

**“Against this *Empusa*:” Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and the *Book of Job***

**Gordon Hull – [ghull@iastate.edu](mailto:ghull@iastate.edu)  
PostPrint Version – not for quotation**

“*Quoy, dit-il, mon amy Job, parlerez-vous touiours, & n’écouteriez-vous aimais? pensez-vous que tout ce langage vous puisse bien iustifier deuant Dieu & deuant les hommes?*”  
- Pierre Maucorps (1637)<sup>1</sup>

Much has been made of Hobbes’s relation to scriptural texts. His heterodox readings of them in *Leviathan* in particular have led to a more or less common response: “Hobbes the Atheist.” This comprised a substantial portion of the response to his work in the seventeenth century,<sup>2</sup> and variations of the opinion continue to inform secondary work in this century, such as that of Strauss, who says that Hobbes undertakes exegesis “in order to shake the authority of the Scriptures themselves.”<sup>3</sup> Despite such established opinion, it seems that one needs a more nuanced approach to Hobbes’s relation to revealed religion. I will begin with an observation and a question. The observation is that, although Hobbes indeed spends much of his time heaping scorn upon scholasticism, and says many things apparently designed to offend theologians, that activity is not the same thing as attacking religion itself. Indeed, attacking scholasticism – Aristotelian versions in particular – in order to save religion was a commonplace in the Reformation.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Why, my friend Job, do you always speak, and never listen? Do you think that all this language is able to justify you well before God and before man?” *Paraphrase sur Job* (Paris, 1637), 92-93. Hobbes references are as follows: DC = *On the Citizen [De Cive]*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), by chapter and paragraph; EL = *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico [Elements of Law]*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: OUP, 1994), by chapter and paragraph; EW = *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1839), by volume and page; L = *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), by chapter and page. For all primary texts, I retain the original spelling and punctuation unless modernized in the edition cited.

<sup>2</sup> For evidence, see Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge: CUP, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1963), 71. Quentin Skinner produces a similar conclusion based on a reading of Hobbes’s technical use of rhetorical scorn; see his *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 198ff. Karl Schuhmann thinks the argument is strong enough that “Skinner’s disquieting results will render a new study of Hobbes’s theology obligatory” (“Skinner’s Hobbes,” *BJHP* 6:1 (1998), 115-125: 116). The following is a modest attempt at initiating such a study, or at least suggesting an avenue which it might take.

The question informs the direction of the present study and is: why did Hobbes name his longest contribution to political philosophy after the sea monster with which God humbled Job? In particular, is there more to this biblical reference than the thought that the Leviathan-state is to be a great one?

Before pursuing these issues, I would like to suggest that the reading according to which Hobbes's writing on Scripture and religion is mere exoteric dissimulation undertaken for political reasons requires (at least) three questionable assumptions. First, one would have to believe both that there is a necessary opposition between "science" and "religion" and that Hobbes saw this opposition. Second, that Hobbes's contemporaries called him an atheist proves nothing since the word was a general term of polemical abuse, applied variously to the Papacy, Luther, Calvin, *et. al.*<sup>4</sup> Calvinist writers also frequently called the Pope the "antichrist," though that presumably did not make him so.<sup>5</sup> Finally, one would have to hold that Hobbes the gifted rhetor expected anyone to notice his dissimulation and thereby correctly interpret his texts. This proposition in particular is extremely suspect in the context of a century where religious questions, even among the learned, centered on the correct application or interpretation of the word of God and not on whether to apply the word of God at all. True atheists and libertines produced utopian fictions, poetry, compilations of quotations from ancient authors, and anonymous pamphlets, but not self-authored demonstrative treatises.<sup>6</sup> Even supposing that such an atheistic audience did exist, it would have to have a means available to infer the "correct" meaning of Hobbes's text. However, since Hobbes's argument proceeds by demonstration, it is unclear what such a means would be. The

---

<sup>4</sup> Some of these considerations are developed in A. P. Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> The term is recurrent, for example, in Theodore de Bèze, *Du Droit des Magistrats sur leurs Sujets* [1574], intro. and Ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970). Note that Hobbes explicitly rejects this idea (L 42, 382).

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of libertine texts and strategies, see Tullio Gregory, "'Libertinisme Érudit,'" *BJHP* 6:3 (1998), 323-349.

vulgar are given Hobbes's repeated affirmation of Christianity and detailed scriptural exegesis, and those who understand demonstrations are shown that these interpretations comport with natural reason.<sup>7</sup> For Hobbes, from the Thucydides translation and its concern to find a "better sort of reader" onward, the problem is instead cast as one of political education, in order to inculcate the correct form of belief.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Hobbes's pronouncements about religion in *Leviathan* are indeed confusingly heterodox. Perhaps they are exoteric. *Leviathan*, however, as Quentin Skinner points out, is not just a book of philosophy. It is also a persuasive pamphlet.<sup>9</sup> If this is true, then we must take Hobbes seriously when he hopes that some sovereign will "convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice" (L 31, 254), *i.e.*, that the text serves a pedagogical function for those interested in "Morall Philosophy." As Strauss says:

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, readers of Hobbes's analytic discussion of the "actions of divine worship" (L 31, 251ff), beginning with the declaration that "there is but one Name to signifie our Conception of his Nature, and that is I am: and but one Name of his Relation to us, and this is *God*" (*ibid.*), would not have failed to notice how closely Hobbes tracks the first five commandments – a part of Scripture which even Hobbes concedes is authentic. He had earlier done the same for the second half of the commandments: "Equity, Justice, Mercy, and the rest of the Morall Vertues" can be derived from "Divine Laws, or Dictates of Naturall Reason, which Lawes concern either the naturall Duties of one man to another, or the Honour naturally due to our Divine Sovereign" (L 31, 248). That Hobbes inverts the usual order of discussion, placing the "duties of man to man" before those to God, is worth noticing.

<sup>8</sup> In other words, as Michel Malherbe suggests, "the procedure of Hobbes is analytic and not symbolic" ("*La Religion Materialiste de Thomas Hobbes*," in *Thomas Hobbes: Le Ragioni del Moderno tra Teologia e Politica*, ed. Gianfranco Borrelli. Naples: Morano Editore, 1990, 51-69: 62). Malherbe derives Hobbes's religious argument from his materialist philosophy. The emphasis is useful; however, Malherbe seems to me to push things too far in the direction of Spinoza, which causes him to endorse the Hobbesian separation between philosophy and "spiritualist" religion to the point of discounting the possibility that Hobbes has something to say to the spiritualists on their own terms. For a discussion of the "better sort of reader" as an English commonplace of the time, see Miriam M. Reik, "Thucydides Placuit," in *The Golden Lands of Thomas Hobbes* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1977), 36-52. See also Quentin Skinner's discussion in *Reason and Rhetoric in Hobbes*.

<sup>9</sup> See his "Conquest and Consent: Thomas Hobbes and the Engagement Controversy," in *The Interregnum: The Quest for Settlement 1646-1660*, ed. G. E. Aylmer (Archon Books, 1972), 79-98.

Those to whom such books are truly addressed are, however, neither the unphilosophic majority nor the perfect philosopher as such, but the young men who might become philosophers: the potential philosophers are to be led step by step from the popular views which are indispensable for all practical and political purposes to the truth which is merely and purely theoretical, guided by certain obtrusively enigmatic features in the presentation of the popular teaching – obscurity of the plan, contradictions, pseudonyms, inexact representations of earlier statements, strange expressions, etc. Such features do not disturb the slumber of those who cannot see the wood for the trees, but act as awakening stumbling blocks for those who can.<sup>10</sup>

If Hobbes's religious comments are exoteric, they should be studied for their "hidden" meaning. That does not entail that this hidden meaning is atheistic. Hobbes says that opinions about religion can be derived from reason, and that "as far as they [Scriptures] differ not from the Laws of Nature ... they are the Laws of God ... legible to all men that have the use of naturall reason" (L 33, 268). He also says that private worship of God "is in secret Free; but in the sight of the multitude, it is never without some Restraint, either from the Lawes, or from the Opinion of men" (L 31, 249). The moral reasoning of the multitude is corrupt, because influenced by external authority (in particular, of the Greeks – L 31, 254).<sup>11</sup> That is, the esotericism of *Leviathan* on matters of religion is about inducing correct reasoning about God. Job's reasoning, as we shall see, had the same problem as the Hobbesian multitude, and Job also suffered a life whose immediate prospects were nasty and brutish, if not short.

---

<sup>10</sup> Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago and London: U. Chicago Press, 1952), 36.

<sup>11</sup> See also *Liberty and Necessity* (which was published without Hobbes's permission), where Hobbes says both that "I must confess, if we consider the greatest part of mankind, not as they should be, but as they are ... I must, I say, confess that the dispute of this question will rather hurt than help their piety" and that the answer he provides "fortifies" piety because it is a higher opinion of God's power to say that he necessitated everything than not (EW IV, 256-257). As his discussions of commentaries and the Greeks make clear, scholastic-sounding disputes (even if demonstrably correct) are for Hobbes a threat to the piety of the masses: the political education question is one of how to get the masses to where they should be. *Leviathan*, with a broad intended readership, thus had to walk a very fine line. For a classic medieval statement of the difficulties of bringing philosophy to the corrupted multitude, see Averroes, "The Decisive Treatise, Determining what the Connection is Between Religion and Philosophy," trans. George N. Atiyeh, in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, eds. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1963), 163-187. Hobbes is of course not Averroes: for Hobbes, the vulgar are not categorically inferior to others by nature.

In any case, my intention in what follows is not to embark on a general discussion of “Hobbes and religion,” of “Hobbes and Scripture,” or even of “Hobbes and Job.” Rather, I want to remain as closely as possible with the relation between *Leviathan* and the biblical text its title invokes, and with the question of what associations that relation could be seen as designed to induce in a seventeenth-century audience. A relatively small but remarkably consistent literature points out that the Leviathan is a metaphor for the irresistible power of the sovereign civil state.<sup>12</sup> No doubt this is correct, but more can be said if the investigation is broadened to include other aspects of *Job*.

Two aspects of the medieval readings of *Job* need first to be considered.<sup>13</sup> First, on the Maimonidean reading, the opinion of Job was equated with that of Aristotle, and was said to represent the limits of human reason without provident revelation.<sup>14</sup> That is, Aristotle had attained the limit of human perfection, but equally showed that this human perfection was in and of itself inadequate. One required in addition divine providence in order to speak and act correctly and meaningfully. Job is therefore being corrected for hubris: not just for having the audacity to desire to speak with God, but for the presumption that his own wisdom and reasons could suffice to explain God’s will or to answer it. The point is to enable one to be open to a reception of providence, and thus to its correct understanding. At least the outlines of this reading were generally known in

---

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the original is still the best: see W. H. Greenleaf, “A Note on Hobbes and the *Book of Job*,” *Anales de la Cátedra F. Suárez* 14 (1974), 9-34. Hans-Dieter Metzger’s “*Die Bedeutung des Leviathan: Politischer Mythos oder politischer Begriff?*” *Hobbes Studies* 5 (1992), 23-52, is more structured but uses essentially the same texts to produce essentially the same results. In his “Leviathan as Metaphor,” *Hobbes Studies* 2 (1989), 3-9, Samuel L. Mintz adds a brief discussion of historical readings of *Job* and offers an explanation of how Hobbes can both oppose metaphor and entitle his book *Leviathan* (for my reading of this, see below).

<sup>13</sup> In the following discussion of the medievals, I am deeply indebted to Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), esp. 39-60 and 172-177. Primary source materials are my own provision.

<sup>14</sup> “The opinion attributed to *Job* is in keeping with the opinion of Aristotle” (*The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago and London: U. Chicago Press, 1963), III:23, 494; page references to this edition). Maimonides then speaks of the necessity of revelation with regard to final causes in terms of Elihu’s story about the “intercession of the angel” (III:23, 495).

seventeenth-century England; they were summarized by Symon Patrick in 1679 as follows:

The conclusion of Maimonides will be very evident (which is the best thing he says) that The scope of the Book is, to establish the great Article of Providence; and thereby to preserve us from error, in thinking that God's Knowledge is like our Knowledge; or his Intention, Providence, and Government, like our Intention, Providence, and Government. Which foundation being laid, nothing will seem hard to a man, whatsoever happens. Nor will he fall into dubious thoughts concerning God; whether he knows what is befallen us or no, and whether He takes any care of us. But rather he will be inflamed the more vehemently in the love of God; as it is said in the end of the Prophecy; Wherefore I abhor my self and repent in dust and ashes.<sup>15</sup>

The point of this reading, then is twofold: first, to establish the separation between the space of God and that of people, and second (and thereby) to allow people to leave to God what is rightfully God's. One should also not fail to note that the effect of this separation of God's and humanity's "Intention, Providence, and Government" is a strengthening of faith. Faith, in other words, will require leaving to God what is God's.

This is not a bad reading, and should be underscored: according to Maimonides, "Job said all that he did say as long as he had no true knowledge and knew the deity only because of his acceptance of authority, just as the multitude adhering to a law know it" (III:23, 492). However:

You will find that in the prophetic revelation that came to *Job* and through which his error in everything that he had imagined became clear to him, there is no going beyond the description of natural matters .... The purpose of all these things is to show that our intellects do not reach the point of apprehending how these natural things that exist in the world of generation and corruption are produced in time and of conceiving how the natural force within them has originated them. They are not things that resemble what we make (III:23, 496).

---

<sup>15</sup> *The Book of Job Paraphras'd* (London, 1679), 309-310.

Maimonides then explicitly underscores that human government should not be modeled on God: “the notion of his providence is not the same as the notion of our providence, nor is the notion of the governance of the things created by Him the same as the notion of our governance of that which we govern .... There is nothing in common between the two except name alone” (III:23, 496). This, he says, “is the object of the *Book of Job* as a whole” (III:23, 497). This recognition is a condition for the perfection of the intellect; its absence allows the presence of an “evil inclination” (III:22, 490) in someone. The initial attraction of this result to Hobbes, who thought that the commonwealth should be conceived as “like a creation out of nothing by human wit” (EL II.XX.1), that a failure of the principles of moral philosophy (broadly conceived) occasioned political catastrophes like the civil war, and that theologians used clever misrepresentations of words to incite the masses to sedition, should be apparent.<sup>16</sup>

Second, the Thomistic reading similarly emphasizes as the lesson of *Job* the need not to reason with God. St. Thomas in his *Expositio super Iob* thus says that the Book is to be able “by probable reasons [to] ... show that human affairs are governed by divine providence” (qt. in Dobbs-Weinstein, 53-54). In this St. Thomas expresses the limits both of the content and of the method of human reasoning: some sort of archic structuring of human reasoning by provident revelation is necessary for that reasoning to be rational as such. As Dobbs-Weinstein concludes, for Thomas, “Job’s opinion may have been correct, but it was an unexamined opinion and therefore neither was it assented to rationally nor could it result from the recognition of the limitations of human reason” (58). Here I wish to emphasize not so much how human reason fails before God, but how Aquinas emphasizes the need for ratiocination to be structured by something outside

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. also *Liberty and Necessity* on this separation: “that which men make amongst themselves here by pacts and covenants, and call by the name of justice, and according whereunto men are accounted and termed rightly *just* or *unjust*, is not that by which God Almighty’s actions are to be measured or called just, no more than his counsels are to be measured by human wisdom” (EW IV, 249).

of its terms.<sup>17</sup> Again, the purpose is to strike a blow against human hubris, and to establish the proper space for revelation.

Two of the dominant medieval scholarly opinions concerning *Job*, then, come to a remarkable agreement: the purpose of the text is to instruct humans in their own limitations, and thereby to enable them to accept the provident wisdom of God.<sup>18</sup> In popular English commentaries of the seventeenth century, this translated to a presentation of the text as offering instruction for enduring earthly sufferings with patience and without velleity. Hence, Patrick says that “one cannot read it seriously, and not be moved to resign the conduct of our selves and all that concerns us unto God’s most blessed will and pleasure; to wait patiently for him ... not to be disheartened by any trouble that befalls us, much less forsake our integrity: but still expect *the End of the Lord*” (sig. A<sub>3</sub>, 1v). The text thus became widely popular during the period immediately around the English civil war, and was often directly applied to it. Joseph Caryl, a non-conformist commentator who delivered a lengthy and popular series of expository lectures begins the printed version of them by declaring that “this Book of *Job* bears the *Image* of these times, and presents us with a resemblance of the past, present, and (much hoped for) future condition of this *Nation*.”<sup>19</sup> The lesson? “*Ye* have heard of the *Patience* of *Job*, and what *end* the Lord made: Could we but hear of the *Repentance* of *England*, all the world (I am perswaded) should *hear* and *wonder* at the *end*, which the Lord would make: Even such an *end* as he made for *Job*, if not better” (I, sig. A<sub>2</sub>, 1r).

---

<sup>17</sup> One is tempted to suggest an analog with Hobbes’s critique of the Royal Society’s presentation of “matters of fact.” Hobbes’s point is that there is no such thing as a self-validating “fact.” Cf. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> The extent to which providence - “grace” - is a necessary condition for human action was also part of the issue during the Jansenist controversy on the continent. On this controversy, see Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes us Nothing* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> *An Exposition, with Practical Observations Upon the Book of Job*, 2 vols. (London, 1677), I, sig. A, 1r.

George Hutcheson similarly spoke from Scotland: “it pleased the Lord ... to make the *Lecturing upon this Subject* not altogether unfruitful in a very difficult time.”<sup>20</sup>

Such an opinion was not confined to the English civil war, however, as *Job* was generally invoked to counsel forbearance in suffering. For example, the Calvinist Théodore de Bèze, whose commentaries from Geneva were quickly translated into English, begins with a gesture to “the troubles of these times and the daungers wherein this common wealth standeth,” and suggests that the state of affairs leaves him “therefore minded to expound the historie of *Job*.”<sup>21</sup> Henry Holland expressed the argument at the turn of the century:

The last great plague I was greatly comforted with this booke of God, and for that I iudged then, as yet I doe, that the euill Angels, sent from God, haue a speciall hand and working in the pestilence, as in sundry other incurable diseases, and euills of this life, warres, famine, &c. For this cause, then, desiring to comfort others with the same comforts, wherewith God comforted me, I collected these obseruations and meditations following.<sup>22</sup>

There was, in other words, a virtual consensus as to the outlines, if not the details, of why the *Book of Job* existed. That purpose was to instruct people in enduring their misfortune: as J. F. Senault’s translator put it in his introduction to the latter’s *Paraphrase sur Job*, the history is written toward “our Instruction, to shew us that the highest point of Valour is to suffer bravely.”<sup>23</sup> What, then, does the Hobbesian reference imply in a text which does not provide an exhortation as to the limits of human reason, but instead the declaration that human reason was entirely sufficient to govern

---

<sup>20</sup> *An Exposition of the Book of Job: Being the Sum of CCCXVI Lectures Preached in the City of Edenburgh* (London, 1669), sig. A<sub>2</sub>, 2v.

<sup>21</sup> Theodore Beza [Théodore de Bèze], *Iob Expounded, partly in manner of a Commentary, partly in manner of a Paraphrase*, trans. anon (Cambridge, [1589]), sig. A<sub>4</sub>, 3r.

<sup>22</sup> *The Christian Exercise of Fasting ... Hereunto also are added some meditations on the 1. and 2. chapters of Iob, to comfort and instruct all such as be afflicted with any crosse, either inwardly in minde, or outwardly in bodie* (London, 1596), sig. Q<sub>3</sub>, 2v.

<sup>23</sup> J. F. Senault, *A Paraphrase upon Job*, trans. anon. (London, 1648), sig. A<sub>2</sub>, v.

commonwealths, which were in fact entirely the creation of human reason, and whose purpose was the attainment of peace (and not the imitation of the Kingdom of God)?<sup>24</sup> As if that were not enough, the book's concluding sections said in no uncertain terms that Church politics were a substantial part of what was wrong with the world.

Let us begin by looking at what Hobbes himself has to say about Scripture in general, and about *Job* in particular. Both the contents and the interpretation of Scripture, of course, are ultimately settled by the sovereign for the attainment of civil peace. The focus on civil peace is central. Indeed, in a later text, Hobbes defends his position in *Leviathan* not only by arguing that heresy itself was originally used by Constantine to promote civil peace, but also that even if his opinion in *Leviathan* had been contrary to some Church doctrine, there was no civil peace to disturb (EW IV, 385-408). In general, Hobbes approaches scriptural interpretation as follows.<sup>25</sup> First, although he has a lot to say about the historical transmission of the Old Testament,

---

<sup>24</sup> This purpose, incidentally, is why Hobbes cannot be straightforwardly assimilated to Calvinism. As de Bèze writes, "*le principal office d'un bon Magistrat est d'employer tous les moïens que Dieu lui a donnez, à faire que Dieu soit recongneu et servi comme Roi des Rois entre les sujets que Dieu lui a commiz; et par consequent il doit employer pour cest effect tant son bras de la Justice contre les perturbateurs de la vraie Religion, qui ne donneront lieu aux admonitions et censures Ecclesiastiques, que son bras armé contre ceux, qui autrement ne pourraient estre empeschez. Pour de cela, nous avons raisons et tesmoignages expres de l'Escriture*" (*Du Droit des Magistrats*, 64). Thus, whereas Hobbes will prove through demonstration that the sovereign's only job is to obtain civil peace, de Bèze will prove through scriptural reference that the sovereign's ultimate purpose is to expound the Kingdom of God, of which he is the representative.

<sup>25</sup> For further discussion of the method of this exegesis, whereby biblical passages are read so as to fit within the authority structure of the sovereign, see Pierre-François Moreau, "*L'interprétation de l'Escriture*," in *Thomas Hobbes: Philosophie première, théorie de la science et politique*, ed. Yves-Charles Zarka and Jean Bernhardt (Paris: PUF, 1990), 361-379. See also Arrigo Pacchi, "Hobbes and Biblical Theology in the Service of the State," *Topoi* 7 (1988), 231-239. A particularly insightful discussion is J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 148-201. Pocock writes: "at the midpoint of the whole work [*Leviathan*], at the end of Book II and at the outset of Book III, Hobbes embarks on a new course. He states quite plainly that human existence, knowledge, morality and politics must be thought of as going on in two distinct but simultaneous contexts: the one of nature, known to us through our philosophic reasoning on the consequences of our affirmations, the other of divine activity, known to us through prophecy, the revealed and transmitted words of God" (159). See also G. A. J. Rogers, "Religion and the Explanation of Action in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Thomas Hobbes: Le Ragioni del Moderno tra Teologia e Politica*, 35-50, which provides evidence that Hobbes's argument is better if one assumes that his religious pronouncements are sincere.

including the possibility that the texts were lost and then re-established by Ezra “who by the direction of Gods Spirit retrieved them, when they were lost” (L 33, 265),<sup>26</sup> Hobbes displaces the question of the origin of scriptural texts to that of the origin of their authority as law (L 33, 267). He then argues that some parts of Scripture – those that “differ not from the laws of Nature” – are self-validating, “and carry their Authority with them ... but this is no other Authority, then that of all other Morall Doctrine consonant to Reason” (L 33, 268). Finally, he spends much of the remainder of *Leviathan* arguing that it is not necessary to interpret Scripture in a manner which undermines the civil sovereign’s authority.

Obedience to the civil sovereign, then, is God’s will, and obedience to God’s will is the purpose of Scripture: “in summe, the Histories and the Prophecies of the old Testament, and the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament, have had one and the same scope, to convert men to the obedience of God” (L 33, 267). Granted, there will be matters of interpretation and teaching, as he acknowledges at the end of the chapter, but the point should not be lost that the purpose of invoking Scripture is apparently to cause those who would otherwise not obey God’s will to do so. The purpose of all of Scripture, in other words, is consonant with that of *Job*, which suggests that for Hobbes, the purpose of invoking *Job* has to do with converting people to obedience of the civil sovereign.

Still, *Job* occupies somewhat of a unique place in all of this. Hobbes writes:

The book of *Job* ... seemeth not to be a History, but a Treatise concerning a question in ancient time much disputed, *why wicked men have often prospered in this world, and good men have been afflicted* (L 33, 263-264).

---

<sup>26</sup> On this point, see François Tricaud, “Note sur l’histoire de la révélation Mosaique selon le Léviathan,” *Archives de Philosophie* 60 (1997), *Bulletin Hobbes* IX, 3-5.

Two things should immediately be observed. First, Hobbes is reading *Job* as “moral treatise” (a “parable” in Maimonidean terms), and not as a history. This is particularly striking when one realizes that it is the *only* book of the Old Testament that he reads in this way. Hence, although he says that the Scriptures in general “are the true Registers of those things, which were done and said by the Prophets, and Apostles” (L 33, 266), he points out that *Job* “seemeth not to be a History” (L 33, 263-264).<sup>27</sup> The effect of this reading is that the biblical text is freed from any form of historical specificity: if it is such a treatise, it is meant to be true for whoever reads it. It automatically assumes, if one will, *meaning*, in the narrow sense of having a referent in the present tense, for its reader.<sup>28</sup> Second, the meaning of the text is to explain why the wicked prosper in the world, and why the good suffer. All of this suggests again that *Leviathan*’s invocation of *Job*, on Hobbes’s own terms, has to be providing an indication as to why wicked people prosper, and the proper understanding of that reason has to have something to do with committing one to a correct belief in God.

I would therefore like to advance the following thesis: although *Leviathan* is concerned to develop the mechanisms for a sovereign “creation out of nothing by human wit,” it is *at the same time* developing an immanent critique of scholastic politics, one that reproaches it with having had the hubris to say that it knows God’s way on earth.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the reference to *Job* works not just in the invocation of a giant monster, but also in the reminder of the limits of human knowledge. Paradoxically, and here he

---

<sup>27</sup> The distinction between history and treatise or parable is of course not absolute: “In a good History, the Judgement must be eminent; because the goodnesse consisteth, in the Method, in the Truth, and in the Choyce of the actions that are most profitable to be known” (L 8, 51). Hobbes had expressed the same opinion as early as 1628, in introducing his Thucydides translation: “the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future” (EW VIII, vii).

<sup>28</sup> I am carefully avoiding using the term “metaphor” here. See below for my thoughts on how Hobbes can at the same time despise metaphors and name his book after a sea monster (or crocodile, as the case may be).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. G. A. J. Rogers, “Religion and the Exploration of Action,” which points out that much of Hobbes’s *Thomas White’s De Mundo Examined* argues that “White is pretentious in his claims to knowledge of God” (43).

does indeed stand the medieval formula on its head, to understand the proper space for human knowledge, Hobbes will show that this knowledge has to be separated strictly from discussion about God. The latter, in the sense of demonstration, will be impossible.<sup>30</sup> The scope of the former will expand indefinitely, but this expansion will have been authorized by a gesture that leaves questions of divine providence outside of it. “Knowledge” involves the “Connexion” of definitions into “generall Affirmations, and of these again into Syllogisms” (L 7, 47); *i.e.*, it is nomological or rule-governed.<sup>31</sup> These “dictates of *Naturall Reason*” are one of the ways by which “God declareth his Lawes.” Of the other two, revelation and prophecy, the former provides no universal laws because “God speaketh not in that manner, but to particular persons, and to divers men divers things;” the latter was given as “Positive Lawes” specifically to the Jewish people (L 31, 246). Anything involving the interpretation of pronouncements of God, then, is categorically separate from the exercise of natural reason. Thus, if Hobbes can describe political philosophy in terms given by natural reason, he will have established its autonomy from revelation and prophecy. If natural reason dictates that theologians can speak only when authorized by the sovereign, he will also have established the priority of the civil order over the theological.

To establish a secular politics requires removing the political authority of the Church. That much is evident. Indeed, such an undertaking had been attempted with express anti-Papal intentions as early as 1324, in Marsilius of Padua’s *Defensor Pacis*. The point here is that *Leviathan* does not just provide a different basis for politics than the Church and repeat (almost verbatim) many of the arguments of the *Defensor Pacis*. *Leviathan* also generates an argument that shows the inappropriateness of *any* scholastic

---

<sup>30</sup> Hobbes explicitly says it is wrong to assign positive attributes to God; *cf.* L 31, 250. *Cf.* also the *Historical Narration*, EW IV, 394-395. Note that demonstration *that* God is, is conceptually distinct from demonstrations about *what* God is.

<sup>31</sup> *Cf. De Corpore*: Philosophy is knowledge by “true ratiocination,” by which “I mean computation.” Hence, “all ratiocination is comprehended in these two operations of the mind, addition and subtraction” (EW I, 3).

politics from within the space of scholastic politics itself. It does so by locating a commonly discussed text - indeed, as we shall see, a text sometimes used as evidence against the pretensions of scholastic science - and then redescribing that text in terms that legitimate an anti-scholastic understanding of politics. *Leviathan* thus performs its own separation from scholastic politics, by standing both within the space of that politics, and by constructing a new political apparatus outside it. The unifying space that bridges this separation is the *Book of Job*. This “immanent critique” of scholasticism will not be a demonstration. Indeed, on Hobbes’s terms, that is impossible. It will, however, use the tools of rhetorical persuasion of which Hobbes was an undisputed master, and it will take up the scholastics on their own terms: biblical exegesis.<sup>32</sup>

To develop this point, let us recall the invocation from the *Epistle Dedicatory to De Corpore*. There, Hobbes speaks of the *Empusa* - the demon - of religious philosophy mixed with Aristotle, and says:

Against this *Empusa* I think there cannot be invented a better exorcism, than to distinguish between the rules of religion, that is, the rules of honouring God, which we have from the laws, and the rules of philosophy, that is, the opinions of private men; and to yield what is due to religion to the Holy Scripture, and what is due to philosophy to natural reason (EW I, x-xi).

Here I wish to emphasize the political implications of this passage: the best way to end the confusion of church politics is to provide a clear separation between theological and political orders. Conflating these two orders - the “Kingdome of God” and the “present Church” - says Hobbes in *Leviathan*, is “the greatest, and main abuse of Scripture, and to which almost all the rest are either consequent, or subservient” (L 44, 419). Enacting such a separation forms the structure of much of the *Leviathan*’s discussion (in particular

---

<sup>32</sup> To those who object to the propriety of such a reading, I would add that the location of argument (*invenio*), usage of commonplaces and their redescription were all stock components of Renaissance and English understandings of persuasion. See Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric, passim*.

of Cardinal Bellarmine), which takes the following form: a given person will present an argument for ecclesiastical power, citing the Old Testament. Hobbes will then locate that text as historically unique, say something to the effect of “Moses really was the civil power then,” and then conclude that the cited passage not only does not support establishing the power of the present Church, but actually refutes it, since it shows the historical specificity of the only time that Church had actual temporal power.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Hobbes will begin his discussion “Of a Christian Commonwealth” with the observation that in such a kingdom, “there dependeth much upon Supernaturall Revelations of the Will of God” (L 32, 255). He then proceeds to invoke the medieval dictum about faith seeking understanding: our “talents” of senses, experience, and natural reason are “not to be folded up in the Napkin of an Implicite Faith, but employed in the purchase of Justice, Peace, and true Religion” (L 32, 255-256).<sup>34</sup> The proper space of human reason, then, is to be located between the hubris of scholastic politics and the dismissal of all religion. The conclusion involves a method of reading Scripture:

Therefore, when anything therein written is too hard for our examination, wee are bidden to captivate our understanding to the Words; and not to labour in sifting out a Philosophicall truth by Logick, of such mysteries as are not comprehensible, nor fall under any rule of naturall science. For it is with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect (L 32, 257).

The digestive language will recur later, as commentary on Job’s speech will emphasize its failure to nourish. For now it is worth emphasizing that Hobbes is not here saying

---

<sup>33</sup> Again, these arguments appear as early as Marsilius of Padua’s *Defensor Pacis*. See note 42, below.

<sup>34</sup> He follows with an invocation of the same argument used by Pascal to demonstrate the compatibility between science and religion: “For though there be many things in Gods Word above Reason; that is to say, which cannot be by naturall reason either demonstrated, or confuted; yet there is nothing contrary to it; but when it seemeth so, the fault is either in our unskillful Interpretation, or erroneous Ratiocination” (L 32, 256). For Pascal’s position, see the second section of Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes us Nothing*.

anything surprising. Caryl, for example, says that “surely it is far better to speak or hear *five words* of Scripture with our understandings, then *ten thousand words*, yea, then the whole Scriptures, when we understand them not” (introduction, unnumbered). At the same time, Caryl will add that simply compounding interpretations is not itself enough, that “the teachings of the Spirit, the teachings of God himself, are chiefly to be looked after, and prayed for, that we may know the mind of the Spirit, the Will of God in Scripture” (*ibid.*). Caryl’s understanding of the purposes of exegesis thus turn out to be broadly consonant with those Hobbes establishes. For example, in explaining his own remarks above, Hobbes says that “by the Captivity of our Understanding, is not meant a Submission of the Intellectual faculty, to the Opinion of any other man; but of the Will to Obedience, where obedience is due” (L 32, 256).

One is thus looking for a middle position between excessive textual commentary for its own sake, and blind faith. This position requires both a use of reason and a recognition of its limitations; one requires “Trust, and Faith reposed in him that speaketh, though the mind be incapable of any Notion at all from the words spoken” (L 32, 256). On the one hand, Hobbes has to establish the authority of the biblical text as bearing the authentic word of God, and on the other, he needs to develop a mechanism for determining whether someone who claims to speak in the name of God actually does so. The early and detailed discussion of the question of false prophets, in other words, is made necessary by the logic of reading Hobbes employs. In both cases, the effect will be the same: the scriptural authority is to be established, and since there are no legitimate contemporary prophets, it will be necessary to subordinate questions of scriptural exegesis (*i.e.*, of the meaning of this authority) to the will of the sovereign.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> “It is the Civil Sovereign, that is to appoint Judges, and Interpreters of the Canonick Scriptures; for it is he that maketh them Laws” (L 42, 378). The problem of false prophets may be seen as the theological analogue to the political problem posed by Machiavelli’s declaration that a Prince need only appear, rather than be, devout. This connection appears readily in Innocent Gentillet’s *Anti-Machiavel* [1576], ed. Edward Rathé (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968), esp. II.1-2. The connection may thus also be seen as exemplary of the general breakdown of Renaissance presuppositions about the veracity of

The case of establishing scriptural textual authority is largely done with reference to the texts themselves. Initially, we should note that this underscores the point that the *Leviathan* is intended for a “Christian Commonwealth,” since this procedure will only work if one (already) believes that the Bible is the revealed word of God. As noted above, however, Hobbes attempts to show that some of God’s scriptural laws are derivable from reason. On Hobbesian terms, one should at least be receptive to the teachings of the Bible, because at least some of them can be drawn from reason. That is, part of the strategy is to render atheism incoherent: as with Anselm’s fool, the Hobbesian atheist who says “*in corde suo, deus non sit*” is “*stultus et insipiens*,” able to speak of but not to understand the non-existence of God. Specifically, Hobbes makes the argument from cause: “by God, is understood the cause of the World” (L 31, 250), and “it is impossible to make any profound enquiry into naturall causes, without being enclined thereby to believe there is one God Eternall; though they cannot have any idea of him in their mind, answerable to his nature” (L 11, 74). Hobbes also specifically invokes the biblical fool, who in *Leviathan* “hath said in his heart there is no such thing as Justice.” Hobbes adds that “from such reasoning as this, Successful wickednesse hath obtained the name of Vertue” (L 15, 101). To begin an answer to the question of *Job*, then, one reason why the wicked prosper in the world is Machiavellianism. Another is atheism: not only is it irrational, but “they who believe ... that there is a God that governeth the

---

phenomena which present themselves for inspection. Ambivalence on this topic ran very deep: De Bèze, for example, both addresses the problem of a tyrant masquerading as a king in his *Du Droit des Magistrats* and asserts that such a tyrant will be “*toute manifeste*.” Hence, his text raises the problem of the transformation of a king into a tyrant, but assumes that in the case of a tyrant against whom revolt would be justified, the tyrant’s status will be recognizable *eo ipso*. The former question, of course, undermines the possibility of the latter assumption (the point, after all, being to notice that the ruler’s self-presentation as “king” is false). In de Bèze’s text, this tension is manifest in a series of stipulations and qualifications designed to ensure that revolt is *only* legitimate when the tyranny is... “*toute manifeste*.” Hobbes points out the problem in *De Cive*: after citing “certain Theologians in our own day” who believe that “tyrannicide is licit,” he asks: “If he holds power rightly, the divine question applies: *who told you that he was a Tyrant, unless you have eaten of the tree of which I told you not to eat?* For why do you call him a Tyrant whom God made a King, unless you, a private person, are claiming for yourself a knowledge of *good and evil*” (DC XII.3).

world, and hath given Praecepts, and propounded Rewards and Punishments to Mankind, are Gods Subjects; all the rest, are to be understood as Enemies (L 31, 246). Elsewhere, he explicitly calls atheists fools (DC XIV.19). Indeed, the atheist seems to suffer like Job: “by denying the Existence, or Providence of God, men may shake off their Ease, but not their Yoke” (L 31, 245).<sup>36</sup> This shows again Hobbes’s close connection to medieval argument, where the point was to understand one’s faith. <sup>37</sup>

Hobbes’s exegesis begins by producing an “original” text in Greek: “after the conquest of Asia by Alexander the Great, there were few learned Jews, that were not perfect in the Greek tongue. For the seventy Interpreters that converted the Bible into Greek were all of them Hebrews” (L 33, 266). Thus, from Hobbes’s point of view, questions of the limits of his own biblical philology (he read Greek but not Hebrew) are resolved by the establishment of an authoritative text in a language he could read.<sup>38</sup> Given such a text, Hobbes is able to argue that “the foundation of all true Ratiocination, is the constant Signification of words; which in the Doctrine following, dependeth not (as in naturall science) on the will of the writer ... but on the sense they carry in the Scripture” (L 34, 269). We should note that this is Hobbes the nominalist, Hobbes who demands that science proceed with careful and exhaustive definitions, and whose proofs in *De Corpore* only establish their own “possibility.” The divine and natural orders are two different orders of discourse, and this entails in each case the selection of an

---

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Maimonides, who reports that Job’s first opinion on his misfortune is that “this happening proves that the righteous man and the wicked are regarded as equal by Him, may He be exalted, because of the contempt for the human species and abandonment of it” (*Guide* III:23, 491).

<sup>37</sup> Hobbes also produces a distinctly Anselmian-sounding understanding of God when responding to Descartes’s “ontological proof:” “to say that God is *infinite* is the same as saying that he belongs to the class of things such that we do not conceive of them as having bounds. It follows that any idea of God is ruled out.” *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), II, 131. For the Anselm, see *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, trans. and intro. M. J. Charlesworth (Notre Dame and London: U. Notre Dame Press, 1965). I of course do not want to be taken as assimilating Hobbes to Anselm. The point is that Hobbes is sufficiently far from atheism that Cartesian doubt seems unintelligible to him.

<sup>38</sup> I mention this point because it has caused concern. Pacchi observes that Hobbes used the Greek text “for double checking, even when philological research would have required cross-referencing to a particular term as expression in the Hebrew” (“Hobbes and Biblical Theology,” 231).

appropriate method.<sup>39</sup> In learning about divine matters, the question is one of interpretation of the will of God. Proliferate interpretations are to be guarded against on the one hand by reference to the biblical text, and on the other hand by the subordination of these interpretations to the will of the temporal sovereign.

Although not identical, the procedure is nonetheless analogous to that of political science. There, the careful use of definitions and an original contract establish a well-regulated discursive space (through definitions and an original contract) in which political science could be written; one then regulates the production of meanings within that space by application of the rules which govern it. Here, the space is being cleared to allow such an understanding of politics to function in harmony with scriptural readings.<sup>40</sup> The result of this harmonization is that politics is reserved for human ratiocination and is not to be contaminated by the attempt to establish a non-secular authority. Hence, the Church's role is to persuade, not to rule: "the Kingdome of Christ is not of this world: therefore neither can his Ministers (unlesse they be Kings,) require obedience in his name" (L 42, 341) and "the Office of Christs Minister in this world, is to make men Beleeve, and have Faith in Christ. But Faith hath no relation to, nor dependence at all upon Compulsion, or Commandment; but onely upon certainty, or probability of Arguments drawn from Reason, or from something men beleeve already" (L 42, 342).

The consequence is that the civil power is to decide doctrinal issues, as Hobbes says both repeatedly and in no uncertain terms: "And first, we are to remember, that the

---

<sup>39</sup> Admittedly, this separation is not as apparent in Hobbes as in other seventeenth-century thinkers. However, the separation of biblical exegesis as a way of understanding final causes and natural science as a way of understanding mechanical causes was commonplace. Hobbes at least seems to echo it here. On this separation, see Robert Markley, *Fallen Languages: Crises of Representation in Newtonian England, 1660-1740* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Hence, the direct political requirements of a Christian believer are minimal: simply to believe in the divinity of Christ. Hobbes grants a right of conscience when issues of expression of this emerge, as in his famous example of being compelled to express submission to Allah in an Islamic country. See also: "internall Faith is in its own nature invisible, and consequently exempted from all humane jurisdiction; whereas the words and actions that proceed from it, as breaches of our Civill obedience, are injustice both before God and Man" (L 42, 360).

Right of Judging what doctrines are fit for Peace, and to be taught the Subjects, is in all Common-wealths inseparably annexed (as hath been already proved cha. 18) to the Sovereign Power Civil, whether it be in one Man, or in one Assembly of men” (L 42, 372). The argument of Chapter 18 is that “whereas some men have pretended for their disobedience to their Sovereign, a new Covenant, made, not with men, but with God; this also is unjust: for there is no covenant with God, but by mediation of some body that representeth Gods Person; which none doth but Gods Lieutenant, who hath the Sovereignty under God” (L 18, 122).<sup>41</sup> At last we come to the crux of the issue, and while it is perhaps obvious why for political reasons Hobbes presents his doctrine, we are now in a position to articulate some theological reasons as well, reasons which exactly serve to critique the assumptions of scholastic politics.

First, if the role of humanity on earth is to imitate the will of God (the medieval *imitatio dei*) and to attempt to recreate God’s kingdom on Earth, Hobbes has interpreted this to mean that the civil sovereign is to have all authority and power.<sup>42</sup> This is because only the Scripture is relevant in determining God’s will, and the only scriptural example of a sovereign ruler acting with divine authority, Moses, is a case of a sovereign ruler who *then* received the word of God. Hobbes is very clear on this point: “I find the KINGDOME OF GOD, to signifie ... a *Kingdome properly so named*, constituted by the Votes of the People of Israel in a peculiar manner; wherein they chose God for their King by Covenant made with him” (L 35, 280; emphasis in original). Jesus and the Apostles did not pretend to be civil sovereigns, and any current aspirants to that title have to first

---

<sup>41</sup> Again, this categorical denial of a right to rebel in the name of God separates Hobbes from the Calvinists. See the notes 24 and 35, above, on De Bèze. This expression caused a number of Hobbes’s critics, e.g., Clarendon, to accuse him of covertly supporting Cromwellianism, since Cromwell was in power when *Leviathan* was written.

<sup>42</sup> As I suggested earlier, this position (and much of the preceding) can be found in Marsilius of Padua. Marsilius insists on the “numerical unity” of government in *Defensor Pacis (The Defender of the Peace, Vol. II: The Defensor Pacis*, trans. Alan Gewirth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956)), I.17; coercive power is denied the Pope at II.4 *et passim*.

prove that they are not false prophets - which task, as Hobbes sets it, is an impossible one. Hence the conclusion:

In short, the Kingdome of God is a Civill Kingdom; which consisted, first in the obligation of the people of Israel to those Laws, which Moses should bring them from Mount Sinai ... and which Kingdome having been cast off, in the election of Saul, the Prophets foretold, should be restored by Christ; and the Restauration whereof we daily pray for when we say in the Lords Prayer *Thy Kingdome come*; and the Right whereof we acknowledge, when we adde, *For thine is the Kingdome, the Power, and Glory, for ever and ever, Amen*; and the Proclaiming whereof, was the Preaching of the Apostles; and to which men are prepared, by the Teachers of the Gospel (L 35, 284).

Hobbes's critique of church politics, in other words, is an *immanent* one. The argument does not stop here, however. At issue in the difference between the Hobbesian argument and that of the scholastic politics it critiques is an issue of the possibility of knowing the will of God, since the possibility of ordering present kingdoms according to the (previously determined) will of God requires that one be able to know what that will of God is in the interpretation of concrete, political situations. This latter clause is important because it highlights that for Hobbes the point of having politics in the first place is purely about this life, whereas for most of the medievals the larger issue is preparation for eternal life. That *telos* provides a positive determination of the appropriate political activity in this life; in Hobbes, the absence of such positive determination is what enables political and natural science.

Thus, Hobbes will now undertake to critique the idea that scriptural texts have a politically relevant meaning prior to their interpretation by the sovereign. This is the importance of the reference to *Job*, the book which, when read (as Hobbes does) as a moral treatise, stands for the entirety of the biblical text. As Caryl puts it, "in a word, it is a *Summary*, a *Compendium* of all Knowledge, both Humane and Divine, both concerning our selves, and concerning God" (introduction, unnumbered). And, "This Book is written for this especially, to teach us the *Soveraignty of God and the submission*

of the creature” (*ibid.*). Or, already noted, all the Scriptures are “to convert men to the obedience of God” (L 33, 267).<sup>43</sup> Hobbes will now show that Church politics is a direct contravention of God’s will. In what follows we should bear in mind the Maimonidean equation of Job’s incorrect opinion with that of Aristotle, and which opinion, according to Patrick, has had its “several Assertors since, who have propagated them among their Scholars” (307).

In a well-known passage, Hobbes concludes his description of the civil commonwealth with a direct invocation of the biblical Leviathan. He writes:

Hitherto I have set forth the nature of Man, (whose Pride and other Passions have compelled him to submit himselfe to Government;) together with the great power of his Governour, whom I compared to *Leviathan*, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of *Job*, where God, having set forth the great power of *Leviathan*, calleth him King of the Proud (L 18, 221).

In other words, Hobbes’s reader is invited to think of *Job* when reading the text.<sup>44</sup>

Let us follow some contemporary commentaries on the biblical text to develop a better sense of the way Hobbes’s invocation fits within its environment.<sup>45</sup> First, according to Caryl, “several render it, according to the strict words of the Hebrew, *He is a King over all wild beasts* .... Now, because those wild ones, of one kind or another, are proud, and prouder than tame beasts, therefore we render, *He is a King over all the children of pride*” (II, 2276). The invocation of wildness thus brings to mind the

---

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Maimonides: *Job* “is not a parable like all others, but one to which extraordinary notions and things that are the mystery of the universe are attached. Through it great enigmas are solved, and truths than which none is higher become clear” (*Guide* III:22, 486).

<sup>44</sup> We can immediately put to rest concerns over whether or not Hobbes is contradicting his own injunction against “metaphors,” since in this case Leviathan does not function as a metaphor. The latter occurs when one uses words “in other sense than that they are ordained for, and thereby deceive others” (L 4, 26). Here, the Leviathan is being invoked exactly as God intended, as a parable, as a warning against human pride.

<sup>45</sup> Although I have been and will be quoting a number of texts, Caryl’s in particular, I am not trying to assert that Hobbes read Caryl or attended his sermons. Such an assertion would at any rate be unprovable. I am selecting Caryl as exemplary of seventeenth-century English readings in order to help us understand what images an invocation of *Job* might bring to mind for Hobbes’s reading public.

Hobbesian state of nature, and the biblical reference serves as evidence for the Hobbesian assertion that the Leviathan state will be King over the “brutish” state of nature.<sup>46</sup> It also thereby suggests what is consistently Hobbes’s argument throughout his life: that something like his state of nature could be the consequence of following church politics.

With regard to the entire chapter of *Job*, in which *Leviathan* is revealed, Caryl writes:

Thus far concerning state and parts of the whole Chapter, in which the Lord hath this general scope, even to humble *Job* yet more, As if he had said, *That thou, O Job, maist see and be convinced of thy presumption in pleading with me; look upon Leviathan, consider whether thou art able to deal with him; if not, how canst thou deal with me who made him, and can both master and destroy him when I will?* Thus the Lord makes his triumph over creatures mightier in outward force then man, to the intent all men may know, they shall certainly fall, and be utterly confounded, if they lift up themselves against God (II, 2212).

On this reading, in other words, the reason for invoking Leviathan is not just to demonstrate that something is powerful, it is to *remind Job that ratiocination with God is foolish* and that one should not ask God for reasons which would explain immediate happenings on earth. God presents Leviathan to Job, in other words, to reassert the hierarchy between God (and Leviathan) and humanity.<sup>47</sup> The parenthetical insertion of Leviathan into that hierarchy is what Hobbes exploits in his text, thereby both establishing absolute power in the civil sovereign, and at the same time strongly

---

<sup>46</sup> It also calls to mind Strauss’s thesis about the importance of vanity as “the final reason of incapacity to learn, of prejudice and superstition, as well as of injustice” and that “the matter of the fundamental prejudices which bar the way to science are phantasmata of sight and hearing; but that man assents to these phantasmata, that man believes in them, is the result of vanity” (*Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 26). One should perhaps underscore that for Hobbes the manifest sign of the failure of scholasticism is its belief in separated essences and ghosts. Strauss cites the following passage; others could be adduced: “to say he [God] hath spoken to him [someone] in a Dream, is no more then to say he hath dreamt that God spake to him ... and such dreams as that, from selfe conceit, and foolish arrogance, and false opinion of a mans own godlinesse, or other vertue, by which he thinks he hath merited the favour of extraordinary Revelation” (L 32, 257).

<sup>47</sup> Caryl: one should observe that “It is of God that the Creatures are disposed into several ranks and degrees, that one exceeds and excels another” (II, 2273).

suggesting that the practitioners of Church politics are themselves in the position of Job, foolishly attempting to reason with God. We shall return to the reference to Job's attempt to reason with God, but for now it will suffice to underscore the force of the reminder.

On the one hand, then, Leviathan is the monster who tames the children of pride and represents a compact sovereign state organized according to human reason. But at the same time, it functions as a critique of church politics as a hubristic proliferation of meaningless words. The invocation of Leviathan also produces a rhetorical shift. At the same time as the entire rhetoric of the period is being increasingly dominated by voyages of discovery,<sup>48</sup> and in structural response to the Baconian invitation to think of utopia as Atlantis, the Hobbesian apparatus moves the literary space of politics from land to sea.<sup>49</sup> Thus, according to Hutcheson, Job is first humbled by the land creature Behemoth but then by the more powerful whale Leviathan (sig. Eeee<sub>1</sub>, 1v). The lesson of this directive to think of the sea, says Caryl, is that "tis wonderful to consider, the huge multitude which is of every kind of fish in the Sea. The kinds are exceeding many, and there are innumerable of every kind" (II, 2216). In this sense, the government of the sea is imagistically tied to the government of the state of nature: it is the government of the multitude, and by apparent general context, it is of wondrous prosperity, and of a qualitatively different order than that which came before.<sup>50</sup> So too, only the Leviathan is fit to govern the multitude, not Job and his church politics: "A hook and a line may serve the turn, to draw up any small and some great fishes, but they will not serve turn to draw up a Leviathan. *There must be a proportion between the instrument and the work, else*

---

<sup>48</sup> See Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1982), *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> The position that Leviathan is a crocodile was somewhat of a minority one. Caryl insists that it is the sea monster (II, 2214). Patrick reads it as a crocodile, but also insists on the historical dating of the scriptural text (sig. A<sub>4</sub>, 4v); De Bèze does the same. The reading of Leviathan as a fantastic whale seems to go in hand with reading the text as a parable. Maucorps (in 1637) says that the Leviathan is an allegory for the devil (345), although Mintz suggests this reading drops out by mid-century.

<sup>50</sup> Caryl: "Therefore the wonderful, even preternatural strength of *Leviathan* appears in this; that he being a Water Animal, should yet be both bigger and stronger than any beast of the Earth" (II, 2275). That Leviathan is shut up in the sea then is a gesture to the need for a complete switch in epistemic orders.

nothing can be done in a natural way” (2216, emphasis mine). The governing of the multitude cannot be accomplished without the Leviathan, which is to say that only the instrument of the Leviathan state has the appropriate epistemic apparatus for political science.

The lesson for the proper ordering of church politics and the civil sovereign follows directly from God’s rhetorical question about whether the Leviathan will make covenant with Job. Caryl explains that “as he will not speak thee fair, nor endeavour to soften thy heart towards him, by speaking soft words to thee, were he in thy power, so he will never enter covenant with thee, to become thy sure friend, much less thy faithful servant” (II, 2219). The state is not obliged to flatter religion, and according to the word of God, it is not to be subordinate to it. In reading the line about being cast down, Caryl offers the following exegesis:

As if God had said, thou hast been high in thy expectations, and highly privileged in thy enjoyments, having had the Gospel preached to thee; but thou shalt not only fall down, but thou shalt be thrust into hell, with a kind of violence. When the Lord in the text saith, *Shall not one be cast down?* We are to understand it of a casting down by the strong impression of astonishment and fear, of dread and trouble, seizing upon the mans spirit who comes near Leviathan (II, 2228).

The message is clear: Church politicians deserve to be in hell. Because politics is a worldly concern, attempting to invoke the will of God in its practice is in itself a hubristic act which needs to be corrected by reminding people that God’s place is above the earth.

An invocation of the Leviathan, then, is also an invocation of the reason the Leviathan appears in *Job*. That reason is Job’s desire to plead his case before God, *i.e.*, to justify his ways before God. Of Job’s multitude of words (*Job* 11:2), Caryl says that “a multitude of words is sinful” when they are “unprofitable, light, vain, frothy, words that have no nourishment in them” (I, 1017). We should recall the language that Hobbes uses to characterize the Greeks and scholasticism: it is “set forth in senselesse and

insignificant Language” (L 46, 461),<sup>51</sup> consists of “insignificant Traines of strange and barbarous words” (L 46, 472), and “when men write whole volumes of such stuffe, are they not Mad, or intend to make others so” (L 8, 59)? They are sinful, in other words, and to revert to Caryl, “when plenty of words have a scarcity, a dearth of matter in them” (I, 1017).

“Therefore Job open his mouth in vain, he multiplieth words without knowledge” (*Job* 35.16). We should recall here Hobbes’s repeated insistence that faith requires understanding, at least insofar as it is impossible correctly to obey what has been obscured by scholastic talk of separated essences and the like. Caryl offers in explanation of this passage: “we are but founding brass and tinkling Cimbals in all we say to God, unless we do what God saith” (II, 1583). Elihu corrects Job “first, Because he had not sufficiently attended and magnified the Sovereignty of God” and “because he had not, as he ought, sat down quietly under the hand of God; but often called to know the cause, and that God would plainly tell him the reason, or give him an account of why he suffered” (II, 1584). Instead, “he should have remembered, that as many of the judgments of God are unsearchable ... so he hath reserved some of them as secrets in his own rest, and will not more give any man an account of them, than any man ought to desire an account of them” (*ibid.*). We thus return to Hobbes’s declaration that the best way to get rid of the Empusa is to leave to God what is God’s, and to give to humanity what belongs to humanity (natural science), while “Nor is it any shame, to confesse the profoundnesse of the Scripture, to bee too great to be sounded by the shortnesse of human understanding” (L 44, 435).<sup>52</sup> In this context, rather than affirming atheism, the

---

<sup>51</sup> With reference to the earlier discussion of Strauss and his highlighting of vanity as the mark of believing that dreams are true, this passage should be noted in full: “The naturall Philosophy of those Schools, was rather a Dream than Science, and set forth in senseless and insignificant Language; which cannot be avoided by those that will teach Philosophy, without having first attained great knowledge in Geometry” (L 46, 461). The final clause of course points towards Hobbes’s own methodological concerns.

<sup>52</sup> Skinner and others interpret this to be an ironic comment. No doubt there is an element of sarcasm present, but there is certainly no need to assume that Hobbes did not also have a serious meaning in mind. The idea that parts of Scripture defy human comprehension has an established pedigree. In the

injunction serves to preserve the glory of God against mortal attempts to organize their lives around immediate manifestations of his will. One cannot reason out (*excogitare*) a politics according to which God is the immediate cause. Doing so is to presume to know something which is better a mystery. This frees such matters for the natural and civil sciences. At the same time, it opens up the space for a biblical exegesis designed to explain the final cause of the world in terms of God - *i.e.*, as a separate order and kind of knowledge, as for example adopted explicitly by members of the Royal Society. The injunction that the two orders are not to meet - *i.e.*, that the *ratio* which governs them is separate - occurs in the person of the Leviathan, which serves simultaneously both properly to order earthly politics and to transfer that politics away from contemplation of the divine.<sup>53</sup>

To return to Job's ratiocination, for Hobbes this church politics, *viz.*, this multitude of words, has both a cause and a political effect. The cause is exactly the hubris of which Job is being chastised: "in stead of admiring, and adoring of the Divine and Incomprehensible Nature ... they that venture to reason of his Nature, from these

---

seventeenth century, for example, it was taken up by the mathematician Pascal. Of Pascal, Kolakowski comments: "This then is the first rule: whatever is not scientifically testable (or rationally self-evident, like axioms) is scientifically empty. And the second rule is: whatever is testable is to be accepted according to the results of the test, and not on any other grounds. Conformable to the first rule, religious truths ... are empirically empty and cannot be ascertained on the basis of empirical evidence. Conformably to the second rule, no scientific truth can be put in doubt by the verdict of a religious dogma .... Scripture, of course, is safe: it can never say something that is false according to the natural light, and in case of apparent conflict it is Scripture's ostensible meaning that has to be differently explained" (*God Owes us Nothing*, 152-153).

<sup>53</sup> Once again, one wants to think of the Anselmian distinction between *cogitatio* and *intellectus*. When Anselm advises his reader to go "*intra in cubiculum' mentis tuae*" (*Proslogion* I) it is to suggest the limitations of *cogitatio*; on the Cartesian reinterpretation of the *cubicule* as woodstove (*poêle*) the point is to utilize *only cogitare*. From this perspective, Hobbes can be seen as one of several, otherwise diverse, authors - including, *e.g.*, Spinoza and Pascal - protesting the extension of *cogitatio* outside its appropriate object domain. The Hobbesian move, again and in other words, involves both constructing the appropriate space for ratiocination and applying reason within that space. On the wood stove as a common trope for revolutionary activity in Cartesian French literature, see the opening pages of Timothy J. Reiss, "Descartes, the Palatinate, and the Thirty Years War: Political Theory and Political Practice," in *Baroque Topographies*, ed. Timothy Hampton, *Yale French Studies* 80 (1991), 108-145. For a discussion of the "two orders of knowing" suggested by the Royal Society, see Robert Markley, *Fallen Languages*, and note 39, above.

Attributes of Honour, losing their understanding in they very first attempt, fall from one Inconvenience into another, without end, and without number” (L 46, 467). Job’s desire to speak with God is established by Caryl as a matter of turning away from the affairs of people and toward an attempt at justification in the space of God: “as if *Job* had said, *I see I shall avail or profit myself but little by any further conference with you, therefore I desire to turn my self to God, from whom I am sure of a good answer*” (I, 1204). Such a reading was a common one. In Senault’s paraphrase, “I will henceforth addresse my words to the Almightye, and without losing time in conferring unprofitably with you, I will dispute boldly with him” (117); or Patrick’s Job who would “be troubled with your Discourses no longer” (73).

Here, the sense of profit and justification directly echoes the motive (and this is the political effect I alluded to above) Hobbes attributes to scholastic politics:

The Metaphysiques, Ethiques, and Politiques of Aristotle, the frivolous Distinctions, barbarous Terms, and obscure Language of the Schoolmen, taught in the Universities, (which have been all erected and regulated by the Popes Authority,) serve them to keep these Errors from being detected, and to make men mistake the *Ignis fatuus* of Vain Philosophy, for the light of the Gospell (L 47, 477).

Job gets his corrective in the monster Leviathan who reminds him that God is incomprehensibly great. Scholasticism gets its corrective by being reminded that God is incomprehensibly great and not available for political justifications. If Job wants to have a politics, he will have to discourse with his friends. His error is that he “applyes himself to God for the determining and ending of the controversie which he had with his Friends” (I, 1205). But that is not God’s place. Here we should also recall the striking formula of *De Cive* III.13, according to which the failure to treat others as naturally equal for the sake of seeking peace (the assertion of natural inequality being explicitly attributed to Aristotle) is labeled “pride.” The critique of scholasticism, in other words, is integral to the attempt to shift the basis for political philosophy.

The usage of *Job* as a corrective to scholastic politics was a not uncommon. What was novel in Hobbes's formulation was that the critique of scholasticism did not entail the abandonment of philosophy, but its restarting along new lines. According to Godefroid Hotton, who produces the more traditional conclusion, in a reading of *Job*:

Ancient, true philosophy, will also be made there, but entirely other than that of the Greeks and Latins. The natural is explained there in an entirely divine fashion: not only in its matter and in its manner, but also according to the source, and the first and efficient cause of nature, and of natural things, which is God the creator and conserver of the world.<sup>54</sup>

After reading *Job*, one can discover that the Greeks' and Latins' "pretended virtues reveal themselves to have only been masks," and that "there flowers in it a degree of perfection much higher than that which is found in the profane writings; they are endowed only with sophistry and vain babble ... such *philosophers* have been the *patriarchs of heretics*" (20-21).<sup>55</sup> The veiled reference to Machiavelli should of course not be lost here, but neither should the assertion of why Machiavellianism is wrong: God is given as both the first and the efficient cause of the world.<sup>56</sup> Hobbes can use the *Job* story as he does by making God's status as efficient cause of events in the world radically unknowable while affirming God's status as the final cause of the world. At the same time, Hobbes is able to say that efficient, mechanical causes can be studied (if not exactly

---

<sup>54</sup> "La vraye philosophie, ancienne y fera aussi proposée, mais tout autrement que chés les Grecs & les Latins. La naturelle y est expliquée d'une façon toute divine: non seulement en sa matiere & en sa maniere, mais encore quant à la source, & à la cause premiere & efficiente de la nature, & des choses naturelles, qui est Dieu le creatuer, & conservateur du monde," *Pieté éprouvée. Représentée en Homélie Familieres & Populaires: Sur les Trois premiers Chapitres de L'Histoire de Job* (Amsterdam, 1648), 20.

<sup>55</sup> "Leurs pretendües vertues se descouvriront n'avoir esté que des masques .... fleurit en un degré de perfection si haut, que ce qui sen trouve és escrits profanes, luy estant conferé n'est que sophisterie, & vain babil .... tels Philosophes ont esté les Patriarches des heretiques" (Hotton, 20-21).

<sup>56</sup> The reference to Machiavelli is confirmed by contemporary discussions of Machiavelli which assimilated him to Epicurus. In his widely known *Anti-Machiavel*, for example, and in the discussion of the maxim that a prince need only appear devout, Innocent Gentillet says that Machiavelli's position "Suivant la doctrine d'Epicurus le docteur des atheistes et maistre d'ignorance, qui estimait que toutes choses se faisoient et advenayent par cas fortuit et recontre des atomes" (II.1, 171-172). Gentillet, however, does credit Plato, Aristotle and other philosophers with "sens commun ... [et] qui ont en quelque savoir" (*ibid.*) with acknowledging a "sovereign cause."

known) through natural science. Firmly against such modernism, Francis Quarles's verse *Job Militant* has God say that: "No Dust so vile, but pens an ample story, / of the Almightyes power, nor is there that, / which giues not man iust cause to wonder at."<sup>57</sup> For Hobbes the dust does not itself pen stories; for the multitude of particles of dust to present meaningful information, they will require insertion into a natural history.

Thus, where Henry Holland can assert that "the wisdom of the world can hardly brook this blessed doctrine of Gods prouidence .... we would gladly auoyde Gods presence and diuine judgement for the trial of all our actions. These and like reasons haue caused Epicures and grosse sinners to deny utterly the holy doctrine of Gods prouidence" (157), Hobbes will (following Bacon, who recommends Democritus and Epicurus alone among the ancient philosophers) assert the relevance of natural science. Again, the radicality of the favorable references on Hobbes's part to Epicurus, Democritus and natural science based on observation and human reason should be underscored. From De Bèze, for example, one learns that "neither had the auncient *Epicures* in time past any more principall foundation to leane unto" (sig. B<sub>1</sub>, 1r) and that "amongst the rest of *Iobs* vertues, the invincible constancie of his godly minde, most wonderfullie sheweth it selfe; condemning both that iron disposition and unsensibleness of the *Stoicks*, and also whatsoever the Philosophers babble of their vainglorious fortitude and Magnanimitie" (sig. B<sub>2</sub>, 1r).<sup>58</sup>

The impasse is set forth by Patrick: God is "representing his Works throughout the World to be so wonderful and accountable, that it is fit for us to acknowledge our ignorance, but never accuse his Providence" (sig. a<sub>2</sub>, 1r-v). How can one address problems in the world without accusing God? Hobbes sets forth the distinction according

---

<sup>57</sup> *Job Militant: with Meditations Divine and Morall* (London, 1624), sig. N<sub>3</sub>, 1r.

<sup>58</sup> Compare also Senault, who says that the stoics' "whole Philosophy is enlivened with Vain-glory," *Man become Guilty, or the Corruption of Nature by Sinne, According to St. Augustines sense*, trans. Henry, Earle of Monmouth (London, 1650), sig. B, 1v). From this, one can see the outlines of a general debate against the stoics.

to which one can have both a natural philosophy and a belief in the Scripture as follows: “our Saviour, in conducting us toward his heavenly Kingdome, did not destroy all the difficulties of Naturall Questions, but left them to exercise our Industry, and Reason” (L 45, 444). Against the “natural philosophy” in *Job* cited approvingly by many of its commentators, Hobbes says:

The Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdome of God, and to prepare their mindes to become his obedient subjects, leaving the world, and the Philosophy thereof, to the disputation of men, for the exercising of their naturall Reason. Whether the Earths, or Suns motion make the day, and night; or whether the Exorbitant actions of men, proceed from Passion or from the Divell, (so we worship him not) it is all one, as to our obedience, and subjection to God Almighty; which is the thing for which the Scripture was written (L 8, 58).

To those who still insist on finding the answers to scientific questions in Scripture, Hobbes adds that “if wee require of the Scripture an account of all questions, which may be raised to trouble us in the performance of Gods commands; we may as well complaine of Moses for not having set down the time of the creation of such Spirits, as well as of the Creation of the Earth, and Sea, and of Men, and Beasts” (L 45, 444).<sup>59</sup>

To bring things together, the Hobbesian invocation of the Leviathan serves at least three purposes within his text. First, as is commonly noted, it serves as an image of the great and powerful civil apparatus the establishment of which is the purpose of the text. Second, the products of Job’s speech are given as parts of the state of nature. In other words, without a sovereign for the establishment of meaning, *i.e.*, without a prior and explicit submission to God, Job’s speech is meaningless. Thus, the general points that discourse has to be archically grounded in order to be meaningful and that the

---

<sup>59</sup> These were not idle questions: a variety of factors in the seventeenth century – from the discovery of fossils to the study of Chaldean histories – had converged to cast doubt on the literal veracity of the “natural history” reported in the Bible. Hobbes, along with Spinoza and Isaac de la Peyrère, were generally viewed as primary opponents by theologians interested in defending Scripture. On this point, see Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1984).

establishment of the political sovereign is what serves as such archic grounding are underscored. Third, and finally, given the position of Job as Aristotle, and of the language Hobbes uses to attack scholastic politics, the reference to *Job* creates a Hobbesian critique of scholastic politics on the grounds that it expresses a hubristic desire to speak with God, a hubristic confidence in human ratiocination in the name of God which is explicitly prohibited by the Bible. Scholastic philosophy, in other words, fails on its own terms. Rather than resign himself to the failure of philosophy in general, Hobbes asserts the need for a philosophy whose object domain is human concerns.

The question of *Job*, why the wicked prosper, says Hobbes, “is of that difficulty, as it hath shaken the faith, not onely of the Vulgar, but of Philosophers, and which is more, of the Saints, concerning the Divine Providence” (L 31: 247). He adds:

And *Job*, how earnestly does he expostulate with God, for the many Afflictions he suffered, notwithstanding his Righteousnesse? This question in the case of *Job*, is decided by God himselfe, not by arguments derived from *Job*'s Sinne, but his own Power (*ibid.*).

Steadying Job's faith requires that he order his intellect correctly. Job was rewarded by the restoration of his prosperity; Hobbes's lesson for the English is the same. If, as Senault puts it, “the greatnesse of God had imposed silence upon Job” (411), then for Hobbes, the greatness of God ought similarly to impose silence upon theologians before their civil sovereign.