

Contesting the Future: Secular and Religious Time in Hobbes's *Leviathan*

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Abstract: This article examines the peculiar fusion of secular and religious temporal orders in Hobbes's *Leviathan* in light of the debate between Löwith and Blumenberg over the origins of modern time consciousness. The analysis places Hobbes more securely on the side of Blumenberg by uncovering the constructive agency at work in the anxiously future-preoccupied account of human nature which distinguishes *Leviathan* from Hobbes's earlier works and which gives his revision of Christian eschatology its psychological coherence and rhetorical force. This interpretation of Hobbes as an early architect of modern time consciousness fills in the missing temporal pieces in Blumenberg's own engagement with Hobbes and gives the theme of temporality—of creating and securing the experience of an open future above all—the attention that it deserves in the account of Hobbes's modernity.

Introduction

This article examines the peculiar fusion of secular and religious temporal orders in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* in light of the debate between Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg over the origins of modern time consciousness. My analysis places Hobbes's *Leviathan* more securely on the side of Blumenberg by uncovering the constructive agency at work in the anxiously future-preoccupied account of human nature that he offers in part 1. This account of human nature, as unique to *Leviathan* as his foray into eschatology in part 3, enables Hobbes to establish a rhetorically effective connection between the anxieties that ground religion and the anxieties to which only the *Leviathan* can provide a remedy. Advocates of the secularization thesis cast the process of secularization as involuntary or unwitting, as the result of a complex interaction of influences—the ineffability of religious

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faith,¹ a craving for ultimate meaning,² or a susceptibility to irrational desires and fears, especially under conditions of change and uncertainty³—of which those on whom it is working are only dimly aware. The moment of active authorship that we encounter in the argument and design of Hobbes's *Leviathan* provides a thinker- and text-specific case in which modern time consciousness appears instead as the self-conscious work of an individual who aspired to be an influence in his own right.

My interpretation of Hobbes as an architect of modern time consciousness offers an original contribution in three respects. First, it goes further than Blumenberg's own engagement with Hobbes by addressing the significance of his anxiously future-preoccupied account of human nature in *Leviathan* for the secularization debate. Blumenberg's commentary is framed by the terms of his critique of Carl Schmitt, whose version of the secularization thesis is substantially different from Löwith's. Second, it contributes to the literature on Hobbes by using the theme of temporality to illuminate a new aspect of the relationship between the secular and the theological orders that Hobbes is attempting to unify in *Leviathan*. Studies of Hobbes that emphasize his constructive agency in relation to Christianity and identify an ambitious secular-scientific purpose of cultural transformation at work in his revision of Christian eschatology in *Leviathan* do not consider the broader temporal implications of this revision and the temporal framing of the psychology to which it is calculated to correspond.⁴ More recent studies that highlight anxiety about the future as an aggravating condition of competition and conflict tend to collude with Hobbes in casting anxiety as a natural problem rooted in the limitations of human knowledge;⁵ the problem of anxiety may be considered in connection with his treatment of religion but

¹Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), v–vii, 204–7.

²Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, *Modernity without Restraint*, ed. Manfred Hennigsen (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 187–88.

³Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 285–86.

⁴J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 148–201; David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of "Leviathan": Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 214–81; Richard Tuck, "The 'Christian Atheism' of Thomas Hobbes," in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. M. Hunter and D. Wootton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 111–29; and Richard Tuck, "The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes," in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 120–38.

⁵William W. Sokoloff, "Politics and Anxiety in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *Theory & Event* 5, no. 1 (2001): 1–14; Annamaria Vassalle, "Prometheus Bound: Curiosity and

his particular remedy of revising Christian eschatology is not addressed.⁶ Finally, it highlights an important but overlooked dimension of Hobbes's modernity by situating the temporally charged conceptual materials that he musters in *Leviathan* in relation to debates about the nature and sources of modern time consciousness.

Even if we have avoided the hazards of taking Hobbes's naturalistic presentation of his anxiously future-preoccupied human beings at face value, we have not yet reckoned with the hazards of the secularization controversy. For advocates of the secularization thesis, Hobbes's account of the future as an object of boundless anxiety depends on assumptions about temporality for which the modern experiences cited by Blumenberg cannot entirely account and for which a plausible alternative source can be found in the theological and psychological inheritance of Christianity. The curiously doubled future of the future-preoccupied universe of the *Leviathan*—an earthly future that extends into an eschatological future bounded by an omnipotent and inscrutable God—would appear to clinch the case. To think alongside Gillespie's Löwith-inspired reading, Hobbes's fearsome God not only jeopardizes his enterprise of subordinating religion to politics, it reduces the fear of the future with which his individual is preoccupied to the fear of God's impending judgment.⁷ Rather than a naturalization of bourgeois man, as C. B. Macpherson argued, Hobbesian man appears in this light as a naturalization of Christian man.⁸

The analysis that I develop in reply to this challenge to the sources of Hobbes's temporal modernity aims to demonstrate the relationship between the priority that Hobbes gives to the future and his commitment to the emerging secular-scientific program for the development of new and useful knowledge. The first section provides an overview of the Löwith-Blumenberg debate and highlights the missed opportunity of Blumenberg's engagement with Hobbes in the course of his critique of Schmitt. The second section examines the way in which the priority given to the future arises from Hobbes's

Anxiety for the Future Time in Hobbes' *Leviathan*," *Humana.Mente* 4, no. 12 (2010): 23–42.

⁶Loralea Michaelis, "Hobbes's Modern Prometheus: A Political Philosophy for an Uncertain Future," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 1 (2007): 101–27; Gianni Paganini, "'Passionate Thought': Reason and the Passion of Curiosity in Thomas Hobbes," in *Emotional Minds: The Passions and the Limits of Pure Inquiry in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Sabrina Ebbersmeyer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 227–56; and Alissa MacMillan, "Curiosity and Fear Transformed: From Religious to Religion in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 80, no. 3 (2019): 287–302.

⁷Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁸C. B. Macpherson, "Hobbes's Bourgeois Man," in *Hobbes Studies*, ed. Keith Brown (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 169–84.

foundational account of perception as limited and confounded by sense impressions which qualifies what can be known of the past and makes the future an object of desire but not knowledge. The third section examines how the interest in the future which distinguishes human beings is converted into intolerable levels of anxiety as a consequence of Hobbes's radically anti-Aristotelian account of human desire in the absence of a *summum bonum*. The fourth section reconstructs the idea of progress underlying Hobbes's account of the sovereign power, whose task is not only to manage anxiety about the future so that it does not reach the crisis proportions of the state of war but also to create the conditions for a new relation to the future in which anxiety is displaced by curiosity and the possibility of progress is secured. The final section revisits Hobbes's refashioning of Christian eschatology in light of the overarching secular-scientific temporal program of *Leviathan*. The curious fusion that he effects between a secular future in which modest progress is possible through human effort and the Christian future in which God rewards the faithful with an earthly paradise that will last for all eternity establishes Hobbes as an early modern architect of modern time consciousness. The new temporal order is painstakingly welded to the one that has gone before, taking its shape in the transition only so that the seam does not show.

1. The Löwith-Blumenberg-Schmitt Debate

Reinhart Koselleck characterizes modern time consciousness as arising from an experience of rupture between past and future in which the future can no longer be inferred from the past. Anticipation, not remembrance, preparation, not recovery: these are the temporal dispositions that distinguish us as modern and that underlie the concepts of history, progress, and revolution that have been central to the modern political imagination.⁹ However, the degree to which this future-orientation is original to modernity has been a matter of some contention. According to Löwith's influential argument in *Meaning in History*, modern time consciousness is little more than a secularization of the Christian. The modern temporal horizon is distinguished from the Christian insofar as the modern is open to human agency and the Christian is bounded by the workings of God. But insofar as the future retains its privileged position over the past and the present, becoming, through the idea of progress, the horizon of fulfillment that gives all that comes before its meaning and purpose, modern time consciousness has its deepest roots in the Christian. Even in its celebration of the world-creating powers of human beings the modern appears in Löwith's account as nothing more than a thief in the conceptual storehouse of the Christian, transferring to human beings the powers of a God who is distinguished by his act

⁹Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

of creation. Modern ideas of history, progress, and human agency are “Christian by derivation” even as they are “anti-Christian by implication.”¹⁰

For Hans Blumenberg, who challenged Löwith and others in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, modern concepts of time arise from the experiences of novelty and the possibility of self-improvement which accompanied developments in the arts and sciences beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹¹ Such experiences not only enabled the formation of a distinctively modern identity with which to oppose the authority of the ancients, they made it possible to challenge the medieval Christian disposal of life on earth to the whims of an omnipotent and indifferent God. The future of this world, previously closed to new experiences and the possibility of improvement, is opened.¹² Blumenberg does not deny that the modern has been influenced by the Christian but he distinguishes between the idea that progress is possible through human effort and the idea that history is developing inevitably in that direction: while the former is native to modernity and reflects a new set of expectations grounded in new experiences, the latter reflects the overextension of this new set of expectations through what he describes as a “reoccupation” of medieval Christian problems and questions. The modern idea of progress as the purpose or ultimate destination of history does not carry forward in secular form the substance of the medieval Christian idea of providence but it does carry forward the medieval Christian question of the purpose or ultimate destination of history as a whole which the idea of providence was designed to answer.¹³ For Blumenberg the relation between modern secular and Christian concepts of time is one of tension rather than derivation.

What is fundamentally at issue in this controversy, as the title of Blumenberg’s book suggests, is not so much the historical question of the origins of modern time consciousness as the normative question of its authenticity and worth. Löwith’s argument that modern time consciousness is nothing more than an offshoot of the Christian aims to challenge the claims to novelty that modernity makes on its own behalf and to expose its self-misunderstanding as an age of enlightenment. The modern does not overcome the darkness of faith but only strengthens its dominion by obscuring its persistence: faith masquerades as reason in the secular theologies of history by which the providential hand of God is disguised as the law of progress. For Löwith such theologies stand in violation of common sense and foster world-historical delusions of the kind that culminated in the political disasters of the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁴ Philosophy of history falls into discredit in

¹⁰Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 61.

¹¹Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

¹²*Ibid.*, 30–34.

¹³*Ibid.*, 46–50.

¹⁴Löwith, *Meaning in History*, v.

the wake of these disasters and cynicism overtakes idealism, but this is all part of the pathogenesis of modern time consciousness for Löwith, vacillating between unbounded confidence in the future and disappointment over what it actually brings: "There is hardly a future which, when it has become present, does not disappoint."¹⁵ Against the erratic intoxications of modern time consciousness Löwith sets the sobriety of the ancient pagans, who take their measure of historical time from their observation of the cyclical processes of nature and regard the oscillation of human fortunes with stoic resignation. Blumenberg is also concerned with the pathologies of modern time consciousness but his analysis of its origins is designed to enhance rather than undermine its worth. His insistence on the tension between modern and Christian time consciousness is central to his aim of retrieving modern ideas of history, progress, and human agency from the totalization that they underwent under the influence of questions inherited from the past and restoring them to their original modest scope.

Hobbes's *Leviathan* yields rich material for documenting Blumenberg's characterization of the birth of modern time consciousness as a process in which emerging secular systems of ideas and experiences are grafted onto older faith-based systems, finding cover and concealment, bearing points and resources for vivifying the new at the expense of the old. While Blumenberg engages with Hobbes in *Legitimacy* it is primarily in the context of his critique of Schmitt, whose version of the secularization thesis is not centrally concerned with temporality and sharply diverges from Löwith in its normative intention.¹⁶ Rather than discrediting the originality of the modern project, Schmitt uses the concept of secularization to draw attention to its essential theological core; modern concepts of sovereignty and human agency occupy the same position as the concept of God in theological systems, all of these concepts rendered according to the principles of his decisionism.¹⁷ Schmitt invokes Hobbes's personification of the state as a mortal God in support of his claim that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."¹⁸ Blumenberg's rejoinder does not focus on the material of Hobbes's political philosophy so much as the mistaking of metaphor and analogy for the transfer of religious substance which underlies the logic of the secularization

¹⁵Ibid., 204.

¹⁶Peter E. Gordon, "Secularization, Genealogy, and the Legitimacy of the Modern Age: Remarks on the Löwith-Blumenberg Debate," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 80, no. 1 (2019): 147–70; Pini Ifergan, "Cutting to the Chase: Carl Schmitt and Hans Blumenberg on Political Theology and Secularization," *New German Critique* 111 (2010): 149–71.

¹⁷Celina María Bragagnolo, "Secularization, History, and Political Theology: The Hans Blumenberg and Carl Schmitt Debate," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 5 (2011): 98.

¹⁸Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.

thesis. Hobbes's program for a state religion is "not a secularized theology but rather the selection from theology of what will be tolerable in the world,"¹⁹ to create the conditions for peace amid the contending denominations of Christianity.²⁰ Blumenberg presents Hobbes's political philosophy as an exemplary case of the modern principle of self-assertion in which the experience of civil conflict motivates the creation of a new order of shared meanings to take the place of the one that has been lost.²¹ But his treatment of Hobbes does not address the themes of temporality that dominate the debate with Löwith.

The remaining sections of this article aim to provide these missing temporal pieces. Modern time consciousness comes into view in *Leviathan* not in the context of narratives of history as inevitable progress but against the backdrop of the early modern preoccupation with science and state formation: the expectation of a future that is different from the past heightens the interest in the future at the expense of the past; in the absence of a common power, this interest is driven by anxiety rather than hope. A progressive development might be possible but is far from inevitable; it is as artificial as the political order on which it depends; regression to anxiety and the state of war remains an ever-present threat. The coherence of the temporal order in which human beings experience themselves as moving toward a future of innovation and industry depends upon the creation of political order; it does not inhere in the nature of things. In making the sovereign the condition of this temporal order Hobbes must contend with the rival claims of religious authorities who appeal to a temporal order created by God and an ordained future revealed through prophecy. His remedy is not the abolition of prophetic religions but their political containment by means of a novel theology of the future from which virtually all other-worldly traces have been drained. Far from undermining the secular temporal order that he constructs in part 1, Hobbes's secular capture of Christian eschatology in part 3 provides it with indefinite extension, anticipating the idea of inevitable progress on which critics of modern time consciousness place so much emphasis. But in Hobbes's case, as I argue, its source is secular rather than religious.

2. The Epistemic and Psychological Priority of the Future

The priority given to the future in the secular temporal order of part 1 of *Leviathan* is anchored in Hobbes's commitment to the program for a new science emerging in European philosophical circles in the early seventeenth century. As the founder of the first self-consciously scientific theory of political obligation, Hobbes, like Descartes, founds his enterprise on a rejection of

¹⁹Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 95.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 90.

²¹*Ibid.*, 218–19.

past knowledge; knowledge based on past experience misleads and constrains the innovative spirit of science. While Descartes circumscribes the rejection of the past to his search for a method capable of securing certain knowledge in the natural sciences, allowing that judgments in morality and politics should follow already traveled paths,²² Hobbes insists that the break with the past include politics and morals. The wisdom of past experience is no part of the civil and moral philosophy that he announces in the Introduction to *Leviathan*,²³ and the study of history does not even appear in his detailed table of the sciences in chapter 9 (56–57). If the past is recalled at all, as in Hobbes's own history of the English civil war, *Behemoth*, it is so that it will not be repeated.²⁴ Hobbes's conception of history has been extensively studied in connection with his civil science as well as his epistemology,²⁵ but the implications of this temporal orientation for his psychology have been overlooked. The temporal frame of his thinking is remarkably unified: Hobbes naturalizes Descartes's methodological artifice of sending the past into oblivion in his portrayal of human beings in *Leviathan* as temporally lopsided creatures for whom the past carries little weight and for whom the present is consumed by the future.

Hobbes's temporal radicalism as compared to Descartes is anchored in the radicalism of his approach to the epistemic questions with which both he and Descartes were preoccupied. As Richard Tuck has detailed in his research into the "Mersenne circle" of philosophical correspondents to which Hobbes and Descartes belonged in the 1630s, advocates of the new science rejected the Aristotelianism on which medieval science had been based while seeking to avoid the skeptical impasse in which earlier critiques of Aristotle had foundered.²⁶ Although the true nature of the things themselves is obscure, our perceptions can be known. Descartes resolved the skeptical doubt that perception might not correspond to anything real by resorting to a proof for a creator God on whom the existence of self and world depends. Hobbes, recruited by Mersenne to respond to Descartes, found a secular solution: since sense impressions change, and all change is caused by motion,

²²René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. with an introduction by Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 12.

²³Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7. Hereafter cited in-text parenthetically.

²⁴Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²⁵Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); and William R. Lund, "The Use and Abuse of the Past: Hobbes on the Study of History," *Hobbes Studies* 5 (1992): 3–22; G. A. J. Rogers and Tom Sorell, eds., *Hobbes and History* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²⁶Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 284–301; Richard Tuck, "Hobbes and Descartes," in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11–42.

and motion is possible only for material objects, the existence of a world outside the self can be confirmed even though its true nature can only be hypothetical; whatever else it may be, the world is matter in motion.

This solution is immediately evident in the opening pages of *Leviathan*. The first chapter, "Of Sense," maintains that ideas have their origin in sense impressions and that sense impressions are caused by moving objects. Those who follow Aristotle mistake our impression of an object for the nature of the object itself, but there is no necessary relation between the two: "the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another" (10). The second chapter, "Of Imagination," further restricts what can be known by describing imagination, memory, and dreams as different stages and aspects of "decaying sense" (11), confounding the knowing self to such an extent that the pause of sleep gives dreams a greater clarity than waking thoughts (13). For all that this epistemology would appear to place the relation between self and world in jeopardy, it secures it all the more firmly than the doctrines of "the philosophy-schools" (10), Hobbes insists, which variously hold that nature has equipped the human mind with faculties that enable its apprehension, or that ideas are placed into our minds by God, or that objects move or come to rest of their own accord (15). A sober anchorage in the material world requires that we renounce the philosophical inheritance of Aristotelianism as a branch of superstition, as fantastic and as dangerous to clear thinking, in Hobbes's account, as the belief in fairies, ghosts, and witches.

The sobriety underlying this account of perception in *Leviathan* is carried forward into its account of psychology: sense perceptions of a world in motion give rise to passions and inclinations as well as images and ideas. But it is also more directly informative insofar as the principal psychological problem with which his human beings must contend is that the world to which their senses anchor them is not a world in which they feel themselves at home: they are confused by the continuous motion that they experience and by the unreliability of their senses in registering this motion. This disorientation is magnified by the fading of sense impressions with the passage of time, but it is in relation to the future that their greatest difficulties arise because they are more preoccupied with anticipating the future than they are with remembering the past. Hobbes's human beings are distinguished not by their curiosity to discover the causes of a particular effect, which they share with animals, but their curiosity to explore all of the possible effects of which that effect could be itself the cause, "we imagine what we can do with it, when we have it" (17). And again in chapter 5: "a man did excel all other animals in this faculty, that when he conceived any thing whatsoever, he was apt to enquire the consequences of it, and what effects he could do with it" (29–30). This forward-looking curiosity is associated with the capacity for what Hobbes calls the pleasures of the mind, which arise "from the expectation, that proceeds from foresight of the end, or consequence of things" (36), by contrast to the pleasures of sense, which arise

from the “sense of an object present” (36). The former are unique to human beings: “Of which I have not at any time seen any sign, but in man onely; for this is a curiosity hardly incident to the nature of any living creature that has no other Passion but sensual, such as are hunger, thirst, lust, and anger” (17). Human desires have greater temporal extension than those of animals; we desire not only the satisfaction of the needs that we experience in the present but also the needs that we can imagine ourselves experiencing in the future. The abstract good of self-preservation, as “the final cause, end, or design of men,” is a pleasure of the mind in exactly this sense: what humans seek above all is “the *foresight* of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby” (111, emphasis mine).

The roots of this future-oriented conception of happiness can be found in texts earlier than *Leviathan* but it is only in *Leviathan* that it becomes the basis of Hobbes’s account of human nature and his distinction between human beings and animals; it is only in *Leviathan* that its psychological implications are fully worked through and aligned with the problem of an uncertain future. In the *Anti-White*, Hobbes defends a conception of this-worldly happiness as consisting in delights of the mind rather than the body—the “pleasure of expectation” rather than the “pleasure of possessing”—but the emphasis is on pleasure rather than pain and, more importantly, the anticipatory enjoyment of “the gaining of delights not yet acquired” is supported by remembrance of past enjoyment.²⁷ It is not the future with which this individual is preoccupied, but the past: anticipation is just another form of remembrance and, in this early period, remembrance functions as a stabilizing anchor. In *The Elements of Law*, composed two years earlier in 1640 and published in 1650, it is precisely the greater capacity for memory which results from the cultivation of language that distinguishes human beings from animals.²⁸ Human as well as animal survival depends upon the ability to remember but in the absence of language, memory is precariously short: through signs that recall to mind past objects and past conceptions, language extends the capacity for memory beyond the always fading impressions of the senses. As in *Leviathan*, this greater capacity for memory has its source in curiosity, but where *Leviathan* gives to curiosity an orientation to the future that mobilizes creativity and inventiveness—not just to find the beginning of things that already exist, but to create new beginnings of our own—the *Elements* orients curiosity to the past: “man, who in most events remembereth in what manner they were caused and begun, looketh for the cause and

²⁷Thomas Hobbes, *Thomas White’s “De Mundo” Examined*, trans. Harold Jones (London: Bradford University Press, 1976), 467, 469. See James J. Hamilton, “Hobbes on Felicity: Aristotle, Bacon and *Eudaimonia*,” *Hobbes Studies* 29 (2016): 144, for an analysis of Hobbes’s concept of happiness which focuses on these early texts.

²⁸Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, trans. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 35.

beginning of everything that ariseth new unto him.”²⁹ Human beings plan ahead in the *Elements* but so do animals; it is only because animals do not remember what they have planned that their providence invariably comes to nothing:

Having the providence to hide the remains and superfluity of their meat [they] do nevertheless want the remembrance of the place where they hid it, and thereby make no benefit thereof in their hunger. But man, who in this point beginneth to advance himself above the nature of beasts, hath observed and remembered the cause of this defect, and to amend the same, hath imagined and devised to set up a visible or other sensible mark, the which when he seeth again, may bring to his mind the thought he had when he set it up.³⁰

Hobbes’s account of language in *Leviathan* retains this link between memory and speech as the means by which “men register their thoughts, [and] recall them when they are past” (20), but the achievement is far more qualified and the relation to the past far more disturbed. Chapter 4 opens with the tale of how the common language originally given by God was lost at the Tower of Babel; it is in the shadow of this transgression that he catalogs the uses and abuses of the language that human beings invented for themselves (20–21). The augmentation of memory with language complicates an already precarious relation to the past by introducing the possibility of distortion arising from the diversity of passions and the insufficient mastery of the meanings of words. Language does not so much preserve the past as create false pasts; as with Babel, the false pasts that it creates are not even held in common.

Leviathan is unique among Hobbes’s texts not only in foregrounding curiosity over the future as the basis of the distinction between human beings and animals but also in foregrounding the anxiety that results from its uncertainty. Commentators are beginning to recognize that *Leviathan* offers a more complex account of human motivation than is found in Hobbes’s earlier works; traditional readings of the fear of death as the greatest fear, the negative analog of the greatest desire, the desire for self-preservation,³¹ have been qualified by readings of Hobbesian psychology that bring into focus *Leviathan*’s greater attention to the political challenge posed by religion.³²

²⁹Ibid., 58.

³⁰Ibid., 34–35.

³¹Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 180–90; Mark C. Murphy, “Hobbes on the Evil of Death,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 82 (2000): 36–61.

³²Johnston, *Rhetoric of “Leviathan,”* 92–113; Jan Blits, “Hobbesian Fear,” *Political Theory* 17, no. 3 (August 1989): 417–31; S. A. Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes’s “Leviathan”: The Power of Mind over Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); S. A. Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Cases in the Law of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 56–94; Johan Olsthoorn,

But the importance of the temporal dimension that underlies this wider range of fears and desires tends to be missed. The fear of invisible powers, the fear of the unknown, the fear of damnation, the desire for glory and the desire for salvation become powerful enough to displace the fear of death and the desire for commodious living only because the long prospect, the future upon which all distinctively human fears and desires are projected, cannot be known with certainty.

This is the problem that the text of *Leviathan* amplifies. Unlike the present, which has a being in nature, and unlike the past, which has a being in memory, the future has “no being at all” (18). By definition it cannot be known. Earlier texts such as the *Anti-White* and the *Elements* highlight the same limitation while giving greater credence to predictions of the future based on past experience: such conjectures “concludeth nothing universally,” but nonetheless “they shall conjecture best, that have most experience.”³³ In *Leviathan*, by contrast, the gap between past and future is presumed to be so great that the prudential calculation of the future takes on a delusional aspect. “From the like things past,” Hobbes says, enumerating the errors from which superstitious beliefs arise, “they expect the like things to come” (74). What is called foresight, prudence, or providence is nothing more than the fading memory of past experiences carried forward on the shaky presumption that the future will be a repetition of the past, “which with most certainty is done by him that has most experience,” Hobbes says, only to add immediately, “but not with certainty enough” (18).³⁴ *Leviathan* alchemizes from the elements of Hobbes’s earlier work on epistemology and psychology an explosive combination: we desire to know above all the future that we cannot by definition ever know. The result is overwhelming anxiety. As Hobbes writes in chapter 12, likening the natural condition of human beings to the agony of Prometheus on his crag: “So that man, which looks too far before him, in the care of future time, hath his heart all the day long, gnawed on by fear of death, poverty, or other calamity; and has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep” (72).

This anxiety over the future defines Hobbes’s idiosyncratic definition of war as a state in which there is not necessarily actual fighting but rather only “the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is *no assurance* to the contrary” (84, emphasis mine). As we will see in section 4, it falls to the *Leviathan* not only to manage this anxiety but also to create the conditions whereby anxiety can be transformed into hopeful expectation of the benefits of industry and common endeavor that its existence makes possible. The

“Worse than Death: The Non-preservationist Foundations of Hobbes’s Moral Philosophy,” *Hobbes Studies* 17 (2014): 148–70.

³³Hobbes, *Elements*, 33.

³⁴The same caveat is also missing from a parallel passage in Hobbes, “*De Mundo*” *Examined*, 469.

practical aims of the new science are as firmly embedded in Hobbes's conception of human nature as its premises. It is by means of the new science that the question of the future acquires its epistemic and psychological priority, but it is only by means of the Leviathan that this new temporal horizon can be stabilized and the promise of the new science fulfilled.

3. From Uncertainty to Anxiety

Hobbes presents the problem of an uncertain future as a natural problem rooted in the limitations of human knowledge and the variability of human affairs in the absence of the sovereign power. But it is not self-evident that this problem would preoccupy human beings with the intensity that Hobbes describes; the fact that we cannot foresee the future does not necessarily mean that we live in fear of it. It is partly on account of its intensity that advocates of the secularization thesis would identify in the priority given to the future a conceptual residue of Christian faith. Aristotle is a useful foil for bringing the peculiarities of Hobbes's account of the temporal situation of human beings into relief because Aristotle explicitly resists the move from uncertainty over the future to anxiety. In the *Rhetoric*, he distinguishes between the near and the distant future, suggesting that only the near future is an object of fear; excepting the elderly, the fear of death is only a salient motivation when the threat of death is near at hand. "They all know that they will die but they are not troubled since this will not occur in the near future."³⁵ The unknowability of the future is not in itself a source of fear. Humans fear only known dangers; uncertainty alone is not a danger. Consequently the near future, with its known dangers, is more fearsome than the distant future. Aristotle returns to this point in his discussion of how age affects desires and fears, suggesting that the young are most preoccupied with the future—"on the first day one has no past to remember but everything to expect in the future"—but their relation to the future is one of hope rather than fear.³⁶ The old are preoccupied with the past but because their futures are shorter and because they have more experience of how things can go wrong they regard the future—when they consider it at all—with anxiety.³⁷ Fear of the future is not a characteristic of human nature but of old age; the longer the future, the greater the confidence with which it is regarded. For Hobbes, by contrast, the longer the future, the greater the anxiety—at least in the absence of the Leviathan.

Apart from these considerations of age, the greatest protection against fear of the future resides in the foundations of Aristotle's moral philosophy.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *Selected Works*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle and Lloyd P. Gerson, 3rd ed. (Grinnell, IA: Peripatetic, 1991), 1382a26–27.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 1389a25–26.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 1390a4–10.

Insofar as one has become aware of the uncertainty of the future one might plausibly resolve to build one's life around the faculties that one does possess rather than those that one lacks; it is this resolution that Aristotle makes available through the idea of a highest good which is desired for its own sake and for the sake of which all other goods are desired. In the absence of a highest good, as he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "our desire would be futile and pointless."³⁸ We would always only desire things for the sake of something else, and so on to no end, and it is inconceivable to Aristotle that human beings would be designed in this way, only desiring what they can never attain. Because the highest good involves the cultivation of capacities that make it easier to bear life's vicissitudes, the individual who is in possession of it is less dependent on what the passage of time can carry away.³⁹ Aristotle easily concedes that we cannot foresee how our fortunes will change over time.⁴⁰ But to become preoccupied with the future would be to enslave ourselves to something over which we have no control; anyone so preoccupied would be judged deficient. His concern with the goods of character enables the exemplary Aristotelian individual to focus on the present rather than the future. Intent on the cultivation of what is already in his possession rather than the pursuit of what he lacks and can never possess completely, he flourishes.

The Aristotelian resolution to the temporal problem is unavailable in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. "There is," as he maintains in chapter 11, "no such *finis ultimus*, (utmost aim,) nor *summum bonum*, (greatest good,) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers" (65). There are only instrumental or apparent goods, goods that are desired for the sake of other goods that might be obtained with their assistance. In the absence of an ultimate good, the desires undergo a radical temporalization: the only goods that the Hobbesian individual recognizes are "future apparent good[s]" (58). Consequently no desire can ever be satisfied; the good of self-preservation that the Hobbesian individual seeks is always beyond his reach. Although he may well call it a "final cause, end, or design" (111) and retain, as some have noted, residual elements of the teleology with which he has explicitly broken,⁴¹ it is a severely truncated "final cause, end, or design," unable to fulfill its proper function of setting a natural limit on desire and preventing the infinite regress of desiring one thing for the sake of another. Once the Hobbesian individual attains the object of his desire he immediately converts

³⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill/Library of Liberal Arts, 1962), 1094a21–22.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1100b5–22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1101a18.

⁴¹ Jean Curthoys, "Thomas Hobbes, the Taylor Thesis and Alasdair Macintyre," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (1998): 1–24; Arash Abizadeh, *Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapter 4.

it into a means for attaining new objects—“we seek all the possible effects, that can by it be produced” (17)—and so on to no end, just as Aristotle feared. Hobbes’s concept of felicity—“a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter” (65–66)—is explicitly tied in this section of *Leviathan* with the infelicity of anxiety over the future. “He cannot *assure* the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more” (66, emphasis mine). In the absence of a properly functioning *summum bonum*, the individual is caught in a never-ending cycle of frustration, anxiety, and infinitely escalating desire in which he seeks to escape the poverty of the present by extending his reach into a continually receding future. Entirely exposed to what he cannot control, it is hardly surprising that he walks about the text bent double under the weight of his anxiety over the future.

The emphasis that Hobbes gives to the anxiety with which human beings regard the future in *Leviathan* follows from his allegiance to the antiteleological premises of the new science just as surely as his emphasis on the limitations of human knowledge. As we will see in section 5, it also sets the stage for his capture of the anxious concern for the future over which eschatological religions hold sway. Hobbes’s understanding of the Leviathan as the only power capable of stabilizing the horizon of expectation and holding it open for the possibility of progress, which we consider in the next section, completes the secular temporal order into which his version of eschatological religion will be incorporated.

4. Hobbes’s Idea of Progress

The priority that Hobbes gives to the future in *Leviathan*’s account of human nature extends to the historical narrative with which the text is framed. However, the future to which this historical narrative points is not an object of anxiety. Unlike the human beings that he describes, Hobbes regards the future with confident expectation of the benefits that will accrue to society as a consequence of the expansion of science and industry and the stabilization of common affairs at which his science of politics is aimed. This future becomes more available the more thoroughgoing the break with the past: the critique of Aristotle that frames *Leviathan* is also a critique of the past over which Aristotle held sway. The penultimate chapter, “Of Darkness from Vain Philosophy, and Fabulous Traditions,” tells the story of how the emergence of philosophy among the ancient Greeks undermines the fledgling rational powers of human beings, spreads to the early universities and “thence into the Church,” where it combines with Christian theology into a perverse alchemy hardly deserving the name of philosophy but nonetheless authoritative, to Hobbes’s dismay, even in his own time (446). Decisive above all is the failure of the ancient authorities to establish a body of

knowledge having utility for human beings: “to be able to produce,” as he explains in the definition of philosophy with which he opens chapter 46, “as far as matter, and human force permit, such effects, as human life requireth” (441, emphasis in original). “What,” he asks, “has been the utility of those schools? What science is there at this day acquired by their readings and disputings?” Their invention of geometry was a genuine benefit but their natural philosophy was “rather a dream than science” and their moral philosophy nothing but “a description of their own passions” (444). The protection that this “vain philosophy” eventually found with church authorities is responsible for the dissemination of its errors and the active suppression of corrective efforts (456).

This is the historical narrative that shapes Hobbes’s self-understanding as a political philosopher: the dawning age of light in which the burden of error and illusion is lifted from the human mind is also the dawning of an age in which the burden of the past is lifted from the present. The present is an age of invention and discovery in which “time, and industry, produce every day new knowledge” (223). What Hobbes finds praiseworthy about this knowledge is precisely its novelty. In breaking with the past it clears the way for the reconstruction of the world that human beings have created so far only haphazardly in ignorance of causes; just as houses were built long before the invention of geometry, so that they were not durable, commonwealths have been established without an understanding of the principles that could make them strong and even “everlasting” (223). The past stands in a relation of opposition to the future. One abides by its authority only when one’s own powers are weak or insecure, “like little children,” he explains, “that have no other rule of good and evil manners, but the correction they receive from their parents, and masters” (69). The development of a body of knowledge having genuine utility requires that we emancipate ourselves not only from naive and foolish concepts but also from previous generations.

Set against this historical narrative, the interest in the future that Hobbes presents as breeding such debilitating anxiety has another, more beneficial dimension. Because the curiosity in which it originates is utility driven above all—in considering the possible effects or consequences of a thing “we imagine what we can do with it, when we have it” (17)—it is also the mother of invention. Hobbes goes so far as to describe it as an “excellence” associated with the beginnings of reason and a capacity for abstraction in which man “can by words reduce the consequences he finds to general rules, called *theorems*, or *aphorisms*; that is, he can reason, or reckon, not only in number; but in all things, whereof one may be added unto, or subtracted from another” (30, emphasis in original). It is only in the absence of the Leviathan that curiosity deteriorates into anxiety on the scale that Hobbes describes.

The privileged position that Hobbes accords to the future follows directly from his commitment to the secular-scientific program on which human self-improvement depends. By describing human nature according to the

anti-Aristotelian strictures of the new science, the problem of anxiety about the future comes to the fore but only, it would seem, so that Hobbes can demonstrate all the more vividly the effectiveness of his own remedy. Under the Leviathan the future not only appears less fearsome, it becomes more available to human agency insofar as fear is displaced by hopeful expectation of the benefits that only common endeavors can provide. Because the Leviathan stabilizes the future as a horizon of innovation and industry it is also connected to the possibility of progress. The term “progress” is not used in *Leviathan* in the sense in which it later came to be used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to indicate a process of improvement continuously unfolding within human history.⁴² Hobbes uses the term to indicate a forward motion having some positive value but no ultimate purpose or design. In the “continual progress of the desire, from one object to another” (65) which he describes as felicity there is neither immanent development nor substantive improvement: there is only continued success in the attaining of what is desired and perhaps also the pleasurable contemplation of the powers that this success confirms. Progress as continued forward motion can mean nothing more than the expansion of human powers of calculation and control.

Hobbes writes with an awareness of his own age as marking an advance over previous ages, but, as his account of the history of philosophy attests, this advance is not the result of a centuries-long development whose subject is humankind as a whole. Rather, it is the work of industrious individuals such as himself who have devoted themselves to the study of nature and to the discovery of the “principles of reason” by which it might be regulated (223). As with everything in Hobbes’s thinking, progress is a possibility to which one looks forward rather than an accomplishment on which one looks back. The openness of the future—its uncertainty, its unknowability—is not necessarily a source of anxiety. The problem is not simply the gap between what we desire to know and what we can know; the problem is how this gap comes to be mediated by human beings. This brings us to the problem of religion.

5. Secular Eschatology and the Opening of the Future

In his classic essay “Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes,” J. G. A. Pocock suggests that Hobbes’s exposition of Christianity in *Leviathan* is “very nearly reducible” to eschatology: the Christian for Hobbes is mainly concerned with his prospects for salvation and consequently also

⁴²This is the basis of J. B. Bury’s classic definition in his 1932 *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (New York: Dover, 1987), 5: “The idea of Progress . . . is based on an interpretation of history which regards men as slowly advancing . . . in a definite and desirable direction, and infers that this progress will continue indefinitely.”

with the details of what awaits him in the world to come.⁴³ Later interpretations that focus more closely than Pocock on the relationship between Hobbes's account of human psychology and the political purposes that underlie his refashioning of eschatology have suggested that Hobbes is primarily concerned with securing a monopoly over the fear of punishment on which the authority of the sovereign is supposed to be based by weakening the fear of invisible powers. In order that the eternity over which God presides does not hold greater terrors than the bodily terrors that the sovereign is empowered to impose, it is argued, Hobbes revises Christian eschatology to dilute the meaning of eternal damnation as nothing worse than eternal death. And if the fear of death is not necessarily the greatest fear, on this account, Hobbes thinks that it should be; otherwise the Leviathan will fall.⁴⁴ However, the oft-quoted formulation with which Hobbes prefaces his eschatological innovations in chapter 38—"it is impossible a commonwealth should stand, where any other than the sovereign, hath a power of giving greater rewards than life; and of inflicting greater punishments, than death" (297)—brings to the surface the entire horizon of expectation upon which the subjects of a Christian commonwealth project their hopes, fears, and aspirations and upon which they calculate the causal chains that bear on what they take to be their well-being: it is expectations in general, and not just the expectation of death, injury, and punishment with which Hobbes is ultimately preoccupied. His overarching purpose in recasting Christian eschatology is more to alleviate fears than to consolidate and focus them on the Leviathan, as Tuck has argued,⁴⁵ although, as I suggest here, the salient issue is not so much fear in general as fear of the future in particular.

The priority of the future to Hobbes's conceptualization of the political problem of religion in *Leviathan* is immediately evident in the parallel between his future-oriented construction of human nature and his future-oriented construction of the Christian faith. There is an obvious tension between these two conceptual universes: unlike the individual of no particular faith who inhabits part 1, for whom the future cannot be known, the Christian of part 3 regards the future through the screen of his faith; he lives in anticipation of the last judgment and the second coming of Christ. He does not know whether he will be saved but he knows that God will bring this world to an end, rewarding the saved and punishing the damned. God's providence, not man's artificial creation, presides over the future he anticipates. Faith alone can alleviate his uncertainty over the moment of Christ's return, over what is permitted and what is forbidden, and his fate on the day of judgment.

⁴³Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology," 160.

⁴⁴Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 198; Johnston, *Rhetoric of "Leviathan,"* 112; Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31.

⁴⁵Tuck, "Civil Religion," 132.

The bridge between these two futures is installed early in *Leviathan*, in chapter 12, with Hobbes's use of the figure of Prometheus to highlight the anxiety with which human beings regard the future that they desire to know but which by definition they cannot. The ensuing account of the origins of religion focuses on the ways in which this anxiety is exploited and manipulated by those who claim to know the purposes and workings of divine powers. Fittingly, the God whose existence Hobbes recognizes in *Leviathan* is the winder of the timepiece of man and nature with whose image the text begins; he is "the one first mover" that any investigation of the causes and properties of moving bodies must acknowledge as a matter of rational necessity (73). But this God remains beyond the grasp of human understanding. Hobbes concedes that there have been some genuine prophets, notably Moses and Christ, but he warns against giving too much credence to this dimension of religious experience. He distinguishes Christianity from paganism on exactly these grounds: pagan believers look to their gods for greater insight into the future and prevail upon them to alter the course of events in their favor. The result is a confused religion in which ignorance of causal relations is compounded by superstition and dependence on the authority of presumed oracles and prophets: its practitioners "are very apt, not only to take casual things, after one or two encounters, for prognostics of the like encounter ever after, but also to believe the like prognostics from other men, of whom they have once conceived a good opinion" (74).

By contrast, monotheistic religions such as Christianity originate not in anxiety over the future but in "the desire men have to know the causes of natural bodies, and their several virtues, and operations" (72). This curiosity is entirely dispassionate—"And all this," he says, "without thought of their fortune" (73)—and entirely distinct from the fear of the future. The result is a religion sharing with science an origin in curiosity and requiring no belief contrary to reason. However, this careful distinction between paganism and Christianity begins to break down since Christians have been just as susceptible as pagans to superstition in their worship, and just as prone to give credence to prophetic claims from individuals outside the established church (81). Ignorance of causes and fear of the future appear at some points to be the source of all religion, implicating monotheism as well as polytheism; it is fear and ignorance, not curiosity, that underlies ritual practices and the ascription of characteristics to God.

Hobbes tries to get around the blurring of religion with superstition by suggesting that Christianity does not arise out of the "natural seeds" of fear and ignorance like paganism but was planted by God himself through revelation (78). But everything we can know of this God of revelation is mediated through human beings. When rational belief in a God passes over into faith in the God of revealed religion, we are on the flimsy ground of our trust in other men, and any faith that is supported by trust in others can be easily weakened by their failings; the resulting religious upheavals are inevitably political upheavals (81). As his argument moves from the origins of religion

in chapter 12 to the origins of conflict in chapter 13, it is clear that the stabilization of the future that the Leviathan is supposed to achieve will require the regulation of religious as well as civil life. If Christianity is to be practiced as a rational religion the conduct as well as the content of public worship must fall under the authority of the sovereign. The ignorance of causes and the fear of the future that have been fanned into the theologies of various religious faiths—Christianity no less than paganism—must be alleviated by new and sounder theologies, restoring Christianity to its origins as a religion of reason rather than prophecy. Whatever ignorance and anxiety remain as part of the natural constitution of human beings are left to the remedial powers of the Leviathan.

The eschatological narrative that Hobbes composes in chapter 38 is prefaced by two caveats: he defers to the sovereign, whose authority in the interpretation of scripture must necessarily supersede the judgments of his subjects (297); and he acknowledges that his own interpretation “will appear to most men a novelty” (301), reiterating that it is ultimately the task of the sovereign authority to settle all disputes concerning the interpretation of scripture. The novelty to which Hobbes refers consists in his claim that the eternal life promised to believers will be enjoyed here on earth: those who are saved will not be taken up into heaven, rather, Christ will come down to earth and rule over them, restoring the “kingdom of God, instituted under Moses” (298). The bodies of the saved will be resurrected to eternal life and so will neither marry nor procreate (299). They will experience the “joys of life eternal” and be secured “against all evil, comprehending want, sickness, and death itself” (305). The bodies of the damned will also be revived but only so that they can suffer, in time, a second and everlasting death (305). In the meantime, they live and marry and procreate on the same earth as those who have been saved.

“Therefore if the kingdom of God after the resurrection, be upon the earth,” Hobbes writes, “the Enemy, and his kingdom must be on earth also” (304). For both the saved and the damned “the world to come” is not so much a radical new beginning as a return: for the saved, paradise before the fall is restored; the damned are returned to the period after the fall, but without the consoling promise of redemption (417). The damned will live as we do now, suffering, as we do now, “bodily pains, and calamities” (305), the certainty of death above all; unlike us they live without hope of deliverance and suffer the additional “grief, and discontent of mind” that comes from “the sight of that eternal felicity in others, which they themselves through their own incredulity, and disobedience have lost” (304–5). Hobbes emphasizes that the saved in the world to come do not really inhabit a new condition at all because their salvation has already been secured and the terror of their mortal death *already* alleviated by their belief in Christ. Hobbes reiterates this key point of Christian theology when he says that “the faithful Christian hath recovered eternal life by Christ’s passion” (299). Those who believe do not live in fear of the future, whether of the present world or of the world to come. To

this extent, the condition of both the saved and the damned in the world to come differs hardly at all from their condition in the present.⁴⁶

Hobbes's secular eschatology fuses heaven to earth not just in its account of the lives of the saved and the damned but also in its account of the kingdom of God as the extension of the Leviathan into eternity. This eternity is not the beginning of a new temporal order, "the standing still of the present time" but the indefinite continuation of what is current, "the endless succession of time" (449–50). Hobbes's science of politics has set out the principles by which the Leviathan will be not just durable but everlasting (223). With its extension into an eternity ordained by God, what was mortal now becomes immortal; what was originally the creation of human beings is restored to God's own creation. This blurring of God's kingdom with the Leviathan does not just secure legitimacy for Hobbes's project for his Christian readers; it is integral to it. The Leviathan cannot endure if the present remains open to contestation by those who claim prophetic insight into a radically different future. Hobbes's interpretation of God's prophetic kingdom is calculated to dilute the power of prophecy by undermining the otherworldliness of the world to come. How much less fearsome seem the terrors of hell when they are presented as identical to the terrors of this world, absent the promise of redemption? And how much less intense seem the pleasures of eternal life when the saved are presented as living side by side, as they do now, with the damned? By fusing the future that God is preparing with the future of the earth on which we already live, Hobbes unifies and so stabilizes the temporal horizon. Whatever hopes the faithful harbor for the future, such hopes can only be realized on earth. Rather than providing a vision of another, better world by means of which the faithful gain critical distance from the world as it is, Hobbesian eschatology, as antiutopian as his political philosophy, reconciles the faithful to the world by persuading them that the world ordained by God is nothing more than a continuation of the present, and that the best way to prepare is to uphold their allegiance to things as they are.

A peculiar difficulty follows from this strategy, however. By undermining the otherworldliness of the world, and by deferring the realization of the earthly kingdom of God to a distant point in the future, Hobbes aims to tame eschatological expectations. But by mooring otherworldly longings to earth and placing the long future of their fulfillment under the jurisdiction of the sovereign, Hobbes runs the risk of intensifying the very expectations that he is seeking to tame. The fear of hell has been diluted but the hope for a better earthly future has been awakened. If the only world is this

⁴⁶Hiram Caton, *The Politics of Progress: The Origins and Development of the Commercial Republic, 1600–1835* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1988), 143: "His new earth is the same old earth, with the same old unrighteous people going about their business 'outside Jerusalem,' i.e., everywhere." See also David Johnston, "Hobbes's Mortalism," *History of Political Thought* 10, no. 4 (1989): 647–63.

world of body, then it is this world into which we will pour all of our longing for something better; earthly longing becomes sharper in the absence of any genuinely other world. In the end it is unclear how well Hobbesian politics are supported by Hobbesian eschatology. The political conquest of the longest imaginable future at which Hobbes is aiming liberates the expectations of the future that he would bind to the Leviathan. Hobbes well fits the portrait of the modern as a thief in the conceptual storehouse of the Christian, making over its otherworldly treasures for this-worldly purposes. Nevertheless, we suspect there are things in the boxes he lifts through the window that are not so easily contained.

Conclusion

The conflation of modern time consciousness with grand narratives of history as inevitable and unending progress makes Hobbes an unlikely figure to conjure in the debate between Blumenberg and Löwith over the question of its Christian origins. Blumenberg's defense of an independent secular foundation for modern time consciousness in the early modern experiences of innovation and improvement in the arts and sciences is valuable precisely because it brings into view the more modest idea that progress, far from inevitable, is nonetheless possible through organized human effort. Hobbes's contribution to the development of modern time consciousness becomes visible within this Blumenbergian framework; if he stands on the shoulders of Christian theologies of the future it is only so that he can more easily neutralize the threat that they pose to the future that the Leviathan alone can secure. Modern time consciousness is related to the Christian in the text of the *Leviathan* not through a process of secularization but through a process of expropriation in which Christian expectations of the future are brought into conformity with the secular temporal order established by the Leviathan as the only power capable of managing the anxiety over the future to which human beings are prone in the disenchanted and future-oriented universe that Hobbes creates for them.

The priority that Hobbes gives to the future in *Leviathan* is overdetermined: it is a combined effect of his repudiation of the authority of tradition and knowledge based on past experience, his rejection of Aristotelian teleology, and his ambition to redescribe the moral and political world from the standpoint of the new science and to realize the full measure of the practical benefits that it can offer. But it also serves a more directly political purpose. The Christian temporal order poses a threat to the secular insofar as its prophetic dimension, if not properly restrained, can foster superstition and intensify anxieties as well as hopes, endangering political stability and impeding the development of new knowledge and industry on which human well-being depends. Hobbes's revision of Christian eschatology is an attempt to neutralize this threat by containing it: by drawing heaven

and hell down to earth he extends the future over which the sovereign presides and turns the spiritual eternity with which the faithful are preoccupied into the longest imaginable earthly future under the Leviathan's perpetual management. The anxiously future-preoccupied human beings described in *Leviathan*, as unique to that text as his foray into eschatology, are essential to this eschatological project. By foregrounding the problem of anxiety over the future, Hobbes is able to present a more coherent portrait of a creature who is motivated as much by fears of eternal damnation and invisible powers as by fears of mortal death and visible powers. In arguing for the supremacy of the sovereign over religion he does not need to propose a transformation in the primary motivation of human beings; he needs only amplify the preoccupation with the future that underlies them all. The fusion of secular and religious time that he effects in *Leviathan* anticipates the grandiose aspirations with which modern time consciousness is often associated. It is in the future-preoccupied narratives of *Leviathan* that we are able to trace these aspirations back to their secular foundation.