mutely. They formed no regular communities or families, but engaged in "ferine

[552] NS 144
[553] NS 311, Cf. FNS 1
[554] NS 819

wanderings" and "infamous couplings." And they had virtually no ability to reason or reflect. The history of human nature is such that "men at first feel without perceiving, then they perceive with a troubled and agitated spirit, finally they reflect with a clear mind."[555] With their savage and childlike natures and lack of articulate language, it is impossible that the first men should have reached any sort of lasting agreement or unity of purpose by reflection and reasoning. Certainly there were not yet any sages or philosophers among them to light the way.

How then did the first political communities form? Providence arranges things, using the instrument of this first human nature, such that the first men invariably fall into a "common sense" which is always religious: "it was a nature all fierce and cruel; but... men had a terrible fear of the gods whom they themselves had created"[556] and "it was a fanaticism of superstition which kept the first men of the gentiles, savage, proud, and most cruel as they were, in some sort of restraint by main terror of a divinity they had imagined."[557] On Vico's account, the first men (described as literal "giants") create the pagan gods when, on the occasion of thunder and lightning, they imagine a powerful divinity communicating with them.

> And because in such a case the nature of the human mind leads it to attribute its own nature to the effect, and because in that state their nature was that of men all robust bodily strength, who expressed their very violent passions by shouting and grumbling, they pictured the sky to themselves as a great animated body, which in

[555] NS 218
[556] NS 916
[557] NS 518

> that aspect they called Jove, the first god of the so-called greater gentes, who meant to tell them something by the hiss of his bolts and clap of his thunder.[558]

In this manner the false pagan gods were created, beginning with a Jove, of which each of the first nations had its own. Vico's account appears to have been inspired on this point by Lucretius,[559] but it serves also to correct another epicurean thesis, revived by many of the early modern political thinkers. Vico is especially concerned to disprove that gods are born of a human deception or priestly fraud.[560]

> [It is not the case] that the first gods in the world were created through fear, understood, in accordance with Samuel Pufendorf's idea, as a fear that some should have induced in others; hence, that the laws that these men made are the daughters of a deception, and that states ought therefore to be preserved by certain powerful secrets together with certain semblances of liberty... it was their fear of the thunderbolts that, Providence permitting, brought the giants to imagine and revere for themselves the divinity of Jove... so that the essence of republics lies in religion and not force or deception.[561]

"False religions were born not of imposture but of credulity."[562] This credulity is not however the creature of mere fate or chance, but providentially led. Religion is the first principle of any and all

[558] NS 377
[559] Cf. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Bk. 5, [1213-1240]
[560] This is Hobbes' position for example. See Lev., pp. 19, 82-83; Cf.
[561] FNS 485
[562] NS 191

authority and community among men. Religion enables human community by establishing common authority, which is the *certainty* of the "common sense" on which a particular religion is based. The first "common sense" must be religious, for the reason that all other and subsequent "common senses" depend on the pre-existence of some force of shared and collective self-restraint, some commonly recognized and commonly feared authority. In a state of wild equality, authority can only arise from the idea of a power superior to man.

> For where there is neither rule of law nor force of arms, and men are accordingly in a state of complete freedom, they can neither enter nor remain in society except through fear of a force superior to them all, and, therefore, through fear of a divinity common to all. The fear of divinity is called 'religion.'[563]

Religion is the condition not only of the direct forms of cooperation and agreement, such as the institutions of the family and solemn burial of the dead, which are indisputably religious in origin, but even of indirect forms of cooperation, such as language itself. The authority of the meanings of the words in a given language presupposes the existence of a society upholding that authority and those meanings. Therefore "without religion, not even language would have been born among men, because, as we argued earlier, men cannot unite in a nation unless they are united in the thought of some one divinity."[564]

The first divinities are as fierce and savage as the men who imagine them. But Plutarch's dilemma as to whether cruel primitive religion or libertine unbelief is the greater evil is misconceived. "He

[563] FNS 57; Cf. FNS 1, 179, 485; NS 27, 179, 916, 953
[564] FNS 303

is not just in weighing this cruel superstition against atheism, for from the former arose the most enlightened nations while no nation in the world was ever founded on atheism."[565] Vico is no less aware than Machiavelli and Hobbes of the ubiquity of force and fraud in all human politics. He answers that although states may be acquired by force and fraud, they are just as easily lost by the same means, and yet it is always on the basis of the religious common sense that they survive over time.[566] From his philosophy of religion, Vico draws "these two eternal properties: one, that religion is the only means powerful enough to restrain the fierceness of peoples; and the other, that religions flourish when they are inwardly revered by those who preside over them."[567]

2.1 Atheism and Shame

Vico therefore does not limit the unifying function of religion to the founding of the first nations. Though religion is made milder and more properly human by reflection and philosophy, and to an even greater degree by the Jewish and Christian revelations, religion as such is an "eternal property" of peoples.[568] "If religion is lost among the peoples, they have nothing left to enable them to live in society: no shield of defense, nor means of counsel, nor basis of support, nor even a form by which they may exist in the world."[569] Grotius, Hobbes and Pufendorf had all asked how it happens that any government forms at all, and had answered mainly with hypotheticals. Plato had answered with the false myth of ancient sages. Machiavelli and his followers had answered with a corrupting immoralism. Vico endeavors to answer truthfully and with piety. Religion and religious shame are prior to rule, they are the condition of rule of any kind. The originary

[565] NS 518
[566] Cf. NS 18
[567] NS 916
[568] NS 916
[569] NS 1109

untrammeled anarchy and chaos of the Hobbesian "natural condition" does not actually occur because *common sense* has already formed men's natures through their idea of a divinity before they are even able to communicate.

This serves as a devastating line of attack against the revolutionary assertion of Pierre Bayle that religion is not necessary to society. On Bayle's dictum depends, perhaps, the broader understanding of the human passions shared by Hobbes, Descartes and Spinoza. All are slighting of piety and the sense of shame, which they understand to be an outgrowth of sociability, or acquiescence in the opinions of others when these are imagined to be unfavorable. Descartes writes simply, "the good which is, or hath been in us, in reference to the opinion other men may have of it, excites glory in us : and the evil, shame."[570] Spinoza follows suit, locating the cause of shame in our perception of the opinions of others: "Shame is pain accompanied by the idea of some action of our own, which we believe to be blamed by others."[571] And Hobbes indicates his disdain for shame with characteristic wit:

> Grief for the discovery of some defect of ability is shame, or the passion that discovereth itself in blushing, and consisteth in the apprehension of some thing dishonorable; and in young men is a sign of love of good reputation and commendable; in old men it is a sign of the same, but because it comes too late, not commendable.[572]

[570] Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, 2.66
[571] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3.31
[572] Lev., p. 43

For Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza, shame is to be avoided as much as possible, whether by deserving the good opinions of others, or by becoming superior to all concern with their opinions. Vico argues, on the contrary, that the sense of shame is not an outgrowth of sociability, but its necessary condition. Moreover, shame is first experienced in the face of the imagined divinities, not other human beings.

> And Ham, who, in jest, insisted upon seeing the private parts of his father Noah, as he lay asleep, carried God's curse with him into the bestial wilderness for his lack of piety. This is one of those origins beyond which it is foolish to seek others earlier, which is the most important mark of the truth of origins... At what point in the world did men begin to be ashamed of themselves [*vergognarsi*] in that state of bestial freedom in which they could neither be ashamed before their sons, to whom they were by nature superior, nor before one another, when they were equal to one another and equally afire with the foments of lust? Hence, if we do not come to a halt at shame [*vergogna*] before a divinity [...] humanity could never have begun among the men of Hobbes, Grotius and Pufendorf.[573]

Vico here also suggests that the philosophers had also lost sight of an additional truth; namely, as the Bible teaches, the sense of shame is inextricably bound up with nakedness and sex. In tracing the history of shame, Vico also anticipates Freud's notion of sublimation, speaking of "human liberty, which consists in holding in check the motions of concupiscence and giving them another

[573] FNS 58

direction,"[574] and noting of the ancient poets that "in a rough way they understood that concupiscence is the mother of all the passions."[575] After shame had arisen,

> the act of human love was performed under cover, in hiding, this is to say, in shame [*con pudicizia*]; and they began to feel that sense of shame [*pudore*] which Socrates described as the color of virtue. And this, after religion, is the second bond that keeps nations united, even as shamelessness [*l'audacia*] and impiety destroy them.[576]

It was the "frightful thought of some divinity" which alone imposed "form and measure on the bestial passions of these lost men and thus transformed them into human passions."[577] Vico means this emergence into humanity to be taken literally. It is only by restraining the passions, and especially the sexual passions, through a self-made fear of the gods, that properly human will first begins to be exercised; from the self-abashed thought of the deity "must have sprung the conatus proper to the human will, to hold in check the motion[s] impressed on the mind by the body, so as either to quiet them altogether, as becomes the wise man, or at least to direct them to better use, as becomes the civil man."[578] Religion and shame, in other words, carry the first men beyond the purely visceral or bestial calculus of desires and fears (which Hobbes believed to be identical with the human will), leading to a properly human ability to restrain desire by means of something other than another stronger desire. For although it is still fear restraining desire, this religious fear is an

[574] NS 1098
[575] NS 701
[576] NS 504
[577] NS 340; Robert Flint observes that the "terror produced by thunder was not represented by Vico as more than the occasion of religion. It simply awakened the religious consciousness in general. In becoming
[578] NS 340; Cf. NS 1098

product of creative and imaginative human self-making and so takes on the humanizing aspect of shame.[579] Human will is therefore no less a human creation than the will of Zeus, and both of these creations are equally providential. Robert Flint, Vico's first English expositor, comments:

> The terror produced by thunder was not represented by Vico as more than the occasion of religion. It simply awakened the religious consciousness. But that was the awakening of religious consciousness in general. In becoming conscious of God, man became conscious of himself; yea, only then did man truly become himself, for he who is not conscious of a self has none...[580]

2.2 *Common Sense* of the Whole of Mankind: Religion, Marriage, Burial

Vico asserts that he has discovered the triad of primordial, necessary and permanent institutions at the core of our humanity. As mentioned above, these are religion, marriage and burial.[581] The emergence of these institutions is not external to our nature, but part of a single development with it. Marriage and burial do not form due to a collective reflection on their utility, nor a pious

[579] Vico offers a numbers of related explanations as to the origin of the human ability to control desire that characterizes the free will. For instance, he ascribes the repression of bodily desire to the mind's acquired ability for reflection: "down to Homer's time they did not understand the human mind itself insofar as, by dint of reflection, it opposes the senses." (NS 691) as well as in the discipline of family life, "by discipline of their household economy they brought forth from their bestial minds the form of the human mind." (NS 692) Again, after the age of divine authority had passed there "followed human authority in the full philosophic sense of the term; that is, the property of human nature which not even God can take from man without destroying him... This authority is the free use of the will, the intellect on the other hand being a passive power subject to truth." (NS 388). "Thus they began to use human liberty, which consists in holding in check the motions of concupiscence and giving them another direction; for since liberty does not come from the body, whence comes the concupiscence, it must come from the mind and is therefore properly human." (NS 1098) These statements and others regarding of the origin of free will are elaborations and extensions rather than alternatives to the thesis that free will is born in shame.

[580] Flint, p. 219

[581] Cf. NS 176, 333; FNS 10

deception. Indeed, no kind of reasonable reflection is possible until significantly after marriage and burial have taken form and become *certain*.

Let us here briefly and schematically outline the net of relations Vico traces among primordial human institutions and *common senses*. Without religion and shame, there can be no marriage, which is a "chaste carnal union consummated under the fear of some divinity."[582] Marriage, the first society, introduces the practice of restraint of the passions, and thus antecedes fully human will.[583] Without the more or less permanent union of marriage, there is no possibility of the regular education of children, and so no certain transmission to posterity of education in "religion, language or any other human custom."[584] (Vico seems to indicate that this truth may become obscured in later times when the broader community takes a much larger role in the education and socialization of children.[585] But in the earliest times, the *certainty* or authority of the first society of marriage prepares all subsequent evolutions of human nature, which depend on *certain* generational transmission.)

The third great institution of humanity, solemn and regularized burial of the dead, could not come about in the absence of the family. The custom of burial introduces a publically recognized or *certain* extension of the human will beyond death. Upon this extension of the will beyond death depends landed inheritance (since inheritance is a social institution and the "first men" are buried on ancestral land). And since the first kind of property is property in land, burial makes possible

[582] NS 505
[583] NS 1098
[584]NS 336; Cf. FNS 68
[585] Cf. NS 336

the institution of property more generally.[586] And it is the institution of property, in turn, that enables permanent settlement and the regular cultivation of the earth.

The institutions of religion, marriage and burial are the *common sense* of the whole of mankind. "And let him who would transgress them beware lest he transgress all humanity," Vico warns.[587] Religion, marriage and burial also provide the elements of first psychology, even as they act as providential agents leading the human race toward humanity.[588] "Metaphysic should know God's providence in public moral institutions or civil customs, by which the nations have come into being and maintain themselves in the world."[589] The philosophic mind finds itself reflected in these civil institutions "just as the bodily eye sees all objects outside itself but needs a mirror to see itself."[590] The political implications Vico draws from this are clear enough.

> For this is the common sense of the whole of mankind: that the nations should stand firm on these three customs above all others in order not to fall back into the state of bestial liberty, for all three arose from a certain blush of shame [*un certo rossore*], experienced by the living and the dead, in face of the sky.[591]

2.3 *Authority* and *Personation* in Hobbes and Vico

Vico's claim that the genesis of all political unity lies in a shared religious *common sense* obviously impugns the natural lawyers' notion of an original compact or contractual agreement. The *New*

[586] Cf. Lilla, p. 162
[587] NS 360
[588] CF. FNS 75, 121; NS 11-12, 176, 336, 337, 1112, 1404-1411 (*Practic of the New Science*)
[589] NS 5
[590] NS 331
[591] FNS 397

Science includes a more detailed and pointed rejoinder to Hobbes' account of the voluntary covenant by which the people become unified through the artifice of representation or *personation*. As we saw in chapter one, Hobbes proposes that each member of the common-wealth contract with each of the other members to allow the sovereign to represent them to themselves. Each member of the commonwealth is to "acknowledge himselfe to be the Author of whatsoever he that beareth their Person shall Act, or cause to be Acted…" By representing the people to themselves, the sovereign person establishes a "reall Unitie of them all, in one and the same Person."[592] "For it is the *Unity* of the Representer, not the *Unity* of the Represented, that maketh the Person One. And it is the Representer that beareth the Person, and but one Person: And Unity, cannot otherwise be understood in Multitude."[593] Hobbes calls the artifice of delegated representation, his first principle of civil order, by the name of *personation*. He explains:

> The word Person is latine: instead whereof the Greeks have πρόσωπον, which signifies the *Face*, as *Persona* in latine signifies the *disguise*, or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and somtimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Visard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to any Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters. So that a *Person*, is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himselfe, or an other; and he that acteth another, is said to beare his Person, or act in his name; (in which sence Cicero useth it where he saies, "Unus Sustineo Tres Personas; Mei, Adversarii, & Judicis, I beare three Persons; my own, my Adversaries, and the

[592] Lev., p. 120
[593] Lev., p. 114

> Judges;") and is called in diverse occasions, diversly; as a *Representer*, or *Representative*, a *Lieutenant*, a *Vicar*, an *Attorney*, a *Deputy*, a *Procurator*, an *Actor*, and the like.[594]

The etymological account of the word *person,* traced from the masks worn on the Roman stage to the legal fictions employed in Roman law, is meant to establish that *personation* is a voluntary fiction whereby legal *authority* is established. The *represented* is also called by Hobbes the *author*, in the sense that the actions of the representative are attributed to the author, on whose authority they are performed. From the author comes all authority. Therefore Hobbes defines authority as such, as delegated or transferred right. "So that by Authority, is always understood a Right of doing any act: and *done by Authority*, done by Commission, or Licence from him whose right it is."[595] Political authority in general is an *acting for*. It is based exclusively in the voluntary alienation or transfer of right.

As we have already seen, the *New Science,* which is "also a philosophy of authority,"[596] wholly rejects the notion that authority finds its source in any voluntary or consensual delegation of right. The best and most advanced kind of human authority is based rather "on the trust placed in persons of experience, of singular prudence in practical matters, and of sublime wisdom in intellectual matters."[597] But the original source of authority Vico locates in religion and *common sense*. The great failing of Hobbes' account of authority, Vico saw, is that cannot explain any historical or actually constituted authority. The historical forms of authority, which follow "the natural law of

[594] Lev., p. 112
[595] Lev., p. 112
[596] NS 386
[597] NS 942

the nations," change in accord with the epoch. "Authority was at first divine,"[598] as reflected in the myths of the Greeks and other nations which have come down to us as an obscure record of the first divine age. "Such were Tityus and Prometheus, chained to a high rock with their hearts being devoured by an eagle; that is, by the religion of Jove's auspices."[599] With the passage of time, the pure force of the gods' authority, appearing in the thunder and lightning and other expression of the irresistible power of nature, is sublimated in the human sense of shame. Hence there "followed human authority in the full philosophic sense of the term... This authority is the free use of the will, the intellect on the other hand being a passive power subject to truth."[600]

Yet since the freedom of the human will is radically *uncertain* without the determinations of *common sense*, the forms of human authority are subject to the providential "authority of natural law."[601] Now arises the authority of particular men, the first heroic fathers. It was an authority grounded in their religious beliefs and their self-restraint. "Thus, through religion, these settlers had already become chaste and strong."[602] The heroes enjoy a real superiority to the other savage first men still lacking their own gods, and consequently lacking marriage and nationhood. Heroic authority thus grew among "the princes of the so-called greater gentes, who counted Jove the first god. These were the ancient noble houses, branching out into many families, of which the first kingdoms and the first cities were composed."[603]

[598] NS 387
[599] NS 387
[600] NS 388
[601] NS 389
[602] FNS 141
[603] NS 389

We return in the next section to the specific sense of justice Vico ascribes to these early heroic princes, such as Achilles and Agamemnon were, and among whom Abraham wandered. Here, let us observe how comprehensively Vico corrects Hobbes on each point of his theory of authority. *Persona* is indeed derived from the Latin for mask, as Hobbes indicated, but according to Vico this usage is in turn derived from an earlier meaning of *persona* as the written symbol or name of a public person or patriarchal house. The first masks, or *personae,* thus appeared in family coats of arms, rather than the theatre.

> Thus there appeared in the market place as many masks as there were persons (for persona properly means simply a mask) or as there were names. The name, which in the times of mute speech took the form of real words, must have been the family coats of arms, by which families were found to be distinguished among the American Indians. And under the person or mask of the father of a family were concealed all his children and servants, and under the real name or emblem of a house were concealed all its agnates and gentiles.[604]

Vico generalizes the point: "Thus all the fictions of ancient jurisprudence were truths under masks."[605] Hobbes' idea of personation is not so much false, in Vico's view, as it is historically circumscribed. In the final stage of the cycle of the civil universe, there is "an eternal natural royal law by which the nations come to rest under monarchies."[606] Here something like Hobbes' idea

[604] NS 1033; Cf.: "This there are the true poetic, civil characters of such personae or masks, a kind of genera in which many men are comprehended under the character of a gens or house, as, in truth, to anyone who reflects upon them, are the family coasts of arms themselves." (FNS 360); FNS 338
[605] NS 1036
[606] NS 1008

of representation really does come about. But the reason for this is different from what Hobbes had supposed. Since "the citizen have become aliens in their own nations" due to their distance from public affairs and their preoccupation in private affairs, "it becomes necessary for the monarchs to sustain and represent the latter in their own persons."[607] And for the same reason, there arises under monarchical government the principle of the personhood of corporations: "*universitates sub rege habentur loco privatorum* ('corporations are treated as private persons under the king'), because the majority of citizens no longer concern themselves with the public welfare."[608] What Hobbes presents as a great and revolutionary discovery, namely the artifice of representation and personation, appears to Vico as the natural consequence of the individual's loss of sovereignty under monarchical government, as well as the monarch's need to level his subjects to a state of equality.[609]

On Vico's account *personae* appeared in Roman law long before they appeared in Roman theatres, of which there had been very few until around the time of Scipio the Elder. Certainly there is a difficulty here for Hobbes, given that the Roman theatre emerged only after the influence of the Greeks had begun to be felt, and presumably long after the *pater familias* was recognized in law to bear the persons of the members of his household. Before the word *persona* signified a theatrical mask, Vico reasons, it must have signified a *certain* public character, and the sign under which this character was known: "The founders of Roman law, at a time when they could not understand intelligible universals, fashioned imaginative universals. And just as the poets later by art brought personages and masks onto the stage, so these men by nature had previously brought the aforesaid

[607] NS 1008
[608] NS 1008
[609] Cf. NS 953, 1023

persons into the forum."[610] On this basis, Vico even hazards a fantastic alternative etymology of *persona*. Since the first Roman theatres are known to have been very small, the word could not have been derived, as the later Roman philologists thought, from *persŏnare*, "to resound everywhere" as through the amplification of a mask.[611] "It must rather have come from *persōnari,* a verb which we conjecture meant to wear the skins of wild beasts, which was permitted only to heroes."[612]

Vico's argument about the religious origins of personation and authority no more depends on his uncertain and curious etymology of the word *persona* than Hobbes' account of it depends on his other etymology. The deeper point, repeated at every opportunity, is that Hobbes and the natural lawyers fail to grasp that the true basis of authority cannot be an arbitrary or voluntary grant of power. Such an explanation only leads back to all the insoluble difficulties that Vico discloses in Hobbes' account of political origins. The ultimate basis of all authority is rather the shared *common sense*, which is initially religious in character, and which permanently depends on the sense of shame. One "eternal property" of nations is "that religion is the only means powerful enough to restrain the fierceness of peoples; and the other, that religions flourish when they are inwardly revered by those who preside over them."[613]

[610] NS 1033
[611] NS 1034
[612] NS 1034
[613] NS 916

3. Cycloptic and Heroic Justice

Because shame is coeval with religion, and religion coeval with humanity, Vico has a new path to illuminate the earliest senses of justice, the grasping of which had eluded philosophers since Plato. In the *Republic*, the irascible Thrasymachus argues that justice is the "advantage of the stronger."[614] Socrates (and in his train almost the entirety of the philosophical tradition) understands Thrasymachus' position to be equivalent to a denial of justice. Vico rejoins that "might is right," though a very primitive sense of justice, is very far from being a denial of justice.

> If there were ever some very ancient time in which men were of disproportionate bodily strength and equal feebleness of mind, their idea of their own nature would have dictated the need to fear divinity as a force superior to their every human force. Hence they would have believed that this superior force constituted their divine law and, consequently, that it was necessary to base the whole of their system of justice on force. This is precisely what we see in the case of Achilles.[615]

Achilles and the other "heroes" characterize the second or "heroic" age of humanity. They follow a sense of justice according to which "might is right." But this does not entail, as the total absence of any sense of justice would, each one of the heroes expending his energies to the maximum possible extent. There is no hero strong enough to be stronger than all the rest. "Might is right" is actually principle of restraint, depending on a *common sense* of shame before what appears strong

[614] Plato, *Republic* [339a ff.]
[615] FNS 52

or stronger than oneself. It is an absolute advance over the mere anarchy of force that reigned in the bestial state of the pre-humans.

> This custom [sc. basing justice on force] was administered by Providence in order that, since these ferocious men had not been domesticated by the rule of [fully human] justice, they should at least fear divinity and thus measure justice by force, so that, in times of such ferocity, killing should not breed killing, which would lead to the extermination of mankind.[616]

This same "heroic" sense of justice recurred in the "returned barbarian times" of the Middle Ages. By this principle, Vico is able to explain the sense of justice underlying the institution of trial by combat and trial by ordeal and "the vindictive satisfactions of the knights-errant of whom the romancers sing."[617] Just as for *blameless* Achilles, these contests rest "on the virtue of punctiliousness, on which the duelists of the returned barbarian times based their entire morality."[618]

> In such armed judgements right was measured by the fortune of victory. This was a counsel of divine providence, to the end that, among barbarous peoples with little capacity for reason and no understanding of right, wars might not breed further wars, and that they might thus have some notion of the justice and injustice of men

[616] FNS 53
[617] NS 667
[618] NS 667

> from the favor or disfavor of the gods: even as the gentiles scorned the saintly Job when he had fallen from his royal estate because God was against him.[619]

The law of heroic justice is itself an evolution of an even earlier law, which Vico calls the "Cycloptic law." The name is taken from Homer's description of Ulysses' sojourn in the cave of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, and of the way of life said to characterize these cave-dwelling monsters.[620] Vico here follows Plato, who understands Homer to be alluding to the customs of early or primitive man, notably that "they dwell on crests of lofty mountains / In hollow caves, and each gives the rule to / His own children and wives, and they don't / trouble themselves about one another."[621] In this age of "divine justice," not even the principle that "might is right" has fully emerged. The Cyclops are too withdrawn and sullen to wage sustained war with one another, so there are not yet any heroes. Yet even here, some sense of justice prevails in the form of the severe patriarchy each Cyclops wields over his family, subject to the divinity each has imagined to be his superior. In those times, it was "just for men to use force both to seize vagabond women and to keep them in their dens, each in his own. This was the time in which the first principle of just wars and the first acts of just plunder began to emerge, since the wars waged to found gentile mankind were no less just than those waged later to preserve it."[622] By this argument, Vico modifies the Machiavellian thesis of foundational violence, so that it no longer leads to the conclusion that politics is founded in injustice: "this [heroic] public virtue was nothing but a good use providence made of such grievous, ugly and cruel private vices, in order that the cities might be preserved

[619] NS 963
[620] Homer, *Odyssey IX* [112-115]
[621] Plato, *Laws* [680b] ff. Quoted from Pangle, *Laws* (1980).
[622] FNS 55

during a period when the minds of men, intent on particulars, could not naturally understand a common good."[623]

> From this same lack of reflective capacity, the heroes were bluff, touchy, magnanimous, and generous, as Homer portrays Achilles... It was with such examples of heroic customs in mind that Aristotle made it a precept of the art of poetry that the heroes who are taken as protagonists in tragedies should be neither very good nor very bad but should exhibit a mixture of great vices and great virtues.[624]

3.1 The Human Afterlife of Cycloptic and Heroic Justice

The Cycloptic and especially the heroic senses of justice persist in the later times of "popular" or "human" governments, but apply chiefly to national individualities. These wage war recognizing no superior but God, and no standard of judgement between them but victory in arms.[625] We may observe, for instance, that the custom of absolute surrender in war, in which an entire nation spares itself by openly recognizing and reliably acquiescing in the will of its conqueror, depends on a system of justice analogous to the heroic. This is already some distance from the bestial pre-humans or the Cycloptic men, who, as we saw above, would "have allowed themselves to be slain along with their entire families rather than endure inequality."[626] Yet even this most desperate attitude and the literal resolution to live free or die, evidently also recurs in later times at the level of collective individualities who do prefer death to surrender. It is significant, and Vico notes it,

[623] NS 38; Cf. NS 819
[624] NS 708
[625] Cf. NS 562
[626] NS 1011

that the disposition to die rather than submit most often occurs when absolute surrender is perceived to entail giving up one's God.[627] Neither heroic justice, nor the properly human calculation of utility, could ever suggest martyrdom. Martyrdom, in Vico's scheme, is an atavism harkening back to the Cycloptic or "divine age," in which no superiority and no justice is recognized besides the divine justice of one's own god.

Vico's understanding of the heroic sense of justice also allows him to formulate new answers to other questions that perplexed modern thinkers. How was it, for instance, that the ancients had regularly performed such dangerous and heroic deeds, risking death, devoting themselves entirely to the common cause? The ancients, Montesquieu exclaimed, "performed actions unknown in our times, and which astound our petty souls."[628] The French writer ascribes this to the unity of ancient education and to "the principle of virtue" in ancient governments. Vico offers a different answer: "rightly understood, the heroes of ancient times performed these actions only through an excess of individual feeling for their own sovereignty, which was preserved for them by their fatherland through their families."[629]

> When men have newly passed from an unbridled liberty to a liberty regulated only by [their fear of] divinity... they must long retain the ferocious custom whereby they have this liberty of life and death. And, if such an infinite liberty is preserved for them by their fatherland, which preserves the gods through whom they have this infinite power over other men, they will naturally be brought [to be prepared] to die

[627] Cf. 562, 675, 676
[628] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 4.4
[629] FNS 137; Cf. NS 950

> for their fatherland and for their religion... [and] in order to prove to the plebs, by sacrifice of their lives, that they ruled in virtue of the auspices. For the common custom of the ancient nations in all wars was *pro aris focisque pugnare*[630] : to conquer or to die with one's own gods.[631]

Vico teaches, by way of implication, that our own mild and more yielding disposition depends primarily on the vast attenuation of our sense of personal sovereignty. This must strike us as an ambivalent development, and one that helps to explain our need of dramatic representations of heroic virtue. But Vico's intention here is neither pagan nor romantic. He means us to understand that this original heroism forms a submerged and vital part of our current human nature. The first heroism arises on the occasion of the "the false opinion that the heroes come from a divine origin."[632] And yet it is on the transmutation of this same uncompromising self-will of the ancient hero, on which "philosophical heroism" depends, rather than on the excellence of the faculty of reason: "The philosophers applied to this heroism three of their genteel and learned ideas: first, the justice reasoned from the maxims of Socratic morals; second, the glory which is fame for having done benefits for humankind; and, third, the desire for immortality."[633] Philosophy depends on the desire for justice, glory, and immortality, desires which are each of them religious in origin and essence, and which are by no means generated by the calculations of reason.

> Upon poetic heroism, Plato raised up his own philosophical heroism, for the hero stands above man, not just beasts. According to that heroism, a beast is slave to the

[630] Lit: "to fight for alter and hearth"
[631] FNS 136
[632] NS 197
[633] NS 666

> passions; man is placed in the middle, fighting the passions; and a hero commands the passions at his pleasure, and so the heroic is in the middle between divine and human nature.[634]

The concept of heroism is one illustration of Vico's understanding of the compounded historicity of human nature, i.e. its dynamic layering. Vico's psychology of the poetic "first nations" and the "heroes" is similarly contemporary. Among the properties of human nature, as it runs its historical course, is that "human nature does not change all at once but always retains an impression of some former practice or habit."[635] Former natures persist under the surface of the latest nature, "much as great and rapid rivers continue far into the sea."[636] Not only philosophy, but each age and form of government has furthermore its own particular heroism, resembling the original virtue of the heroes, but modified by the reigning "common sense," and increasingly directed toward the equity of properly human law.[637]

Vico understands, as Hobbes does not, that without heroism, no one is prepared to fight and die in defense of the commonwealth.[638] An unheroic people would certainly make a very inglorious end of what Hobbes called the Leviathan's "artificiall eternity of life."[639] Religion, marriage and burial are not dead artifacts of the past stages of civilization; they evolve and persist, so that if ever these

[634] NS 275
[635] FNS 90
[636] NS 412
[637] Cf. NS 18, 1042, 1101
[638] Cf. NS 277-279
[639] Lev., p. 135

institutions do eventually fail entirely, this, too, is synonymous with the death of the civilization they founded.[640]

[640] Cf. FNS 526; NS 333

4. Human Nature Between Poetry and Reason

A broad metaphysical principle emerges from Vico's treatment of human nature. Aristotelian and scholastic metaphysics ascribed essences to substances, qualities without which no individual thing can be itself. Descartes and Spinoza inaugurate modern metaphysics by replacing the doctrine of essences with the notion that a thing is understood by understanding the totality of its efficient causes. When Vico speaks indiscriminately of "the nature or birth [*natura o nascimento*]"[641] of institutions, he draws on the metaphysics of his modern predecessors. But Vico, like Leibniz, so historicizes the principle that things are constituted by the totality of their causes, that it becomes virtually a new principle. He writes, "the totality of the principles of things includes both those from which their composition begins as well as those in which their resolution is finally reached."[642] To truly grasp a thing, therefore, is to grasp both its birth and death.

4.1 Poetic Logic

To know ourselves, we must first of all grasp the first human nature, which was poetic.

> The first gentile peoples, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters. This discovery, which is the master key of this Science, has cost us the persistent research of almost all our literary life, because with our civilized natures we cannot at all imagine and can understand only by great toil the poetic nature of these first men.[643]

[641] NS 148; "We explain the particular ways in which [institutions] come into being; that is to say, their nature, the explanation of which is the distinguishing mark of science" (NS 346)
[642] FNS 381
[643] NS 34

Notwithstanding the impossibility of imagining the nature of the first men, Vico claims that it is possible to understand it. He lays down as premises that "because of the indefinite nature of the human mind, wherever it is lost in ignorance man makes himself the measure of all things,"[644] and "imagination is more robust in proportion as reasoning power is weak."[645] The first metaphysics is an "imaginative metaphysics" characterizing an early humanity that is "entirely immersed in the senses, buffeted by the passions, buried in the body."[646]

> So that, as rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them (*homo intelligendo fit omnia*), this imaginative metaphysics shows that man becomes all things by *not* understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*); and perhaps the latter proposition is truer than the former, for when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them.[647]

Among the many concrete historical discoveries Vico's principles enables him to reach, he determines that verse precedes prose, and that rhythmic tribal song comes before articulate language.[648] Poetic logic generally operates by metonymy, the use of a particular as a symbol or sign for a whole class of objects. In the earliest stages of poetic language, it also follows the

[644] NS 120
[645] NS 185
[646] NS 378
[647] NS 405
[648] Cf. NS 409, 460-461

principle of ascribing human qualities to inanimate objects: "they gave the things they wondered at substantial being after their own ideas, just as children do, whom we see take inanimate things in their hands and play with them and talk to them as though they were living persons."[649] The first language is wholly metaphorical, and "every metaphor so formed is a fable in brief."[650] As one scholar has correctly observed, Vico reverses Hobbes' severe judgment on the value of imagination and poetry.[651] The fables of true poets are true:

> These fables are ideal truths suited to the merit of those of whom the vulgar tell them; and such falsehood as they contain consists simply in failure to give their subjects their due. So that, if we consider the matter well, poetic truth is metaphysical truth, and the physical truth which is not in conformity with it should be considered false. Thence springs this important consideration in poetic theory: the true war chief, for example, is the Godfrey that Torquato Tasso imagines; and all the chiefs who do not conform throughout to Godfrey are not true chiefs of war.[652]

As reason develops through the practice of reflection, abstract ideas form that do not operate on the principle of metonymy. Nevertheless, language is the most concrete illustration of the dependence of later natures and institutions on their predecessors; abstract language depends on appropriating and extending a first vocabulary formed through poetic logic, just as all abstract words can be traced in one way or another to more visceral primary words: "the terms needed for

[649] NS 375
[650] NS 404
[651] Pern, "Imagination in Vico and Hobbes"
[652] NS 205

the refined arts and recondite sciences are of rustic origin,"[653] and a great many abstract terms are derived from the human body.[654] Before the Germans, Hamman, Herder and Grimm, Vico had identified etymology as a study capable of yielding profound anthropological and historical insight: "native etymologies are histories of institutions signified by the words in the natural order of ideas."[655] The most important principle here, and the most radical, is that rational logic rests permanently on a foundation of poetic logic. Reason and reflection can only reclassify and reassign what has been brought into existence by poetry. The evolution of the human mind from the particular to the general, and from sense to reason, is therefore reflected above all in language: "words are carried over from bodies and from the properties of bodies to signify the institutions of the mind and spirit."[656]

For all the many differences between human languages, the similarities are still greater. This leads Vico to a conception of "imaginative universals" or "poetic characters,"[657] which form a "universal etymologicon" or "mental dictionary for assigning origins to all the diverse articulated languages."[658] "There must be in the nature of human institutions be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it in as many diverse modifications as these same things have diverse aspects."[659] By

[653] NS 404
[654] Cf. NS 405
[655] NS 22
[656] NS 238; Many have noted the similarity of this principle to Spinoza's famous dictum of the parallelism between the attributes of extension and thought: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." (*Ethics*, 2.7) It should be noted that while Vico's claim is verbally similar and perhaps inspired in its formulation by Spinoza, Vico is not arguing that ideas as such parallel things. Rather, he is arguing that human ideas (those that are not "true" but only "certain") and human institutions undergo a parallel development in history.
[657] NS 209
[658] NS 145
[659] NS 161

reconstructing early history and the early mind through the study of language, Vico arrives at a "new critical art" capable of unlocking the original (largely social and political) meanings of the ancient myths by uncovering the truth of the "imaginative universals" in which the barbaric peoples thought and spoke.[660]

4.2 Properly Human Nature

Vico's historical account of human nature leans on this evolutionary history of language, which traverses a course parallel to that of other human institutions. Beginning with immediate sensation, passing through an intermediate series of the perceptions of *common senses*, human thought and language arrive at length at abstraction and reason.

> To sum up, a man is properly only mind, body, and speech, and speech stands as it were midway between mind and body. Hence with regard to what is just, the certain began in mute times with the body. Then when the so-called articulate languages were invented, it advanced to ideas made certain by spoken formulae [s.c. oaths and rituals]. And finally, when our human reason was fully developed, it reached its end in the true in the ideas themselves with regard to what is just, as determined by reason from the detailed circumstances of the facts.[661]

Civilization thus passes from the divine-poetic law of the first humans, to the heroic law, until at length "...on the ruins of the natural law of the heroic gentes, [in which justice was] estimated

[660] The ancient philosophers and critics had read myths either as allegories of natural processes or as the distorted histories of individuals. Vico reads them as social and political histories. (Cf. Burke, pp. 43-50)
[661] NS 1045

according to superiority in force, the natural law of the human gentes, as Ulpian named and defined it, [in which it is] estimated according to equality of right, was erected."[662] The properly human age is indeed an age of human equality, and it also accepts the principle of utility: "The natural equity of fully developed human reason is a practice of wisdom in affairs of utility, since wisdom in its broad sense is nothing but the science of making such use of things as their nature dictates."[663] Natural equity reflects the true human nature, and it is part of the revealed teaching of Christianity, but it came to be true only after "the philosophers... as the old men of the nations, founded the world of the sciences, thereby making humanity complete."[664]

Any apparent resemblance of Vico's idea of human equity with that of Hobbes and the other natural lawyers is deceptive. Vico's natural equity is a wisdom guided by things in their specificity, by a detailed examination of facts. Its virtue of humanity consists precisely its bending of the rigid forms of law inherited from the heroic law. This, too, is a fine balance; without authority, there is no law, and authority emerges only from the determinate and the *certain*. Nevertheless, we may say that Vico's idea of equity, like Aristotle's, entails a loosening of the rigor of legal definition. Properly human law "looks to the truth of the facts themselves and benignly bends the rule of law to all the requirements of the equity of the causes."[665] Whereas the heroic "men of limited ideas take for law what the words expressly say."[666] Certainly natural equity in Vico's understanding does not entail imposing an heroic legal rigor on the whole edifice of human knowledge, as Hobbes aspired to do.

[662] FNS 77
[663] NS 326
[664] NS 498
[665] NS 940
[666] NS 319

There is moreover an immediate human cost to the possession of "fully developed human reason" insofar as it weakens the imaginative and creative powers of poetry. When we "entered the age of reflection... the senses became less sharp."[667] The supreme achievements of poetry and reason do not coincide in the same age, or in the same man. "The theological poets were the sense and the philosophers the intellect of human wisdom."[668] The philosopher, especially in the age of reflection, faces therefore the particular occupational hazard of becoming *senseless*. Even at the very acme of our humanity in the age of greatest human perfection, human nature remains eternally and uncomfortably suspended between poetry and reason.

> For the study of metaphysics and of poetry are naturally opposed to each other; one purges the mind of the prejudices of youth, while the other immerses and subverts it in them; one resists the judgements of sense, while the other makes them its principle rule; one weakens the imagination, while the other requires a robust imagination... In short, one is studied in order that the learned, shorn of all passion, should know what is true in things... while the other strives, through the mechanisms of highly perturbed feeling, to induce the vulgar to act in accordance with the true, which they would certainly not do without such perturbed feeling. Hence, in the whole of time up to now, and in all the languages known to us, there has never been a single man who was at the same time a great metaphysician and a

[667] NS 707
[668] NS 779

> great poet, not, at least, of the very highest kind, of which Homer was the father and prince.[669]

Vico's natural equity is the projection of a fully developed human nature which has, at great length, and tutored by evolving institutions and painful historical struggles, become "intelligent and hence modest, benign, and reasonable, recognizing for laws conscience, reason and duty."[670] Conscience, which Hobbes derides as mere private judgement,[671] is for Vico composed of the secret accumulation of the historical experience of one's self, one's nation, and the whole of mankind. Men's consciousness or conscience [*coscienza*] is "what is hidden *in* them."[672] Natural equity is not therefore the naked product of reason's calculation of utility; it is that calculation rendered *certain* by a highly developed human culture suspended precariously between its initial inhumanity of pure sense and its final inhumanity of pure reason.

[669] FNS 314
[670] NS 918
[671] Cf. Lev., pp. 48, 223
[672] NS 342

5. The Succession of Regimes

The movement from sense to reflection, from poetry to philosophy, characterizes all human institutions, including the institution of government. "For governments must conform to the nature of the governed, inasmuch as the governments are born of the nature of the governed."[673] Vico recognizes three kinds of government: divine, heroic and human. The first divine governments are those "in which men believed everything was commanded by the gods."[674] Next come the aristocratic heroic governments, in which "all civil rights were confined to the ruling orders of the heroes themselves, and the plebeians, being considered of bestial origin, were only permitted to enjoy life and natural liberty."[675] Finally in "the human times,"

> human free popular states or monarchies develop. In the former the citizens have command of the public wealth, which is divided among them in as many minute parts as there are citizens making up the people who have command of it. In the second the subjects are commanded to look after their own private interests and leave the care of the public interest to the sovereign prince.

The movement from heroic to human government is a movement from the principle of aristocracy to that of human equality. The engine of this movement, described in vivid detail throughout the *New Science*, is a class war whose essence Vico summarizes as follows: "The weak want laws; the powerful withhold them; the ambitious, to win a following, advocate them; princes, to equalize

[673] NS 952; Cf. FNS 208
[674] NS 925
[675] NS 926

the strong with the weak, protect them."[676] In an historical numerology of government curiously similar to Hegel's, Vico expresses the metaphysical principle of this struggle as follows:

> Governments began with the one, in the family monarchies; passed to the few in the heroic aristocracies; went on to the many and the all in the popular commonwealths, in which all or the majority make up the body politic; and finally in civil monarchies return again to the one. By the nature of numbers we cannot conceive a more adequate division or another order than one, few, many and all, with the few, many and all retaining, each in its kind, the principle of the one... and, when we have passed the all, we must begin again with the one."[677]

It is "the plebs of the peoples, always and in all nations, have changed the constitutions from aristocratic to popular and from popular to monarchic..."[678] The rise of the plebs is also both cause and effect of a softening of human nature, for they introduce "love of ease, tenderness toward children, love of women, and desire of life."[679] An increasing gentleness characterizes modernity, as Montesquieu would note and explain by the spread of commerce. Vico believes this gentleness stems ultimately from the sense of weakness characterizing the *common sense* of mass man: "Later came the mild punishment practiced in the popular commonwealths commanded by the multitude, which, being made up of the weak, is naturally inclined to compassion."[680]

[676] NS 283
[677] NS 1026
[678] NS 1017
[679] NS 951
[680] NS 1022

One consequences of this general theory is that the first form of government is not monarchy, as had been thought, but heroic republics. (In applying this argument throughout the *New Science* to the details of Roman political history, Vico anticipates Mommsen and agrees with him on all essential points concerning the early republic.) A second consequence of the theory is that after passing from heroic aristocracy to the government of human equality, there is no return to aristocracy but through civilizational rupture. Like Tocqueville, Vico saw human equality as the defining providential fact of his age: "These last two forms of state, since both involve human governments [s.c. popular commonwealths and monarchies], readily admit of change from either to the other, but a return from either to an aristocratic state is almost impossible in civil nature."[681]

Of human governments, Vico rates monarchy the best: "From the brooding suspicions of the aristocracies, through the turbulence of popular commonwealths, nations come at least to rest under monarchies."[682] Vico admires in monarchy many of the same things Hobbes does. It is tranquil, prosperous, lawful, and allows the private sphere to flourish. There is less sedition and violence than under popular government. Monarchy forms a natural limit to the territorial rapaciousness of small popular commonwealths.[683] Finally, a monarch is the natural champion of the natural equity of his subjects.

> Now in free commonwealths if a powerful man is to become monarch the people must take his side, and for that reason monarchies are by nature popularly governed:

[681] NS 1087, Cf. NS 29
[682] NS 1025
[683] "Again, from the little districts which could be well governed by the aristocratic commonwealths, through expansion by the conquests to which the free commonwealths are disposed, we finally arrive at monarchies, which are beautiful and magnificent in proportion as they are big." (NS 1024)

> first through the laws by which monarchs seek to make their subjects all equal; then by that property of monarchies whereby sovereigns humble the powerful and thus keep the masses safe and free from their oppressions; further by that other property of keeping the multitude satisfied and content as regards the necessaries of life and the enjoyment of natural liberty; and finally by the privileges conceded by monarchs to entire classes (called privileges of liberty) or to particular persons by awarding extraordinary civil honors to men of exceptional merit (these being singular laws dictated by natural equity). Hence monarchy is the form of government best adapted to human nature when reason is fully developed.[684]

There is also a catholicism about true monarchs that Vico remarks, without either endorsing or rejecting. "For it is a vow characteristic of great monarchs to make one city of the whole world, as Alexander the Great used to say that for him all the world was a single city of which his phalanx was the citadel."[685] This drive to unite the world, to make of mankind one city, is therefore inherent to monarchy as such. The spiritual unity of mankind is also the teaching of Christianity, to whose inspiration alone Hobbes owed his project of "the study of mankind in the whole society of the human race."[686] And equality of human nature is the teaching of the mature Roman law, as formulated by Ulpian, which Vico finds so eminently humane in its equitable weighing of necessities and utilities.[687] All things, it would seem, conspire to unite mankind at the end of history.

[684] NS 1008
[685] NS 1023
[686] NS 179
[687] Cf. NS 320, 322, 575, 578,

But universal human and humane monarchy –the "universal homogenous state" as Alexander Kojève expressed it – is not the end of history and goal of providence. The cycle of history does not come to rest at the acme, but begins immediately to decline. According to Vico, properly human government never in fact conquers the whole of mankind, though it must eternally dream this dream. Rather, by the time human government might grow to the necessary proportions to effect world government, it must have long since lost its human *common sense* in its disunity. Providence has a remedy for this, too. Like all things mortal, truly human government includes the principles both of its composition, as well as those in which "resolution is finally reached."[688]

[688] FNS 381

6. The *Barbarism of Reflection*

The strengthening of the human power of reflection is one of the key indications that a people is well advanced toward humanity.[689] The habit of reflection, by enabling self-knowledge, allows men to become aware of their true and equal human nature, to humanize the inflexible and cruel demands of the heroic law, and to pursue instead what is most truly beneficial and useful according to reason and the detailed facts of the matter. Philosophy, which plays such a critical role in this process of humanization, also owes its birth chiefly to reflection. "For thus it was disposed by nature: that men first did things through a certain human sense, without attending to them, and then, much later, they applied reflection to them and, by reasoning about their effects, contemplated their causes."[690]

As we saw above, Vico maintains that the human mind finds itself reflected above all in civil institutions. Philosophical reflection, which teaches the equality of the true human nature, is consequently both cause and effect of the long process of democratization that begins with the first plebeian uprising of each heroic city: "metaphysics began to arise through political reflection on the laws of human times."[691] Solon, by inscribing the oracle "know thyself" in the public places of Athens had prepared the way for the subsequent flourishing of philosophy by "admonished the plebeians to reflect upon themselves and to realize that they were of a like nature with the nobles

[689] "The human mind is naturally inclined by the senses to see itself externally in the body, and only with great difficulty does it come to understand itself by means of reflection." (NS 236)
[690] FNS 26
[691] FNS 2243

and should therefore be made equal with them in civil rights."[692] In fact, it is the specifically democratic or human *common sense* that introduces abstract thought.

> Now, because laws certainly came first and philosophies later, it must have been from observing that the enactment of laws by Athenian citizens involved their coming to agreement in an idea of an equal utility common to all of them severally, that Socrates began to adumbrate intelligible genera or abstract universals by induction; that is, by collecting uniform particulars which go to make up a genus of that in respect of which the particulars are uniform among themselves.[693]

Philosophy's dependence on the existence of fully human political institutions is however only part of the story. As we have seen, all abstract thought depends ultimately on the vulgar wisdom of poetry and religion; "it was poetic wisdom itself whose fables provided occasions for the philosophers to meditate their lofty truths, and supplied them also with means for expounding them..."[694] In this sense, Homer and not the Athenian democracy was "the source of all Greek philosophies."[695] We have also seen that according to Vico philosophical praxis depends on the vitality of a sublimated heroic *common sense*, insofar as philosophy entails not only dispassionate reasoning, but also a highly refined sense of "philosophical heroism," which is conquest and command of the passions.

[692] NS 414
[693] NS 1040
[694] NS 901
[695] NS 901

Philosophy, in Vico's conception, is in essence a true reflection on the fictions and institutions arising from poetic metaphysics. Here we find the same modern conception of the artificiality and the sovereignty of human ideas and opinions that we have discovered in Hobbes. But unlike Hobbes, Vico believes that later human ideas – the abstract ideas of philosophical reflection – are formed from the materials of earlier ideas and preserve a vital relationship with them. By distancing us from the *common sense*, reflection threatens to become a source of social and political disintegration. It was no accident that ancient philosophy played just such a role when the Stoics and Epicureans (who "should be called monastic, or solitary philosophers"[696]) as well as the skeptics and atheists began to undermine the ancient *common sense*, weakening the bonds uniting the members of the political community, and making all agreement impossible. In one of the *New Science*'s most remarkable passages, Vico calls this final state of reflective disunity the "barbarism of reflection."

> But if the peoples are rotting in that ultimate civil disease and cannot agree on a monarch, and are not conquered and preserved by better nations from without, then providence for their extreme ill has its extreme remedy at hand. For such peoples, like so many beast, have fallen into the custom of each man thinking only of his own private interests and have reached the extreme of delicacy, or better of pride, in which like wild animals they bristle and lash out at the slightest displeasure. Thus no matter how great the throng and press of their bodies, they live like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit and will, scarcely any two being able to agree since each following his own pleasure or caprice. By reason of all this, providence decrees

[696] NS 130

> that, through obstinate factions and desperate civil wars, they shall turn their cities into forests and the forests into dens and lairs of men. In this way, after long centuries of barbarism, rust will consume the misbegotten subtleties of malicious wits that have turned them into beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than the first men had been made by the barbarism of sense, for the latter displayed a generous savagery, against which one could defend oneself or take flight or be on one's guard; but the former, with a base savagery, under soft words and embraces, plots against the life and fortune of friends and intimates. Hence peoples who have reached this point of premeditated malice, when they receive this last remedy of providence and are thereby stunned and brutalized, are sensible no longer of comforts, delicacies, pleasures, and pomp, but only of the sheer necessities of life. And the few survivors in the midst of an abundance of the things necessary for life naturally become sociable and, returning to the primitive simplicity of the first world of peoples, are again religious, truthful, and faithful.[697]

Barbarism, then, signifies solitude of spirit. The "barbarism of sense" is the original solitude of the first men who cannot communicate because they have no god in common. The "barbarism of reflection" is the solitude of souls returned to solitude through their emancipation from the social bonds of *common sense*, and who likewise cannot communicate for lack of a common god. In the latter barbarism, the elements of human community are resolved and return to the "chaos of the theological poets" which signified "the confusion of human seed."[698] This is part of the natural mortality of nations, and a definite limit to the ambition to impose human government on the

[697] NS 1106
[698] NS 1409

"whole society of the human race," as Alexander the Great and Hobbes, in their humanity, had aspired to do.[699] The barbarism of reflection, which is a social and political danger inherent to philosophy itself, thus summarizes the whole of Vico's answer to the natural lawyers and to the Hobbesian project of ideology.

Since the "barbarism of reflection" emerges only under the egalitarianism of truly human government, Vico's account of it is a retelling and correction of Plato's account of the corruption of democracy. But the "barbarism of reflection" is also a different and much broader notion. Corruption, according to Vico, consists in nothing else but the abandonment of the *common sense*. Yet even in the extremity of such corruption, the object of reflection remains this very *common sense,* nor can it be anything else.

> The reason for this is that so long as the peoples keep to good customs, they do decent and just things rather than talk about them, because they do them instinctively, not from reflection. But when they are corrupted and ruined, then, because within themselves they ill endure the sense of lacking such things, they speak of nothing but decency and justice... And because they feel themselves resisted by their religion... in order to console their errant consciences they use that same religion with impious piety to consecrate their wicked and nefarious actions.[700]

[699] NS 179
[700] NS 1406

Vico's examples of this practice, "those two dreadful human phenomena of which we read in the history of decadent Rome," are the marriage of the Emperor Claudius' wedded wife Messalina simultaneously to the actor, Gaius Silius, "with all nuptial sanctity and propriety," and the marriage of Nero to his freedman, Pythagoras, "with the sacrifices and auguries and all the other divine ceremonies."[701] Vico explains, as Plato did not, why at the close of the most humane and enlightened ages, strange and fragmentary religions and incongruous heroic identities reassert themselves. Success in the liberation from "the common sense of all mankind" is not man's fate. God "does not allow himself to be forgotten even in the most abandoned of nations," and "never rouses men to a more vigorous reflection than when they are most corrupt."[702]

[701] NS 1406
[702] NS 1406

Postscript

The Crisis of Liberal Progress

Between Hobbes and Vico, two foundational, competing branches of modern political thought emerge. These are the constructivist project of Hobbesian *artificial or ideological politics*, and, in reaction to it, the *modern philosophy of history*. Hobbes gives us "armed reason," the ideological mode of organizing politics on the basis of a universal egalitarian claim to rule. The Leviathan state is supposed to be immune to all natural decay, being upheld by an artificial and undecaying culture of reason. Vico's response to Hobbes and the natural lawyers rejoins that all authority has its roots in an unreflective and historical *common sense*. Thus, for instance, while Hobbes rejects aristocratic heroism as contrary to reason, Vico shows its necessary presence even in the most humane and democratic ages.

The contest between Hobbes and Vico, as we have seen, comes about within the broader context of a shared modern outlook, reflected in their agreement concerning the inaccessibility of nature and the artificiality of human ideas. Ideology and the modern philosophy of history are, respectively, forward and backward looking applications of these foundational modern principles, whose origins can be traced to the seventeenth century's revolution in natural science, and before that, to the doctrine of nominalism. But Hobbes and Vico each accomplish, as it were, only half of what is required by the liberal theory of progress. Vico uncovers the thought behind the developmental understanding of human nature, which is advanced in a different form in Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hamman and Herder. Hobbes provides the constructivist project that has iterations in Pufendorf and Locke, and again Rousseau.

Rousseau, and not Kant, is perhaps the first to be both an ideological and historical thinker, but he does not undertake to synthesize fully these two aspects of his philosophy. After he had written

Discourse on the Inequality of Man (1755) outlining his own philosophy of history and proposing a history of human nature and human ideas, he then penned *Social Contract* (1762) expounding his ideology and correcting Hobbes. Although the *Second Discourse* had undertaken to explain the origin of inequality, the *Social Contract* begins by not asking after the cause of inequality: "How did this transformation come about? I do not know. How can it be made legitimate? That question I believe I can answer."[703] In Rousseau, therefore, the philosophy of history and ideology, the two foundational streams of modern political thought, remain still distinct and separate.

It is otherwise with Kant, who combines these two approaches in the complex system of his theory of progress. Reason will at first operate providentially, on man and through nature, as Vico had argued. Subsequently, with the coming of Enlightenment, reason will operate through man on nature, as Hobbes had taught. Thus man is no longer conceived as his own artificer simply, as Hobbes asserted. For Kant he must first *become* his own artificer. This forms a basic principle shared by the liberal theory of progress and the other modern progressive ideologies. History, according to these theories, is characterized by a radical break or rupture, from unconsciousness to consciousness, and from the tutelage of nature, to self-mastery and mastery over human nature.

The guiding question of this study – why the liberal theory of progress was so successful at predicting the course of history, and then, subsequently, so unsuccessful at predicting its reversal – depends on the nature and mechanics of the transition between the two stages of history, and on the theories that explain each of these stages. This is not the place to indicate in greater detail precisely how Hobbes and Vico can shed light on the successes and failures of the specifically

[703] Rousseau, *Social Contract*, p. 49

Kantian liberal theory. This is a problem demanding its own study. We may conclude nevertheless with a brief reflection on the original dispute between Hobbes and Vico which has been the object of our study here.

Hobbes teaches that philosophy lacks power to enforce its truth without the force of the ideological state, while Vico teaches that the philosophers lack the ability and authority to engineer the state from mere reflective reason. For some time, in light of the success of the ideological state (in both its liberal and communist forms) it was possible to assume that Vico was mistaken. The current political crisis of liberal progress has made this position less tenable.

Any answer to our guiding question requires that we revisit Kant and his liberal successors in light of the dispute between Hobbes and Vico. Through these pioneering and disputing thinkers, the theoretical fault line running across the entirety of progressive liberalism comes into view. It is to be hoped that in this way, by returning to the origins, we and future generations can find a way to secure humane and just government, despite the increasingly manifest inadequacy of the liberal theory of progress.

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