

Hobbes and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Conjuncture of the English Revolution

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Abstract

This article investigates debates between historians and political theorists about whether Hobbes should more properly be considered a political theorist or polemicist. Political theorists who regard Leviathan for its formal qualities alone neglect the historical context of the Engagement Controversy that shaped the text, but historians who regard the text as presaging contemporary debates on sovereignty miss the transhistorical importance of Hobbes's method. I suggest that by reading Hobbes alongside Stuart Hall's "conjunctural analysis" we can see that Hobbes himself was attempting to articulate a politics that could resolve the crisis of the English Civil Wars through common consent to the Commonwealth government. What marks this politics as important for political theory today is the conjunctural method of analysis Hobbes uses, which is not tied to any particular content but rather demonstrates a radical responsiveness to different contexts. As such, the more neglected religious arguments in Leviathan, whose arguments about the proper organization of the state church are often lost on contemporary theorists, becomes important precisely because this debate has faded from relevance in our secular liberal societies and yet still has relevance for how political theorists apprehend different political questions today.

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To read *Leviathan* as a work of political philosophy without regard for its historical context is to miss the ingenuity with which Hobbes responded to the conjuncture of events around the climax of the English Revolution in late 1649 and early 1650. In that period, King Charles I was executed, and the commonwealth government came to power under the banner of Oliver Cromwell's religious Independents. The Independents demanded first in October 1649 that nearly every literate man in England swear an "Oath of Engagement" to the Commonwealth, and then in January 1650 broadened the remit of the oath to oblige every man in England over the age of eighteen to swear it. Such an oath raised enormously important questions in popular politics and required that ordinary people think deeply about what makes their governments legitimate before swearing or not swearing the oath. During the Stuart restoration in the 1660s, Hobbes defended himself from a critic, John Wallis, by stating that *Leviathan* "framed the minds of a thousand gentlemen to a conscientious obedience to present government, which otherwise would have wavered in that point" (Hobbes, quoted in Skinner 2004a, p. 306). That is, Hobbes defended his book on the basis that it justified Engagement. This justification links a certain political moment with Hobbes's broader philosophical system, including his theory of obligation and the *de facto* legitimacy of the state. Upon its initial publication, *Leviathan* was received as employing this system as a justification of Engagement.

The Engagement controversy is far from the minds of many political theorists today, though. The political questions that concerned Hobbes, especially those concerning church governance and ecclesiastical power, appear as the relic of a former era before the advent of the secular state. While toleration is taken for granted by most political theorists working today, and anti-tolerant politics in Hobbes's work might appear uninteresting for those who study Hobbes only for the explicitly political facets of his thought like his theory of *de facto* legitimacy, there is something important in how Hobbes addresses ecclesiastical politics that is useful for seeing

Hobbes as a thinker concerned with popular politics. He does not merely think in the most abstract and transhistorical terms, but also uses his philosophy to address real issues of practical importance. *Leviathan* is a dynamic text addressing live political problems, not merely a formal speculation on the conditions that always and everywhere promote the formation of a state.

It is my aim in this study to show that viewing Hobbes's position on ecclesiastical issues in historical perspective makes him useful to contemporary thinkers of political theory who wish to think politics at our own conjuncture. To analyze Hobbes's theory as it is applied, as he brings his abstract system to bear on concrete problems, is useful even if the concrete problems of church government and established religion that he analyzes are perhaps of little interest to contemporary political theorists. As such, the article will proceed by first elaborating what I mean when I say that Hobbes is a conjunctural thinker who should be read in historical context and why that matters. That section largely focuses on a debate between historians and political theorists on how Hobbes should be interpreted given his historical context, and over what in his theory is historically unique. Second, I engage with the ways that Hobbes applied his philosophical thought to practical political problems by examining attempts to place him in either the Parliamentarian or Royalist camps and find that he is best characterized as attempting to offer constructive criticism to the Parliamentarian camp from a former Royalist so that the two sides may escape the conjuncture's crisis with a new settlement. Third, I cover the specific development of Hobbes's embrace of Cromwell's Independents through his interpretation of ecclesiastical politics. In that section, I argue that Hobbes reads ecclesiastical politics as the focal point in the crisis of the English Revolution capable of being resolved and ending the crisis with a new settlement between the warring factions. Finally, I conclude by offering some reflections on what political theorists have to gain by reading Hobbes as a conjunctural thinker.

Conjunctural Analysis and the Skinner-Warrender Debate

It is the aim of this study to demonstrate that the utility of Hobbes for political theory today can largely be discerned from his interventions into historical debates around church government and the Oath of Engagement during the conjuncture of the English Revolution by bringing to bear on political questions a historically and materially informed theoretical system. In this section, I advance the idea that debates between historians and political theorists on the legacy and importance of Hobbes have stalled because they are split between those who value Hobbes for his insight into his specific moment and those who value his philosophy for values they claim as transhistorical constants. My own intervention in this debate is to introduce the idea of “conjunctural analysis” first articulated by the Marxist cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall into the study of Hobbes’s politics and philosophy. Lawrence Grossberg, a student of Hall’s, describes conjunctural analysis thusly:

Conjunctural analysis involves a strategic political choice – to work at a particular ‘level of abstraction’. Conjunctures define an effective site – perhaps the most effective site – for political intervention aimed at redirecting the tides of social change, and perhaps the most propitious level at which intellectual and political analysis converge. This is the level of the social formation as some sort of totality, however fragile and temporary. It is located between the specificity of the moment and the long *duree* of the epoch (Grossberg 2019, p. 42).

I contend that this describes well the work that Hobbes sets out to do in *Leviathan*. Between the moment of the regicide and the possibility of an epoch of civil strife, Hobbes intervenes by focusing on the most effective site for political intervention, the Oath of Engagement, and the attendant issues of church government that, in his view, required Christian subjects to swear the oath. Hobbes was no

Marxist, and I should clarify that he puts conjunctural analysis to use in pursuit of very different ends than Marxists have, but he shares with them a materialist and historicist method that makes conjunctural analysis a fitting term for his work. This is also not to say that others have not identified in Hobbes a kernel of radicalism. On that question, the next section will have more to say than this one.

Grossberg suggests that all conjunctural analysis has a politics. Conjunctural analysis is not neutral. However, it need not be Marxist. To understand Hobbes as a conjunctural analyst requires reading his broader theoretical points alongside his more immediate political aims. Hobbes's own politics run contrary to those of the Marxist historians of the English Revolution. For those Marxists, the history of the revolution provides an opportunity for the political education of a revolutionary multitude. Hobbes also seeks to instill a kind of reason within the multitude, but it is fundamentally a political form of reason opposed to revolutionary upheaval. Though their political conclusions differ, Marxist historians of the English Revolution and Hobbes both approach this conjuncture in full awareness of its potential to fashion a new epoch through the appeal to the multitude. They analyze the English Revolution as a conjuncture.

Here, it is useful to turn to the Marxist political theorist and intellectual historian Ellen Meiksins Wood, whose writing on the "early modern period" of political thought and on Marxist thought present a keen opportunity for considering Hobbes's work as a conjunctural analysis. Wood's work returns often to the question of the origin of capitalism, and much of her work on the early modern period, including her analysis of Hobbes, stresses how the unique historical character of the early modern period precipitated the rise of capitalism. In these writings on the origins of capitalism, her foremost aim is to attack those historians whose uncaring analyses present capitalism as an inevitable, even ontological force. She writes, "In most accounts of capitalism and its origin, there really *is* no origin. Capitalism seems to always *be* there, somewhere; and it only needs to be released from its chains" (Wood 2002, p. 4). This account of capitalism as a

transhistorical force waiting to be set loose is one that Wood claims “stress[es] the *continuity* between non-capitalist and capitalist societies” while denying “the *specificity* of capitalism” (Wood 2002, p. 5). Put another way, Wood rejects historians who ontologize capitalism while ignoring its emergence out of specific historical conditions. For Wood, capitalism is properly an epochal trend, and her historical work defends this proper categorization.

That task sets Wood on a two-front war against those who would ontologize capitalism, but also against what she calls “postmodernism,” which narrowly focuses on the moment and presumes the perfect plasticity of historical actors. In a critique of the post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Wood rejects the notion that, “[T]here are no ‘fixed’ social interests or identities” as “a denial of *history* and the logic of historical process” (Wood 1986 pp. 61-62). This denial of any logic of history, for Wood, denies the possibility of any causality in history as such. For Laclau and Mouffe, Wood claims, “There are no historical conditions, connections, limits, possibilities. There are only arbitrary juxtapositions, ‘conjunctures,’ and contingencies” (Wood 1986, p. 62). Without some degree of historical determination, all history must be read as the arbitrary product of some transhistorical voluntarism. Wood’s sneering use of “conjunctures” here is still useful for thinking conjuncturally, though, as it more accurately resembles Grossberg’s description of the moment. Indeed, the problem of arbitrary contingencies without reference to historical determinations is one also acknowledged by Hall himself. In an interview with Grossberg, Hall also criticizes Laclau and Mouffe by claiming,

[T]hey do tend to slip from the requirement to recognize the constraints of existing historical formations. While they are very responsible—whether you agree with them or not—about recognizing that their position does have political consequences, when they come down to particular political conjunctures, they don’t reintegrate other levels of determination into the analysis (Grossberg 1986, p. 58).

Hall's rebuke of Laclau and Mouffe expands upon an insight that resembles Wood's own. As Hall sees it, the problem is not that Laclau and Mouffe theorize the contingent by juxtaposing different social elements, but rather that they do so without proper reference to determinations at other levels of abstraction. Laclau and Mouffe, in their attempt to free their political theory from determinism, dispatch with causality altogether. They situate their analysis only against the teleological, but do not reintegrate it between the determinative level of historical structures and the immediate agentic level of the moment. The difference between Wood on the one hand and Hall and Grossberg on the other is that Wood, too, can ignore the importance of reintegrating other levels of determination into her analysis. She is skeptical of historical work that attends too closely to the moment, finding that it can jettison too many of the abstractions necessary for theoretical insight to emerge from the study of history. Much of her work, therefore, is oriented around taking "a longer view of history" (Wood 2012, p. 3). What should conjunctural analysis make of this "longer view of history," though? That is, how can it be "reintegrated" along with other levels of determination?

This question requires certain political judgements. Grossberg notes a difficulty in drawing a clean distinction between the moment, the conjuncture, and epoch, with such a distinction itself being a "matter of strategic judgment," though it generally follows a movement "from the concrete to the abstract, or in Heidegger's terms, from the ontic to the (more) ontological" (Grossberg 2019, p. 44). Rather than being focused on the purely contingent concrete organizations of social elements within the moment, Grossberg emphasizes that conjunctural analysis operates at a higher level of abstraction from "the chaos of the overdetermined world" of the moment (Grossberg 2019, p. 44). Grossberg's project is to systematize Hall's concept of conjunctural analysis precisely to avoid the same arbitrariness that Wood complains of. His conjunctural analysis therefore admits a degree of historical *determinacy* without denying historical *specificity*. Consider Wood's claim that "[C]apitalism has, from

the beginning been a deeply contradictory force” and that this contradictory character “makes it inevitably susceptible to economic instabilities which require constant ‘extra-economic’ interventions” (Wood 2002, p. 193). In this statement, we see capitalism exercising a logic—it is *inevitably* susceptible to instabilities—and yet this logic can never be fully totalizing; it requires articulation with ‘extra-economic’ social elements, or elements that are necessarily not determined by this economic logic itself. Attending to these contradictions is crucial for conjunctural analysis, which concerns itself with the methods of articulating unities between seemingly incongruous social elements. Grossberg thinks of conjunctures as opening “problem spaces” to deal with these contradictions. He writes,

A problem space is a map of the problematics, of the deep and wide-spread instabilities and uncertainties that are constantly reconfiguring the conjuncture as a site of contestation, defining both the limits and the possibilities of consent, adaptation and resistance; they shape the felt challenges of political change in people’s lives. Such problematics unsettle, displace and even challenge our cherished common sense assumptions and logics that had always seemed unquestionable, across not only particular sites but also social domains (Grossberg 2019, p. 52).

The deeply contradictory structures of capitalist political economy and capital’s frequent recourse to articulations with extra-economic elements suggest conjunctural analysis applies in Wood’s thinking. Her insistence on taking a “longer view” of the origins of capital, then, suggest not an absolute rejection of conjunctural analysis but a specific political judgement about where the boundaries between epoch, conjuncture, and moment ought to be placed to best challenge the presently dominant epochal trend of capitalism. By focusing on capitalism in this “longer view,” then, Wood hopes to demonstrate the capacity for capitalism to determine social relations without ceding that

capitalism is “unquestionable” or that it is merely the realization of transhistorical “common sense assumptions and logics.” She places her boundaries between these categories for her political purposes. So, too, does Hobbes.

It is useful, therefore, to contextualize Wood’s reading of Hobbes within her own political analysis. In her book on early modern political thought, Wood writes, “To identify these questions [of long-term effects of specific political episodes] is likely to require greater attention to long-term historical processes of a kind the Cambridge approach eschews altogether” (Wood 2012, p. 29). In this statement, Wood is responding directly to the implications of the Engagement Controversy for Hobbes, and criticizing a blind spot she perceives in the historical work of Quentin Skinner, whose “Cambridge approach” to Hobbes scholarship is critical for understanding how Hobbes himself approached the task of conjunctural analysis. That is, Wood does not wish to dispute the accuracy of Skinner’s scholarship so much as she wishes to reframe it to call attention to longer term trends. For her, Skinner’s emphasis on the Engagement Controversy is too narrow and misses Hobbes’s grappling with the emerging epochal trend of capitalist political economy.

This mirrors earlier debates between Skinner and Harold Warrender, in which the two disputed the proper level of analysis for considering Hobbes’s work. Warrender argues as a political theorist and Skinner as an historian. The debate hinges on the proper interpretation of historical works of political theory between their immediate historical context and their long term, even ontological insight into the nature of politics. The connection between political theory as an abstract body of thought and as a response to a specific historical moment is instructive because the debate turns on the question of whether *Leviathan* is important for its value as a work of political theory or as a tract. However, this debate never broaches the subject of conjuncture and the *political* stakes of such questions. What it means to consider *Leviathan* as a tract or as a purely philosophical

text is thus considered without explicit reference to the implications for political practice posed by the text.

For example, Warrender writes that, “One of Hobbes’s most fruitful achievements [is] the formal (minimum content) analysis he gave to the concept” of natural law (Warrender 1979, p. 932). That is, Warrender values Hobbes not for his conclusions about the Engagement controversy, but for the philosophical system he devises. He defends his theorizing in the abstract by stating that theorists often deal with multiple scales of analysis. In the case of Hobbes, he states that we may consider three scales: “Scale 1,” which concerns the long history of natural law “[f]rom the Stoics and Cicero, to Grotius and the jurists, or to Locke; or from the Aristotelian legacy developed (and still continued) by the Roman church” and “Scale 2,” which he describes as a “more restricted scale, Hobbes’s contemporary political and intellectual milieu” (Warrender 1979, p. 933). Both these scales place Hobbes within a given tradition, but one tradition spans thousands of years and the other hardly escapes the middle decades of the seventeenth century. “Scale 3,” which Warrender takes to be a “global framework” that “will show in every molecule” because “[e]verywhere it is the same” is Warrender’s solution to the problem of scale—it solves the problem by removing scale from the equation (Warrender 1979, p. 938). What does it mean, after all, to think of Hobbes within a given period? It means to study his reception by others within that period, their interpretations of his work, and their understanding of it. It also requires a drawing of distinctions between the moment, the conjuncture, and the epoch.

Warrender’s Scale 3, then, asks us to consider Hobbes specifically as Warrender receives him. “[W]hat is theoretically important may not be historically conspicuous,” he writes, “at least in the short term, and...the influence of ideas is not the same as the connexion between them” (Warrender 1979, pp. 937-938). To analyze at Scale 3 is to attempt to create a direct lineage between oneself and the thinker considered. For Warrender, there is no fixed Hobbes, no Hobbes determined by history, but rather a formal set of texts that are

radically open to interpretation by political theorists. Indeed, any thinker could be anonymous for centuries and still, if in the text taken as a formal object of analysis yields some theoretical value to an interpreter, then the work of this thinker can be recovered at any time and put to use. It is a compelling argument, but one that leaves us wondering what, then, is the role of the history of ideas in political theory? If we can only think of the theory in the dyad of a primary text and secondary text, what are we to make of the lineage of other theories and interpretations that have emerged historically in the intervening time between the publication of the primary and secondary text? These questions do not arise in Warrender's writings on Hobbes. He is content to treat Hobbes as a formal object of analysis, and indeed, to defend this formalist reading of Hobbes against Skinner's "contextualist" reading.

By the way Warrender defines Scale 2, it appears as though he means to demonstrate that it is an overly restricted timeframe and ultimately chosen on an arbitrary basis. To him, Skinner is attempting "to legislate for political theorists" what they can (and more importantly, what they cannot) write about, and the narrow confines of Scale 2 are meant to represent a kind of overly restricted domain where Scales 1 and 3 are taken to be far more capacious (Warrender 1979, p. 931). His complaint is fundamentally a political one—Skinner is limiting the capacity for theorists to think, defining away the infinite plasticity of the theoretical mind by confining the text of *Leviathan* to some conjuncture whose boundaries are set by some historically determined politics. Here, the formal text of *Leviathan* is read against Skinner's attempt to place the text within historical context. For Skinner, there is no formal *Leviathan* outside the lineage of the text's political importance, its historical interventions, and its interpretation by other theorists. This does create some limit and leads Skinner to seemingly more modest claims about the importance of *Leviathan* than Warrender makes. In Skinner's own words, "Hobbes's *Leviathan* can...be presented as a slightly belated but uniquely important contribution to the lay defence of Engagement" (Skinner 2004a, p.

306). The uniqueness of *Leviathan* is not, as in Warrender's account, a stunning reinterpretation of the natural law tradition, but it is still unique within the context of the Engagement controversy. Skinner places Hobbes in the context of his intellectual milieu by stating, Hobbes was neither the first nor the only political writer of the mid-seventeenth century to discuss conquest as a means of acquiring political authority, nor was he the first nor the only writer to draw absolutist lessons from the historiography. He did not even provide the most original or systematic formulation of the theory of *de facto* sovereignty. It is even open to us to suppose that he may to some extent have adopted his conclusions from some of the earlier writers I have singled out (Skinner 2004b, p. 256).

Skinner's Hobbes is not unique as a *de facto* theorist, but he is unique for the role he plays in the Engagement controversy. He was writing contemporaneously alongside several other *de facto* theorists and possibly was influenced by their thinking. To take *Leviathan* under consideration only for its formal qualities without attending to its situatedness within the broader debate between natural law theorists and *de facto* theorists misses the clear influence of Hobbes's contemporaries. Skinner is not swayed by the same abstract elements of Hobbes's thought that interest Warrender. He sees *Leviathan* as fundamentally intertextual and situated within a broader debate, with his evidence demonstrating that Hobbes's contemporaries had influence even over the style of Hobbes's prose.

There is an increasingly large amount of historical scholarship that delves into the *de facto* theorists with whom Hobbes would have been familiar (see, for instance, Skinner 2004a, 2004b, 2004d, 2005; see also Collins 2004, Collins 2005, Patterson-Tutschka 2017, Tuck, 1993, Tutino 2008). From the historical work done by Skinner and others, it is clear Hobbes was not perceived by his contemporaries as being in continuity with the natural law tradition and instead was considered to have much in common with other *de facto* theorists, such as the Blackloist group. However, I argue that it is completely consistent to praise the "general internal consistency of Hobbes's political ideas"

that so appeals to Warrender, and to praise the unique role of Hobbes's thought in the Engagement controversy that appeals to Skinner (Trainor 1988, p. 680). Indeed, to read Hobbes at the conjunctural level is to read not only the internal consistency of Hobbes, but his consistency with the external world of his conjuncture. One need not read Hobbes as a keystone development in the lineage of natural law theory as Warrender does to find him to have philosophical importance. Indeed, we may also agree with Skinner that Hobbes lacks uniqueness as a *de facto* theorist and still find that there is philosophical importance to his work. Therefore, I agree with Trainor's description of Warrender's reading of Hobbes as an "exegetically impressive but historically implausible portrayal of Hobbes as a natural law theorist" (Trainor 1988, p. 685). Trainor and Skinner merely point to the implausible nature of Warrender's argument at Scale 2 without making a comment on his abstract work at Scale 3, and ultimately affirming that all those who read Hobbes in his immediate intellectual milieu saw his theory as radically breaking with the long tradition of natural law covered by Scale 1. To be blunt, Warrender holds that Hobbes could only obtain his world historic level of genius by, in some historically bounded way, being a total idiot—or at least appearing to his contemporary interlocutors as such. The idea fueling Warrender's analysis is that Hobbes advanced a brilliant argument for natural law theory that was so unrecognizable as such that it saw Hobbes endure censorship and infamy for the remainder of his life despite his protestations and defenses of his work. That is, Warrender can only find genius in Hobbes if it is the case that Hobbes in some considerable way lacked the ability to communicate with his contemporaries. This is perhaps a parodic way of presenting Warrender's argument, but I will admit that I cannot disprove it. It is not an argument I think can be disproven, only declared implausible as Trainor does. Instead, I suggest that we consider what is lost in an exegetically impressive but historically implausible reading of Hobbes. That is, what do we lose when we lose Hobbes's ability to operate effectively at Scale 2? To go even further, what philosophical insights are lost by assuming that

Hobbes was not effectively communicating something about his political philosophy to his contemporaries? We cannot think Hobbes as a thinker of conjuncture if we accept Warrender's reading. Any philosophical insight that Hobbes has for thinking in conjunctural terms must be abandoned if we wish to think of *Leviathan* using purely formalist methods and paying no mind to its historical context.

Indeed, for Warrender, to think Hobbes in context is to think of Hobbes as a pundit writing popular tracts and abandoning the project of political philosophy (which must be timeless, formal, and suitable in its specificity to many if not all moments). I claim that to attempt to separate Hobbes the philosopher from Hobbes the pundit can lead to confusion and lead us away from the ingenious conjunctural method of analysis by which Hobbes uses his system of political philosophy as an exegetical tool for combining the moment of civil strife with the possibility of peace under Cromwell's government. Warrender claims, "[t]he classic texts in political philosophy are more than tracts for the times" (Warrender 1979, p. 939). Philosophy, for him, must maintain some timeless quality or else it is something less than philosophy.

Skinner, meanwhile, "hopes that an historical investigation of Hobbes's argument may turn out to be of more than purely historical interest" (Skinner 2004c, p. 178). That is, he hopes to achieve some insight into the nature of the sovereign state because we still face political questions relating to the nature of the state today, and by understanding the historical context, can gain insight into how to theorize the character of the state in our own time. He writes, "We do not always understand the theory we have inherited, and that arguably we have never managed fully to make sense of the proposition that the person of the state is the seat of sovereignty" (Skinner 2004c, p. 178). The point of developing historical interpretations of a text is then to develop some further understanding of the theories political thinkers have developed within their own moments, but that we have inherited. Here, the exegetical value of a historical text is that it provides insight into structures that persist into the present moment.

To pick on this point of Skinner's analysis, I suggest (though other points that would serve just as well to illustrate the same thing) it is not certain today whether the state is sovereign. For example, Hardt and Negri famously declare that there "has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule—in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world" (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. xi). I quote this not to introduce some treatise on the philosophy of Hardt and Negri contra Hobbes, nor to make a definitive pronouncement about whether the state is sovereign or whether Empire is a more fit object of analysis today than the state, but only to say that even if all the social forms described by Hobbes in *Leviathan* were to vanish or transform (as indeed many of them have), there would still be a philosophical importance to his text precisely because it is a text that is intimately concerned with the conjuncture faced at the moment of its own creation. Conjunctural analysis as a method does not rely upon connections to the present nor assert any transhistorical basis for an institution like the state. Rather, by taking the conjuncture as a basic unit of analysis, we can study how people within specific contexts experience, organize, and negotiate the cultural, social, and political forces that govern their lives. *Leviathan* puts forward a philosophical system that describes its world, that keenly picks apart which factors are important, and then navigates between the contentious factions of the in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms to declare that peace could be achieved through Engagement. It articulates an ecclesiastical politics that would make the many factions composing both the Royalist and Parliamentary sides of the conflict amenable to peace. It is Hobbes's conjunctural method that provides him with an exegesis of the history of 1649-1651 and a solution to the ongoing cause of the wars. Thus, when we study Hobbes, we should study his ability to apply his grand philosophical system to minute questions such as "should I swear the Oath of Engagement?" Beyond Skinner's account, which sees the historical interpretation of Hobbes as important only inasmuch as the structures

Hobbes describes persist into our present moment, I argue that Hobbes's thought can inform conjunctural analysis across many contexts because it is so attuned to its own conjuncture. Yes, the sovereignty of the state has been thrown into question, and perhaps Hobbes is still of use in helping us reach some preliminary answer to that question, but even an anarchist utopia could learn from Hobbes. Or, perhaps more poignantly, even we who live in tolerant secular liberal societies should study Hobbes on the politics of the government of the established church.

To understand Hobbes as a conjunctural thinker requires going further than Skinner in assessing the context in which Hobbes was writing. Grossberg endorses a "radical contextuality" that holds, "Contexts are constructed as unities, but they are always unstable and their boundaries porous to varying degrees" (Grossberg 2019, p. 47). Hobbes looked to the constructed unities of his own moment, structures like the Presbyterian Scottish Covenanters and the Irish Catholic Royalists and saw their unstable and porous boundaries. In as simple a pronouncement as Hobbes's claim that "the Pope pretendeth, that all Christians are his subjects" we see in miniature that his philosophy mediates between the epochal (even ontological) and the momentous (Hobbes 1998, p. 407). In this example, the Pope has constructed for himself a unity (all Christians are his subjects) but this unity, to Hobbes, is constructed on faulty grounds and in want of a more suitable ontological system of "natural knowledge" (Hobbes 1998, p. 425). The moment of the Pope's supposed pretense is here rejected for its incompatibility with Hobbes's interpretation of the ontology of nature. Nonetheless, this is not properly speaking an "epochal" analysis and remains within the conjunctural because "The epoch calls for its own kind of analysis – diagrammatic and ontological – that maps the heterogeneous logics, organisations and apparatuses constituting the very possibilities (and limits) of our ways of being in the world" (Grossberg 2019, p. 45). One retains the possibility of acting in error in Hobbes's world and so is not limited by the ontology in this way. He does not propose to say that there is a limit, nor that

we are naturally drawn toward the state. Instead, he calls for a popular politics of Engagement. A full range of political possibilities can exist within Hobbes's ontology, and he never describes an historical inevitability. His contexts are always themselves unstable with porous boundaries. He is writing politically because he is aware, then, of his conjuncture. What he calls for is a politics that takes a different stance toward the ontology of political life—reject the pretenses of the Pope, he says, and live in peace; don't live under war. By reading the conjuncture this way, Hobbes attends both to an image of the ontological and to the specificity of the moment. Much of Hobbes's concern in *Leviathan* is the use of rhetoric that mystifies or distorts ontological truths, often for the unseemly gains of private men. He writes,

For words are wise men's counters, they do but reckon by them: but they are the money of fools, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, or a Thomas, or any other doctor whatsoever, if but a man (Hobbes 1998, p. 24).

Much of Hobbes's project is dedicated to this demystifying gesture, by which he seeks to discern which figures and factions of his moment act in accord with the epochal project Hobbes wishes to build, the "Immortall Peace" he describes in *De Cive* as contrasting with "pretence" (Hobbes 1983, pp. 25-26). His ontology thus serves as an evaluative tool for him to judge the politics of the moment for their utility toward the epochal project of peace. The epochal frame of nature informs but does not define the possibility of politics in the moment. Politics abstracted away from the moment, however, have the possibility of ushering in an epoch of peace or an epoch of war.

There is no place where this mediation between the epochal project and the politics of the moment is clearer than in Hobbes's discussion of church government. I suggest we look at Hobbes's approach to a specific political issue that he saw as the ongoing cause of the civil wars at the heart of the English Revolution: the issue of

church government. On this issue, Hobbes debates several camps: the Anglicans, the Catholic Gallicans, the ultramontane factions of the Jesuits, the Presbyterians, and the Parliamentary *de facto* theorists. The way that Hobbes bobs and weaves between these factions demonstrates a political uniqueness to his own thought, and he often adopts elements of the thought of one enemy to assail another. What is more, ecclesiastical politics reveal Hobbes's thought on questions of toleration and of private conscience and their appropriate roles within a commonwealth and especially a Christian commonwealth. That is, questions of church government are more properly political than many of the issues that Hobbes focuses on in parts one and two of *Leviathan*, such as questions of civil law. That there was widespread disagreement on the proper governance of the church and that this disagreement led to unusual coalitions (such as that between the Blackloists and the Independents in 1649 or the always-uneasy agreements struck between the Independents and the Scottish Covenanters throughout the wars of the English Revolution) suggests that it was on questions of church government that political opinions were most obviously displayed. Hobbes fixates on this issue because he sees it as the single point on which social change hinges—the resolution of the question of church government is thus the key to the resolution of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. Before we delve into the factional politics that Hobbes discusses in his ecclesiology, however, it is important that we discuss why it is inadequate to ask whether Hobbes's allegiance in *Leviathan* is to the Royalist or to the Parliamentary side. The complexity of Hobbes's allegiance can be baffling, but once we read Hobbes as a conjunctural thinker, it becomes clear that he is articulating elements from both the Royalist and Parliamentary intellectual and political cultures to provide a feasible settlement for the civil wars.

Did Hobbes Support “The English Revolution?”

Throughout this article, I have used the term “English Revolution” to refer to the events of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (the two English civil wars, as well as the wars in Ireland and Scotland) and the

interregnum after the regicide of King Charles I and before the restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II in 1660. This term can create confusion when one is speaking about Hobbes, because, while he writes in favor of Engagement, it is not wholly accurate to describe him as revolutionary himself. Rather, in this section I will argue that in *Leviathan*, Hobbes pursues a politics of Engagement, but also critically assesses the Parliamentary cause because he sees their intellectual justifications as potentially destabilizing even a peace provided by a Parliamentary victory in the war. That is, he seeks to sap the revolutionary energy of the revolutionary Parliamentarians so that they may assume sovereign power without further challenge.

The term “English Revolution” is one developed in an essay by the Marxist historian Christopher Hill and is meant to place the revolution in a broader lineage of social progress and popular political mobilizations. Hill describes why he labels the period often referred to as the “English Civil War” using this far broader term thusly:

The English Revolution of 1640-60 was a great social movement like the French Revolution of 1789. The state power protecting an old order that was essentially feudal was violently overthrown, power passed into the hands of a new class, and so the freer development of capitalism was made possible. The Civil War was a class war, in which the despotism of Charles I was defended by the reactionary forces of the established Church and conservative landlords. Parliament beat the King because it could appeal to the enthusiastic support of the trading and industrial classes in town and countryside, to the yeomen and progressive gentry, and to wider masses of the population whenever they were able by free discussion to understand what the struggle was really about (Hill 1955, p. 6).

The English Revolution as a progressive overcoming of the feudal mode of production is an interesting reading of the event that breaks with much of the Liberal, Whig, and Tory historiography that Hill takes aim at in his essay. More than the swapping of flags was at stake in these nineteen years. For Hill, it appears that the English Revolution provides historical instruction for Marxist politics. Despite

its being a revolution for the bourgeois, it nonetheless marks a “progressive” revolution. In terms of conjunctural analysis, this progress effectively means the end of the normal politics of the Stuart monarchy in a crisis and the advent of a new settlement stacked in favor of the bourgeoisie.

The economic transformations alone were immense. Hill writes, “Under the old order, in the century before 1640, real wages for labourers in industry and agriculture fell by more than one half: in the century after 1640 they more than doubled” (Hill 1955, p. 9). The elements that Hill identifies, though, are nearly absent from *Leviathan*. That is, though Hobbes provides a defense of Engagement, he does not do so because Engagement is an endorsement of the revolt of the popular classes. Even where Hobbes does touch on, say, economic issues, he often does so in ways that run contrary to materialist Marxist analysis that Hill sees as precipitating revolution. For example, Hill writes that, “between 1510 and 1580 food trebled in price in England, and textiles rose by 150 per cent. This had the same effect as an inflation in our day” (Hill 1955, p. 15). However, Hobbes, on the topic of money, seems to suggest that sovereign monetary policy cannot alter the value of gold and silver. He writes, “silver and gold, have their value from the matter itself; they have first this privilege, that the value of them cannot be altered by the power of one, nor of a few commonwealths” (Hobbes 1998, p. 167). Furthermore, economic concern cannot be the grounds for Hobbes to sign on to a revolutionary government for the mere reason that he views industry and war as inversely related. In his description of the state of nature, Hobbes writes, “in such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain” (Hobbes 1998, p. 84). A revolutionary movement against government is therefore also always necessarily a revolution against the condition of possibility of industry. The economy cannot justify revolution for Hobbes. The rights of one class cannot triumph over another class when both classes have voluntarily contracted to live in society together, and the rights of the sovereign cannot be divided so the triumph of parliament over king is

nonsensical as a justification for claiming Hobbes as a revolutionary. Hobbes reads the conjuncture in an entirely different way from this Marxist revolutionary approach. That is, he identifies a different element or set of elements around ecclesiastical politics rather than around economic issues and makes this the center of his analysis.

This is a point approached by Wood years after the Skinner-Warrender debate. Her own analysis hinges on the importance of the historical emergence of the dominant epochal trend of capitalism out of the conjuncture of the “early modern period” and as such, she is less concerned with the specifics of the Engagement Controversy than someone like Skinner, but indeed, for her the Engagement Controversy’s importance to Hobbes can only be evidence of an attempt to grasp what the character of the emerging epoch will be, that is, Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is important for its purpose in deciphering what kind of history will the new logics of capital determine. The historical specificity of the Engagement Controversy should be taken in a longer view precisely to pull back the curtain on all the religious argumentation and reveal the class conflicts undergirding the English Revolution. In a rebuke of both Skinner and Warrender she writes,

For the social history of political thought, it is not enough to track relations among thinkers, their utterances and texts; but nor is it enough to situate them in the historical context of very specific political episodes, such as the Engagement Controversy in which Hobbes may have sought to intervene (Wood 2012, p. 29).

That is, she distinguishes herself from thinkers at the formal level of their text, but also the “very specific” context of their political episodes. What she attempts to establish, however, is a proper scope for handling ideas. This raises the question, however, of what purpose this scope should be proper *for*. Implicitly, this appears as well in Hill’s treatment of the Revolution. He writes, for example, that the split between Presbyterians and Independents “was, in fact, a class split” with the Presbyterians reducible to the faction of the “big bourgeoisie”

while the Independents were compromised of “the progressive smaller gentry, yeomen, free-trade bourgeoisie, supported by the masses of smaller peasants and artisans” (Hill 1955 p. 45). Wood makes no claims to refute Skinner, only to challenge the immediacy of his historical contextualization. For Wood, Hobbes is “the most notable defender of royal absolutism” and should be read as resisting the democratic multitude in their project of class war against the king (Wood 2012, p. 218). This view, I claim, in its rejection of specificity, reduces Hobbes to the level of a mere counterrevolutionary and misses his analysis of the *specific* conjuncture he analyzes in *Leviathan*. It is not the case for Hobbes, then, that the Presbyterian, Anglican, Independent, and Catholic all stand in for this or that class position. His rejection of economic causes of the revolution should not be read as an inherently “royal absolutist” approach to the conflict, either.

To claim Hobbes as a “defender” of “royal absolutism” is to neglect how Hobbes analyzed the Engagement Controversy. The historian Jeffrey R. Collins has claimed that, “A positive, if partial and often hesitant, agreement with aspects of the Revolution motivated Hobbes to break with royalism” (Collins 2005, p. 5). Collins explicitly allies himself with Skinner’s contextualist reading of Hobbes’s defense of Engagement. He also makes a somewhat ambiguous claim that Hobbes was only “partial” in his agreement with “aspects” of the revolution. I argue that to think Hobbes as a conjunctural thinker, we should accept that he did endorse the revolutionary government of Cromwell and did not do so in any way that could be called partial, hesitant, or pertaining only to certain “aspects” and not to others. Rather, as I shall develop below, *Leviathan* poses an immanent critique of those aspects of the Parliamentary ideology that prevent them from rectifying the errors that created their revolutionary movement in the first place and thereby assuming the undivided authority of sovereignty. He is, in effect, arguing that he knows what is best for the Parliamentarians if they want to achieve peace, and that peace may require abandoning some of the revolutionary claims on which they

developed their theory of their own legitimacy. To this effect, in *Leviathan* Hobbes writes:

If there had not first been an opinion received of the greatest part of England, that these powers were divided between the King, and the Lords, and the House of Commons, the people had never been divided and fallen into this civil war; first between those that disagreed in politics; and after between the dissenters about the liberty of religion; which have so instructed men in this point of sovereign right, that there be few now (in England,) that do not see, that these rights are inseparable, and will be so generally acknowledged at the next return of peace; and so continue, till their miseries are forgotten; and no longer, except the vulgar be better taught than they have hitherto been (Hobbes 1998, p. 121).

In this passage we see three points worth dwelling on. First, Hobbes remains ardent that the fault for the civil war lies with the division of sovereignty between the king and parliament. That is, he does not endorse the revolution because of some imperfection within the English state prior to the revolution. Indeed, it could only be born of a failure to see that the rights of the sovereign are inseparable. For Hobbes, this revolution and indeed any revolution, begins in error. Second, Hobbes argues that there may be a return of peace only if this error is rectified and the new sovereign power asserts itself with undivided power. Third, he speaks in neutral terms of the “next return of peace,” that is, without specifying whether it will be a Royalist or Parliamentary sovereign who presides over this peace. Instead, he speaks about the lessons that such a sovereign will have to impart, namely, that sovereign power is undivided. The Parliamentarians could preside over peace, therefore, if they resolve their vulgar belief in the division of powers.

The revolution begins with a belief in the division of sovereignty that Hobbes finds erroneous and yet it has the potential to

form an undivided sovereign power if it were to abandon this belief. For Hobbes, the Parliamentarians are both the cause and solution to the civil wars. In this sense, he accepts the legitimacy of Engagement as a possible conclusion for the war. It is important to note that Hobbes was not offering a postmortem, and indeed the war was ongoing during the Engagement controversy. The Oath of Engagement emerged in the wake of the regicide, not in the cessation of hostilities. Patterson-Tutschka points out that, “the war was still raging when Hobbes wrote and published *Leviathan*” (Patterson-Tutschka 2015, p. 633). As such, *Leviathan* offers a strategic analysis of its conjuncture and a way out of the conflict for the Parliamentarians.

Hobbes is no revolutionary himself, but he can be said to support the legitimacy of the revolutionary government’s claim because it carried what he saw as the potential for the promotion of peace through the resolution of the very errors inherent in the moment of its divisive foundation. He should not be read as a partisan defender of “royal absolutism” given this support for a democratic sovereign in the Commonwealth government. Wood claims, “Hobbes has undermined Parliament’s case by repudiating both the mixed constitution and the political status of the multitude” (Wood 2012, p. 247). I would instead argue that Hobbes alters but does not undermine Parliament’s case—he argues for a sovereign parliament against the mixed constitution and with high regard for the political status of the multitude in choosing their sovereign. It is not so much the case that Hobbes picks and chooses which parts of the revolutionary project to agree with so much as it is that he affirms their legitimacy in the hopes that Cromwell, with the Rump parliament behind him, could end the civil wars by securing consent of all governed through the Oath of Engagement. There is no endorsement of class war, nor of justice for religious dissenters, nor of the rights of parliament against the king. And yet, all the same, Hobbes does endorse the revolutionary government’s claim because he believes in the *de facto* legitimacy of conquerors.

This leaves something to be desired for our analysis because it leaves open the question of why Hobbes saw fit to intervene in the way he did. That is, why did he support the Parliamentary claim instead of the Royalist one when it was still an open question as to who would win the war? We may answer this with a poignant question Collins poses about why Hobbes chose to write *Leviathan* when he did, especially considering that the sections on *de facto* theory and many other key political themes remain so similar to his earlier work. Collins asks, “Why did Hobbes, having only recently issued a revised edition of *De Cive* and finally returned his attention to natural philosophy, again change course and compose the third formulation of his civil science?” (Collins 2005, p. 116). That is, why did Hobbes see fit to issue a new work of political philosophy when his previous work, *De Cive* expresses many of the same beliefs about the *de facto* legitimacy of the state? Johann Sommerville finds a letter by Hobbes written during the same period Hobbes was composing *Leviathan* that may be instructive here. The crucial excerpt of the letter reads:

I do but propound, maintaining nothing in this, or any other paradox of Religion; but attending the end of that dispute of the sword, concerning the Authority, (not yet amongst my Countrey-men decided,) by which all sorts of doctrine are to be approved, or rejected; and whose commands... be obeyed (Hobbes, quoted in Sommerville 2019, p. 166).

In this excerpt, Hobbes signals a break with Royalism without fully endorsing the Independent cause. Here, Hobbes conceives of his countrymen as undecided on who shall become their next sovereign authority rather than as in error about who their true sovereign is. Though Collins and Sommerville are much disagreed as to whether *Leviathan* is an Independent or a Royalist text, Collins also notes the impact of the regicide on Hobbes’s thinking. He refers to the regicide as a “palpable breaking point” in Hobbes’s life (Collins 2005, p. 117). We might presume that this signals there was in fact no social compact at this point, and that the decision to be made by Hobbes’s countrymen

is which sovereign to choose. Though one of the great debates on the legacy of Hobbes concerns his atheism, on this issue at least he is a clear agnostic: he affirms neither cause as rightful, and instead seems to suggest that the question of who shall be sovereign must be decided by popular politics. It is out of this moment of irresolution that Hobbes comes to his conjunctural analysis in *Leviathan*. He looks to the indecision in the English public and ultimately endorses Engagement as an expedient way to end that conflict. Since he follows a *de facto* theory of legitimacy, the matter is decided not on the basis of an endorsement of the revolutionary politics of the Independents, but of the possibility for Engagement to serve as the foundation for assent to a new sovereign state where there was, after the regicide, only chaos.

Collins draws on Skinner's scholarship on the non-unique character of Hobbes's belief in *de facto* legitimacy to claim, "Hobbes's theory of obligation was an utterly static feature of his political theory, appearing without significant change in all his writings. *Leviathan* would hardly have been necessary to restate his long-standing views on political obligation" (Collins 2005, p. 120). As such, the *de facto* theory of legitimacy and Hobbes's theory of obligation to the state cannot be said to be the major theoretical developments of *Leviathan* because these ideas were first developed elsewhere in Hobbes's thought. Consider the following passage from the preface of *De Cive*, for example,

These grounds thus layd, I shew farther what civill government, and the supreme power in it, and the divers kinds of it are; by what meanes it becomes so, what rights particular men, who intend to constitute this civill government, must so necessarily transfer from themselves on the supreme power, whether it be one man, or an assembly of men, that except they doe so it will evidently appeare to be no civill government, but the rights which all men have to all things, that is the rights of Warre will still remaine (Hobbes 1983, p. 32).

These words, published in 1641, predate the English Revolution and already there appear elements of the *de facto* argument: there is a “supreme power” in the civil government, and this supreme power is not formed in accordance with the will of God, but by the transfer of rights from particular men to the government. The *de facto* theory is not unique to *Leviathan*, and it is not formed in response to the condition of civil war in England.

For a book whose political argument is largely preceded by its author’s previous work, *Leviathan* was nonetheless mighty popular in its time. Skinner finds evidence from 1658 that Hobbes was the third most popular author in England after Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh. Ten years later and his *Leviathan* was still so sought after that it still sold for “three times the original price” (Skinner 2004d, p. 267). Hobbes was a popular author and *Leviathan* a popular text. Hobbes’s critics “took themselves to be attacking the ablest presentation of a political outlook that was gaining dangerously in acceptability” (Skinner 2004d, p. 267). The popular appeal of the text does not make it less than a work of philosophy but does demonstrate that the philosophical work made its mark upon the literate parts of the English public. Furthermore, Hobbes’s critics perceived *Leviathan* to be skilled in its presentation and to profess a politics that they found particularly noxious, with the possibility of gaining real ground in public opinion. This is at least partially contrary to Sheldon Wolin’s claim that “the style and method of Machiavelli and Hobbes show...that they were addressing a highly select audience. They spoke to their intellectual peers and directed their efforts at influencing the few who occupied the seats of power” (Wolin 2004, p. 174). Hobbes may have thought he was addressing only an elite audience, and indeed the literate public would have largely been composed of the elite, but it was among the most popular texts in England. Hobbes’s critics were worried that his work would have repercussions for popular politics and Hobbes’s work was being read by just about as wide an English audience as a book could have in the mid-seventeenth century.

Why, though, did *Leviathan* make such a splash? If readers were familiar with *de facto* arguments, including *de facto* arguments by Hobbes himself, what reason was there to buy his new book? Skinner elsewhere describes *Leviathan* as an entry in a longstanding public debate on Engagement. He writes, “it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that Hobbes’s entire theory of lawful government as he articulates it in *Leviathan* takes the form of a critical commentary on...Parliamentarian arguments” (Skinner 2005a, p. 167). Thus, there is a tremendous currency to his argument, as it appears to amend his previously developed theories of obligation and *de facto* legitimacy of the sovereign but within the scope of his present conjuncture. Furthermore, Hobbes makes use of “the distinctive political vocabulary developed in the meantime by his Parliamentarian adversaries” (p. 168). That is, Hobbes recasts the arguments Collins calls “static” across all his political work within the rhetorical paradigm of his political opponents to effectively dismantle their arguments from the inside out. Hobbes attacks the Parliamentarians not because he is opposed to their claim, but because, as a potential supporter of their claim, he seeks to transform their politics into a politics that is free of the revolutionary sentiments that caused them to see a division in the sovereignty of the Stuart monarchy. He seeks to convince the Parliamentarians to use the Oath of Engagement as an occasion to attain sovereign legitimacy through popular assent and abandon their claims to have a providential right to rule. Hobbes’s critique of the Parliamentarian cause is not partial or incomplete, so much as it is an attempt to recognize those parts of the Parliamentarian argument that are not themselves suited for the undivided power of sovereignty. His writing is focused on making the Independents fit for sovereignty and making the public fit for Independency.

Conjunctural analysis posits the possibility of articulating a new settlement between opposing social forces on the basis of the remnants of group cohesion maintained by the social elements composing those forces after the event of an organic crisis. That is, a conjuncture is necessarily a moment in which a certain settlement is ruptured, leaving

the fragments that can then be rearticulated into a new settlement. As Grossberg writes, “conjuncture must always be seen as the result of a complex and fragile set of articulations, which requires various labours attempting – and always partly failing – to maintain its ever-changing shape and density” (Grossberg 2019, p. 58). Hobbes sees the origins of the English Revolution as a crisis within the order of the Stuart monarchy, and specifically in a set of Parliamentary beliefs that Sommerville summarizes thusly: “The Civil War in England had resulted from people’s ignorance of their liberties, and from the belief of princes that they were boundless in authority. Not even parliament had unlimited power, and the people could defend itself against a wicked parliament” (Sommerville 2004, p. 164). For Hobbes, such a view is necessarily a source of organic crisis. The rupture of the social forces of parliament and the monarchy broke their longstanding settlement and opened a question about which group should have sovereign power. Any settlement, Hobbes is keenly aware, must remedy this belief that sovereign power can be divided. However, this is not the only element at play. Here again we see the unique insight Hobbes has to offer as a conjunctural thinker, which Skinner explains by stating, “Of all the writers who contributed to the debate about *de facto* powers, only one eliminated all invocations of God’s providence and grounded a theory of obligation entirely on an account of the political nature of mankind” (Skinner 2004a, p. 303). Hobbes breaks with natural law theory and divine right, and he rejects popular Parliamentary arguments within their own vernacular. He weaves between the various social forces populating the space of the English Revolution and uses *de facto* theory as the grounds for a new settlement between these forces.

The theory of *de facto* legitimacy, though, requires that a sovereign emerge that suits the character Hobbes attributes to the sovereign. Collins notes that one of the aims of *Leviathan* as a tract is “to advise sovereigns” but it is worth noting that the sovereign in England at the time of the composition and initial publication of *Leviathan* was, properly speaking, dissolved and any sovereign was a

sovereign yet to be formed by a new social contract struck between all people in England (Collins 2005, p. 128). It is for this reason that Hobbes turns to epochal forces to establish a new ground for sovereign authority. He is effectuating a shift from the divine right theory of sovereignty to a *de facto* form of sovereignty that requires its own logical justifications. It requires popular support. But what is to be the basis of that popular support? Sommerville approaches this question in an interesting way. He writes:

Hobbes's assertion that there was no sovereign in England when he wrote *Leviathan*, and that he could therefore offer his own interpretation of the Bible suggests that in other works, written when there was a sovereign, he felt the need to tailor his view to accord with the sovereign's interpretation" (Sommerville 2019, p. 166).

That is, Hobbes saw that in the absence of a sovereign, it was incumbent upon him to return to some foundational source of authority (scripture) so that he could assist in the project of creating a popular political program around the religious foundations of a new sovereign power in Cromwell's Independents. Sommerville uses this point to explain a development from Hobbes's earlier religious arguments in *De Cive*, which largely conform to established Anglican ecclesiology. However, it is far more important that Hobbes uses the moment following the regicide to turn to sources of authority that persist even after the sovereign power has been dissolved. That is, he is searching among fragmentary elements to articulate a new argument for why Cromwell's Commonwealth should be accepted as legitimate and all claims of loyalty to the king abandoned.

We can say that Hobbes sees the English Revolution as a site of crisis that also offers up the possibility of a new settlement. In crafting the very terms of possibility for a settlement, Hobbes turns to his *de facto* theory and elaborates a basis for it in natural law, rhetoric, scriptural authority, and the arguments of both Parliamentarians and

Royalists. Grossberg writes, “A settlement, in defining the organic crisis, attempts to define a field of possibles – in both imaginative and strategic terms, defining and limiting the practices of communication, negotiation, resistance and opposition” (Grossberg 2019, p. 58). Hobbes defines the field of possible actions (war or peace) and elaborates on a suitable ontology for his *de facto* theory outside of any theory of God’s providence. To study a conjuncture is to study this process of movement from conjuncture to contested settlement. A conjuncture is always concerned with finding a settlement between the old and the new, as Hobbes does. He rejects certain elements of the old, such as royalism, but also much of classical thought, natural law theory, and divine right. He also bases his settlement on a combination of emerging scientific knowledge, old scriptural authority, patristic history, and classical rhetoric. Grossberg writes, “the question of what is old and what is new, what has worked under what conditions, and what has not, becomes a vital part of the effort to challenge the existing efforts to install a new settlement” (Grossberg 2019, p. 59). Hobbes as a conjunctural thinker attends to the attempts by both Parliamentarians and Royalists to form a new settlement and argues that these settlements are akin to the continuation of war. He inserts his theory of *de facto* legitimacy into their very modes of thinking to convince them that there is only one possible settlement capable of resolving war. Skinner writes that Hobbes “goes on to invoke and endorse the precise political vocabulary that the Parliamentarian writers had developed in the course of the 1640s” but turns this vocabulary against the divisive ends to which it has been put (Skinner 2005, p. 167). He also, as Sommerville notes, attempts to persuade Royalists that Engagement is in their best interest because they would be ruled by consent and allowed to keep their property rather than remain at war with their property at risk (Sommerville 2004, p. 157). Ted H. Miller suggests that Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* with a keen eye to his student, the future King Charles II. Miller writes,

Although Hobbes’s political philosophy speaks of sovereignty in general terms, Hobbes’s circumstances were

such that he expected that the next sovereign of Britain would be his student Prince Charles. Charles would also need to be convinced. Hobbes's immediate rhetorical task was to convince Charles that he should accept sovereignty not by divine right but by the consent of the governed. I think that *Leviathan's* unique rhetorical characteristics are in large part attributable to this challenging task (Miller 2004, p. 91).

It is perhaps too hasty to say that Hobbes expected the next sovereign of Britain to be Charles II, but it certainly the case that he wrote the book with certain rhetorical characteristics largely attributable to his desire to teach even the most ardent of Royalists (up to and including the Prince of Wales himself) that sovereignty is given by the consent of the governed. The title of Collins's book, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, is a provocative one, but if we take Hobbes as a conjunctural thinker, then we cannot think of him as taking this or that side except to the extent that one side will become the dominant party in whatever imperfect but stable settlement they manage to reach. That is to say that attempts to identify whether Hobbes was really a Royalist or really a Parliamentarian miss the extent to which Hobbes saw his only aim as the securing of popular assent to an undivided sovereign power so that there could be peace and law in England.

Conjunctural theory develops out of Marxism, but Hill's Marxist history tells us a very different story from what we see in *Leviathan*. Hill writes from an altogether different conjuncture after the birth of Marxist politics, and it leads him to treat the English Revolution as a possible inspiration for a twentieth century politics. Hill identifies the English Revolution as a conjuncture in his Marxist version of history because he perceives a breakdown in the settlement between the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the popular classes. Though he names multiple progressive advances, such as the end of the despotism of Charles I and the deposing of the state church, most of these are reduced to the advances of the bourgeoisie over the aristocracy. When Hill describes changes in religious politics, for

example, he focuses on an instrumental vision of what churches were in the seventeenth century, writing,

The Church controlled men's feelings and told them what to believe, provided them with entertainment and shows. It took the place of news and propaganda services now covered by many different and more efficient institutions—the Press, the B.B.C., the cinema) the club, and so forth (Hill 1955, p. 11).

As such, he sees the triumph of the Independents over the established church as really a piece of evidence supporting the class war hypothesis of the English Revolution. However, Hobbes sees things differently. For him, secularism is not a given in the same way that secularism is a given at Hill's conjuncture, and such a secular reading of the church as a mere site of ideological control misses the importance that Hobbes attributes to Christian life. A conjunctural analysis identifies which elements are important hinge points for the resolution of crisis and the formation of a new settlement. Hill, attempting to study the past to usher in the new through a rupture, acts in an altogether different way from Hobbes, whose conjunctural theory is rather more oriented toward the preservation of order. Hill treats "revolution" as a positive term, but Hobbes, though he endorses a revolutionary government in *Leviathan*, does so only on the condition that it abandon the theories of sovereignty that resulted in its formation. Hobbes picks out ecclesial politics as the site on which order can be reestablished just as Hill focuses on class war as the locus by which an old order can be overturned. Both are conjunctural analyses, both describe the same event, but they do so differently because of their different contexts and goals.

This section has examined how Hobbes addresses the conjuncture of the English Revolution. I claim that Hobbes as a conjunctural analyst sees himself not in allegiance with either side of the conflict, but merely proposes that one side, with some alteration

could provide a viable resolution to the conflict. *Leviathan* as a political work, therefore, is an attempt to launch a popular appeal to elements of both sides of the conflict to convince them of the *de facto* theory of legitimacy and the potential for Engagement to result in the formation of a new *de facto* sovereign by popular consent. It is a text that applies philosophical findings Hobbes first develops in *De Cive* and *Elements of Law* to the context of the post-regicide moment of Engagement by framing the static *de facto* argument within the discourses of both Royalist and Parliamentary partisan tracts. Hobbes in *Leviathan* is ultimately a proponent of Engagement but is aware that the war is ongoing and that the cause of Independency might fail without popular support. As such, he spits plenty of bile on Cromwell's cause, but accepts as well that with adjustment to his theories of sovereign right, Cromwell might well ensure enduring peace. Where both the Royalist and Parliamentary side believed in signs that they were entitled to rule by God's providence, Hobbes instead acted politically to persuade because he believed that God's favor was only truly afforded to those who rule *de facto*. In the following section, I delve further into Hobbes's attempt to craft a religious argument capable of mobilizing former Royalists to support the *de facto* sovereignty of Cromwell's Commonwealth.

Of Politics Ecclesiastical

Conjunctural analysis identifies a strategic site for action. For Hobbes in the context of the English Revolution, this site was the Church. Since the conjuncture sits at a level of abstraction between the moment and the epoch, it is open to vast changes—a single element in a conjuncture may provide the possibility of affecting epochal shifts in structures like the state or mode of production through actions taken at the level of the moment. For Hobbes, this small action was swearing the Oath of Engagement, and the barrier preventing men from swearing this oath was often religious. Was it a sin, after all, to swear an oath to a sovereign that did not support the institution of episcopacy with the authority to govern over religious rules? That is,

could one endanger one's eternal life in Heaven by swearing allegiance to a power on Earth without the religious right to rule? Hobbes answers no, it is no sin to swear the oath because the institution of the episcopacy depends upon its institution by the sovereign, or else it undermines the sovereign and to undermine the sovereign is to undermine the scriptural command to obey the law, and no minister of Christ, in Hobbes's view, could disobey scriptural commands.

The sovereign establishes the Church, but the sovereign is itself established by a transfer of right from each to all. This point causes some confusion but can also be an occasion to examine how Hobbes analyzes the politics of his conjuncture. Pierre Manent offers an interpretation of Hobbes's thinking on ecclesiastical matters that suggests that much of Hobbes's political philosophy is a reaction to the problems created by the English Reformation's attempt to establish a Protestant state church and, at the same time, ground the authority of the king on religious grounds. Manent mistakes the Hobbes of *Leviathan* for a Royalist and an Anglican, but this interpretation is still useful for understanding Hobbes's thinking. Manent claims, "Hobbes saw clearly that the only way of saving royal authority, and thus civil peace, was to detach completely the king's power from religion by making the king fully sovereign over it" (Manent 1995, p. 21). Manent reads Hobbes as arguing that the king must forfeit any claim to divine right because the king must become sovereign over matters of what is and is not divine. The religious cause of the civil wars is thus, in Manent's perspective, the proliferation of Protestant sects dissenting from the state's Anglicanism for Presbyterianism and other radical sects. Manent further claims that "the definition of the body politic having come to depend on a religious opinion which, it had been learned, was not fixed" and this lack of fixity was in some way responsible for the advent of the war (Manent 1995, p. 21). This is, in some sense, accurate to Hobbes's thinking. However, it relies upon an assumption that there ever was a period of fixity of religious opinion or ever could be some fixed Christian opinion on religious matters. For there to be fixity of

religious opinion, Christians must contract with one another to choose a sovereign who is also their “supreme pastor” (Hobbes 1998, p. 361).

It is on this point that Hobbes bases his endorsement of Independency, and it is also what spurs his most vehement anti-Catholic invective. The longest chapter of *Leviathan* by far is Chapter 42, “Of Power Ecclesiastical” and it is in this chapter that Hobbes launches many of his most politically inflammatory remarks, including his support for Independency and his most in-depth criticism of the papacy. The chapter is primarily concerned with the arguments of the Catholic Cardinal Bellarmine, a Jesuit theologian at a time when the Jesuits were especially renowned for their ultramontane support of the papacy when the question of ultramontane authority was still a disputed question within Catholicism. Bellarmine himself was an ardent supporter of the papacy’s monarchical rule. The chapter is unusual in that it combines the critique of Bellarmine’s ultramontanism with tirades against the Presbyterian dissenters. It is also unusual that Hobbes should focus his longest chapter on what Collins refers to as a “point-by-point rejoinder to *De Summo Pontifice* by Bellarmine” when that book was first published in 1586, almost seventy years before the first publication of *Leviathan*, when otherwise Hobbes’s argument is so focused on his contemporaries (Collins 2005, p. 23). However, the chapter addresses a systematic theological stance on ecclesiology that grounds ecclesiastical authority in sovereign power. The opening salvo against Bellarmine is illuminating because of addresses this very same idea of a pre-Reformation fixity of religious ideals that Manent invokes in his discussion of Hobbes. Hobbes writes,

Cardinal Bellarmine, in his third general controversy, hath handled a great many questions concerning the ecclesiastical power of the pope of Rome; and begins with this, whether it ought to be monarchical, aristocratical, or democratical: all which sorts of power are sovereign, and coercive. If now it should appear, that there is no coercive power left them by our Saviour; but only a power to proclaim

the kingdom of Christ, and to persuade men to submit themselves thereunto; and by precepts and good counsel, to teach them that have submitted, what they are to do, that they may be received into the kingdom of God when it comes; and that the apostles, and other ministers of the Gospel, are our schoolmasters, and not our commanders, and their precepts not laws, but wholesome counsels: then were all that dispute in vain. (p. 330).

In this passage it is as though Hobbes adopts Manent's own critique but turns it against Catholicism rather than against Protestantism. Hobbes himself denies that ministers are left with any right to coercive power by the authority of scripture. It is scripture that Hobbes seeks to grant this authority, and he strictly delineates the ministerial power that scripture grants from the sovereign power created by the social compact.

That is the argument of Chapter 42 in miniature: scripture grants ministerial authority and the sovereign power is formed only through the contract of each with all. Sovereign control over religious belief is something Hobbes furthermore finds nonsensical. He at times veers into a radical and quasi-Calvinist approach to belief that posits belief cannot be influenced by the rewards and punishments of others, meaning that sovereign power cannot coerce or reward belief. He writes, "Faith is a gift of God, which man can neither give, nor take away by promise of rewards, or menaces of torture" (Hobbes 1998, p. 332). Hobbes sees religious belief coming directly and only from God. He shares this theory of belief with the Independents. Even more telling, Manent's inference that the fixity of religious belief can be shaken by the transfer from a Catholic polity to a Protestant one is fundamentally at odds with Hobbes's claim that the sovereign cannot be responsible for changes in beliefs by use of rewards or punishments. God's authority in the inducement of belief extends beyond any sovereign's coercive ability to compel belief. For Hobbes, faith is a given, not a choice. Regarding ministers, Hobbes writes, "the points of

their commission, as they are expressly set down in the gospel, contain none of them any authority over the congregation” (Hobbes 1998, p. 334). Without this authority, there is then no possibility of a commonwealth formed on the foundation of the right of clergy to rule in temporal matters. Since religious belief for both Hobbes and the Independents is an internal matter and the authority of ministers is not by right coercive, this lends itself naturally to a Congregationalist ecclesiology whereby churches are independent of one another (hence the name Independent) and operate on the basis of free conscience (no coercion). They elect their ministers in a tradition Hobbes traces to the history of the early church. He writes,

The first apostle, of those which were not constituted by Christ in the time he was upon the earth, was Matthias, chosen in this manner: there were assembled together in Jerusalem about one hundred and twenty Christians (Acts 1. 15). These (verse 23) appointed two, Joseph the Just, and Matthias, and caused lots to be drawn; and (verse 26) the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the apostles. So that here we see the ordination of this apostle, was the act of the congregation, and not of St. Peter, nor of the eleven, otherwise than as members of the assembly (p. 352).

This passage demonstrates a belief in congregational assent to ministerial rule. Furthermore, because Hobbes claims that the sovereign must be the supreme pastor, therefore, that sovereign and supreme pastor must be chosen by the will of the congregation. There can be no Christian sovereign without this assent.

Hobbes has strange bedfellows with this argument, and these bedfellows prove a certain point about his views on sovereignty. Hobbes had much contact with the Blackloist group, a collection of Catholic intellectuals who inhabited the Court of Queen Henrietta Maria, the French Catholic wife of Charles I. However, this group played an unusual role in the conflict both intellectually and

pragmatically. The historian Stefania Tutino writes, “If in 1645 helping the Queen meant...helping the philo-Catholic Royalist faction to overcome the viscerally anti-Catholic Parliament, this time [1647] helping the Queen meant favouring a peaceful resolution of the conflict” (Tutino 2009, p. 50). That is to say, the Blackloists were a Royalist faction of Catholics sitting in a Catholic court who, in turn, took it upon themselves to maneuver intellectually and politically to support Independency so as to bring peace. Politically this meant attempting to broker a deal between the Independents and the class of Catholic nobility in Ireland, who were mostly Royalist out of fear of religious persecution from more extreme sects of Protestant dissenters. This activity led the Blackloists to petition the Pope and to seek to turn the mass of Catholic forces in Ireland against the Royalist cause (Tutino 2008, p. 52). These flirtations were mutual, with the Independents seriously entertaining the idea of providing a limited degree of Catholic toleration in line with Blackloist proposals in exchange for giving them Ireland. Collins writes that, “The flirtation with the Blackloists...must be placed within the context of the Commonwealth’s security concerns. In the aftermath of the king’s execution, facing revolts on the Celtic fringe and confronted with hostility across Europe, the Commonwealth needed allies (Collins 2004, p. 318).

While the Independents acted out of necessity in their dealings with the Blackloists and ultimately reneged on the proposition of providing toleration in exchange for an alliance, the Blackloists were intellectuals, and they developed a complex ecclesiological justification for cooperation with the Independents that may have influenced Hobbes’s own political thinking. Richard Tuck writes,

It would not be surprising if it was the experience of prolonged and intellectually satisfying debates with these Catholics, of which the *Critique of White* is the most vivid testament, which led Hobbes to his own theological position - in which, in a sense, the national church under its civil

sovereign simply takes over the absolute interpretative power accorded to the universal church in the Catholic tradition, and a material body is given once again to the ghost of the Roman empire (Tuck 1993, p. 137).

Indeed, something in Hobbes's thought changed in the same period in which the Blackloists moved from ardent Royalists to instead supporting a peaceful resolution. In the period in which he was exposed to these Catholics, Hobbes's opinions on ecclesiastical power and its relationship to sovereign power changed in ways that largely mirror the Blackloists own conciliar view of Catholicism. The Blackloists radically reconsidered the relationship of Catholic ecclesiastical authority to the papacy. Tutino writes, "[T]he relationship between the English Catholic Church and the Pope needed to be specified by reconsidering the hierarchical structure of the government of the Church of Rome" (Tutino 2008, p. 45). Propositions included allowing the English parliament to elect Catholic bishops, and the Blackloists proposed an oath of their own, which would have them swear, "[T]he Pope can have no Power over them to the prejudice of the state" (Pugh quoted in Tutino 2008, p. 45). This anti-papal Catholicism based in fear of the pope's authority as a temporal sovereign potentially undermining the allegiance of subjects to the civil sovereign is mirrored in Hobbes's own transition from Anglicanism to Independency.

In 1642, in *De Cive*, Hobbes presents an ecclesiology that is recognizably Anglican in character. However, without a sovereign in place to interpret the law, this Anglican interpretation of religion falls out of favor for Hobbes. That is, after the regicide, Hobbes took it upon himself to interpret scripture again so as to provide a basis for Independent government because there was no sovereign power fit to exercise interpretive power. Tuck writes, "Hobbes broke with the Anglican tradition because the Church of England was not sufficiently purged of the religion of the gentiles" (Tuck 1993, p. 133). That is, the Anglican tradition was too dependent upon the episcopal governance

of bishops with an authority independent from the king. Sommerville writes, “The Anglicans argued that it was the clergy who were the proper interpreters of Scripture” (Sommerville 2019, p. 167). However, this view relies upon the sovereign providing a certain degree of authority to the bishops so that they may authoritatively inhabit this role. Sommerville writes that Hobbes across *De Cive* and later *Leviathan* held the same belief that, “[T]he authority to interpret the Bible belongs to the sovereign and the sovereign alone, but it makes practical sense for him to consult experts, as it would in geometry or any other field” (Sommerville 2019, p. 168). That is, there remains a kind of factual basis that can become a domain of expertise in the interpretation of scripture. It is merely that the sovereign should not divide his own power by granting some power to his bishops that the sovereign itself cannot lay ultimate claim to, a political error that Hobbes sees corrected in the congregational ecclesiology of the Independents who assent to their sovereign just as they assent to their ministers. Anglican episcopal government was a site of potential division, and thus a point that Hobbes saw fit to revise in his embrace of Independency.

Hobbes thought of the shift from Anglicanism to Independency in a conjunctural way. That is, he saw that Independent ecclesiology with its congregational method of choosing ministers was a fitting way of securing the undivided character of the future sovereign against the possibility of a class of bishops laying claim to some coercive power against the wishes of the sovereign. Congregational ecclesiology fits neatly into Hobbes’s *de facto* theory of legitimacy and his theory of the social compact. In the absence of a sovereign power, congregations provide the basis for the interpretation of scripture, which in turn leads to an imperative to select a civil sovereign and follow its laws. The Independents “sought to preserve the religious unity of the Commonwealth under the aegis of the magistrate, while undermining the coercive power of any national clerical establishment” (Collins 2005 pp. 102-103). In *Leviathan*, this dual role of preserving unity and undermining the possibility of an

established clergy with the capability of questioning the decisions of the sovereign appears to be a convenient solution to the problems of a religiously plural commonwealth and a clergy with aims to exercise coercive authority as though it were the sovereign.

The political theorist Monicka Patterson-Tutschka offers an interpretation of Hobbes meant to take aim at Collins's radical reading of *Leviathan* in which she claims that Hobbes was religious anti-foundationalist, and that he thus sought to reject not only Anglicanism, but also Independency itself. She writes, "In addition to challenging divine-right Presbyterians and divine-right Anglicans, we may interpret Hobbes's attack on religion foundations in *Leviathan* as an attack on Cromwell's and his allies' claim to authority" (Patterson-Tutschka 2017, p. 645). My claim is that it is precisely because Hobbes is so anti-foundationalist in matters of religious authority, or, in the language of conjunctural analysis, so radically contextual, that he seizes upon and affirms Independency as the proper model for resolving the crisis of the civil wars. Hobbes was once an Anglican, and had the Stuart monarchy remained in power, he likely would have remained one his entire life. However, when sovereignty was made an open question, the model of congregational assent offered by Independency offered a potential solution to the problems of church government posed by bishops whose power could in some sense be said to undermine the authority of the sovereign. It is merely the case that Independency in the conjuncture of the Engagement controversy after the regicide provided a clearer means of peaceful resolution to the continued fighting.

Conclusion: Leviathan as Conjunctural Analysis

A conjuncture sits between a moment and an epoch and carries with it the possibility of tremendous social change. When we study Hobbes, we can follow Warrender and study his theory in an abstract and transhistorical way by concerning ourselves only with the formal elements of his texts, taking each text as a world unto itself, a closed totality. Or, alternatively, we can study him as Skinner does, in his

historical context, and draw out inferences about how the structures that govern our lives like the sovereign state have a historical link to the very same structures Hobbes describes in his work. However, in this article I offer a third possibility of reading Hobbes as radically contextual, as a thinker who examines the crisis facing his present conjuncture and sets upon the task of cobbling together a settlement to that crisis out of the philosophical and political means available to him—the *de facto* theory of legitimacy, the authority of scripture, geometry, the history of congregational selection of ministers in the early Church, the Oath of Engagement, rhetoric, and so on. *Leviathan* operates between the possible epoch of peace and the moment of war. When we read *Leviathan*, we can appreciate the particular genius that went into the political calculations therein. Hobbes articulates the grounds for new alliances between old enemies. He decides what of the old should remain and what of the new must be ushered in. In the final paragraph of *Leviathan*, he writes that he offers it up to his reader “without partiality, without application, and without other design than to set before men's eyes the mutual relation between protection and obedience” (Hobbes 1998, p. 475). I argue that we should believe this statement. As students of Hobbes, we should consider the ways that he makes this mutual relation between protection and obedience the cornerstone of his philosophy and his politics to the detriment of partiality. Attempts to claim him for the Royalist or the Parliamentarian side are therefore misguided. He had a grander project than both, a project of articulation of various social elements into a coherent unity that could bring about a lasting peace.

We can thus think of Hobbes as we consult our own conjuncture, no matter how different it is from his. While it is perhaps unwise to fix an exact method for doing conjunctural analysis that applies across every context, we should ask ourselves what method can Hobbes provide us? How does he assemble a theory of a new peaceful settlement out of the fragments left by the crisis of the Stuart monarchy in the English Revolution? How does he work across the registers of the political tract and the philosophical treatise to produce

a cultural text capable of intervening at his conjuncture, of persuading men to swear an oath? These questions can guide our thinking about our own conjuncture, and if Hobbes's conjunctural thinking is valuable to us, we should make use of him.

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