



DOCUMENT

UFD025  Vincent Garton

Leviathan Rots

Gazing into the occult nightmare of Leviathan, Vincent Garton calls for an unconditional retheorisation that moves beyond both the restoration of the state and its neocameralist multiplication

1. The King of the Proud

Nothing on earth is its equal—a creature without fear. It looks down on all that are haughty; it is king over all that are proud.

—Job 41:33–34

Abraham Bosse's frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* is one of the most famous images in the history of philosophy. It shows the enormous figure of the 'mortall God', the blurry aggregate of the faces of all the various men and women of the commonwealth, as a collective sovereign towering as one over the countryside. The picture is striking, yet it leaves unanswered a crucial question: Why, exactly, did Hobbes choose to call this enormous beast 'Leviathan'? Hobbes himself, of course, gives an answer: 'the great power of [man's] Governour [...] I compared to Leviathan, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of Job; where God having set forth the great power of Leviathan, called him King of the Proud.'¹ But this is curiously perfunctory. The image of the 'one and fortieth of Job' is not at all as reassuring as Bosse's—which already seems scary enough. In the Book of Job, Leviathan is a horrific creature. Armoured with plated shields, snarling with 'fearsome teeth', 'its snorting throws out flashes of light; its eyes are like the rays of dawn. Flames stream from its mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. [...] It makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron' (Job 41:20–21, 31). Hobbes obscures this frightening image even as he

cites it. Emblazoned as it is in the title of work, however, for any reader who is scripturally aware—as indeed Hobbes's readers were—it lurks irrepressibly in the background of the text. Chained between the lines, its thrashing echoes across Hobbes's relentless argumentation.

Carl Schmitt, who fancied himself—with more than a grain of justification—the Hobbes of the twentieth century, proposed to solve the contradiction in an esoteric piece of iconographic research, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*. For Schmitt, the problem was simple: Hobbes had picked the wrong image. With more than an overtone of anti-Semitism—he was, at least in public, by this point in 1938 a devoted acolyte of the Nazi regime—Schmitt complains that the pre-existence of the scriptural, Jewish image of the Leviathan, supposedly entirely other than the rigorous Hobbesian construction of the symbol, defeated Hobbes's purposes. Leviathan, Schmitt states, 'evokes [...] dreadful Asiatic myths of an all-demanding Moloch or an all-trampling Golem. According to cabbalistic views, the leviathan is thought of as a huge animal with which the Jewish God plays daily for a few hours.'² This parade of 'Asiatic' horrors could only be construed as entirely opposite to Hobbes's intentions; as the apex image of the modern state, Hobbes used it 'without horror and without reverence', an entirely rational and un-'cabbalistic' construction.³ Poor Hobbes, however, was

1. T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXVIII.

2. C. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, tr. G. Schwab and E. Hilfstein (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 57.

3. *Ibid.*, 95.

overwhelmed: just a few years after *Leviathan's* appearance, we are told, Spinoza the liberal Jew perceived at once the contradictions, and forced the 'barely visible crack' open, 'sapping the leviathan's vitality from within' and opening the 'telling inroad of modern liberalism'.⁴

Schmitt's fable puts Hobbes in an unenviable position: while rescuing Hobbes's thought from the supposed problems of his symbol and restoring it, Schmitt undermines both the extent of his influence and the depth of his imagery. Liberal political theory, going back to Spinoza, is construed as something radically anti-Hobbesian, a cancer perverting *Leviathan* from within that metastasised almost immediately after Hobbes's formulation of the concept. If there is a moment of salvation for Schmitt, it is merely that 'on the thought processes of total technology the leviathan can no longer make a sinister impression'—this manifest failure of the symbol will, at last, free Hobbes from the 'dreadful Asiatic myths', finally permitting the sober application of his theory to the Hobbesian age of modern politics.

Liberal political theory is not, today, an anti-Hobbesian construct: the construction of any state on a constitutional basis depends on certain Hobbesian assumptions

Let us begin by offering to be more generous to Hobbes than Schmitt was. Liberal political theory is not, today, an anti-Hobbesian construct: the construction of any state on a constitutional basis depends on certain Hobbesian assumptions, the assumptions of a social contract theory. Together with Machiavelli's *Prince*, Hobbes's *Leviathan* offers a descriptive analysis that was central to the birth of political science, and it is an analysis with staying power precisely because of the force of its representation of the state form in abstract.

Yet Schmitt is correct in one respect. The quality of *Leviathan* as religious symbol—the terror of its image in Job, its subjugation as a plaything of God—is of decisive importance not just for the immediate trajectory of Hobbes's political theory, as Schmitt

4. Ibid., 57.

thought; it points to a problem inherent to the practice of politics. For in Hobbes's political theology, we enter—to use his own phrase—a 'kingdom of darkness'.

It is a darkness that overwhelms not just Hobbes, but modern politics as such.

2. The Enthusiast

Everything under heaven belongs to me.
—Job 41:11

The term 'catastrophe' in the general sense in which we use it today originates in the prophetic upheaval of the Hobbesian era, the English Civil War. Perhaps the earliest surviving usage is to be found in a short Fifth-Monarchist pamphlet of 1654 entitled, appropriately, *The Grand Catastrophe*: here, the 'grand catastrophe' is identified with God's 'resolve [...] to change the forme of Government from what it was now [...] unto what it was better'.⁵ The historical significance of this obscure text far exceeds the content of its arguments. It stands, chronologically, at the head of an entire 'catastrophic' literature of the later seventeenth century that purported to divine the significance of the ongoing motions of politics according to the movements of the heavens. In the 1680s we find the *Catastrophe Mundi, or, Europe's many mutations* of the mathematician and astrologer John Holwell beside the similarly titled *Catastrophe Mundi, or Merlin Reviv'd* of the magician, associate of John Dee, and former Civil War propagandist William Lilly, each offering its occult prognoses of the impending arrival of a new order of the European states.⁶

If the occult stands at the historical root of the concept of catastrophe, however, there is also something peculiarly catastrophic about the occult. The term *disaster*, after all, is equally astrological: *dis-aster*, the falling constellation—'the stars down to earth'. The association between turmoil in heaven and earth is in itself hardly specific to the Western occult tradition, of course: this is the heart

5. 'Johannes Cornubiensis', *The Grand Catastrophe, or the change of Government, being a word about the last turne of these times* (1654), 2.

6. J. Holwell, *Catastrophe Mundi, or, Europe's many mutations until the year 1701...* (1682); W. Lilly, *Catastrophe Mundi: or, Merlin Reviv'd, in a Discourse of Prophecies and Predictions* (1683).

of astrology as such, reaching back to the ancient magi of Babylon, repeated equally on the other side of the world in the Chinese notion of the ‘mandate of heaven’ or ‘heaven’s command’, *tianming*, 天命, which locates the underlying order of the labyrinth of the political in the will of heaven made manifest as fate.⁷ But where *tianming* posits a transcendent order, it is ostensibly in the modern West—beginning in the Hobbesian moment and extended in the relentless naturalisation of ‘catastrophe’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, firstly after the great Lisbon earthquake, and then in the geological theory of *catastrophism*—that the occult reality of ‘catastrophe’ assumes the aspect of something truly monstrous, a figure of absolute exteriority, of heterotopic nightmare.

Hobbes’s text is not just wracked by, but is founded on a psychotic intolerance of the ‘Enthusiasts’, the ‘theomancers’, the ‘prophets’

And so back to Hobbes himself. To the modern reader, the serious political theorist, it seems almost embarrassing that nearly half of *Leviathan* is made up of its treatment of theology in Parts III and IV, with its discussion of the ‘kingdom of darkness’ and its sprawling digressions on prophecies and scriptural esoterica, demons, witchcraft, and miracles. Yet Hobbes’s text is not just wracked by, but is *founded* on a psychotic intolerance of the ‘Enthusiasts’, the ‘theomancers’, the ‘prophets’, those men and women throughout human history who have claimed that God could speak through them; who have claimed, more radically, to see beyond politics directly into the occult circuitry of which all human affairs are merely the simulated emanation.⁸ From Hobbes’s perspective, the catastrophic occultist stands in the gloom of the outside, looming as a spectre of militant opposition to the suspension of catastrophe by the state, welling up from the residues of reality the state has failed to overcome.

7. On the differences in Chinese and Western conceptions of technics and time, see Y. Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016); A. Greenspan, *Shanghai Future: Modernity Remade* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014).

8. My argument owes much to Takuya Okada’s ‘Thomas Hobbes on Christian Religion in the Context of the English Civil War: His Use of the Bible in *Leviathan*’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Tokyo, 2016).

Over and over, *Leviathan* returns to the need to suppress the Enthusiast in all its guises: in chapter 7, chapter 8, chapter 12, chapter 32, chapter 34.... Casting his gaze over the vista of ruin wrought in seventeenth-century England by the enthusiastic sects, Hobbes could see all too well that this figure was the single most dangerous vulnerability of the commonwealth. Leviathan may be a terrible beast, a plated colossus impregnable to any human weapon, churning whirlpools of slaughter with its belly as it breathes the fire of reason from its mouth. Yet above Leviathan there stands God, transcendent mystery—and to lay claim to the voice of God himself leaves Leviathan among the detritus of the transcended. Schmitt was precisely correct in seeing the Jewish image of Leviathan as making it a ‘plaything of God’, then; but he was disastrously wrong in assuming that this is a problem exterior to Hobbes’s theory. This paranoia is central to Hobbes himself. ‘Everything under Heaven belongs to me’—yet *not Heaven itself*...

Hobbes’s answer to the problem was simple—at first sight, at least. Thought must be controlled at its very roots, in its ulterior basis in myth. The very possibility of the theomantic short-circuit around Leviathan must be stamped out; all human disagreements must be evaporated first into the determinate text of scripture, and ultimately into the orthodoxy pronounced in the commands of the *Persona Civitatis*, the aggregate ‘Person of the Commonwealth’. He puts the point most sharply in an earlier part of the book, while discussing the universal basis of the pagan commonwealths: ‘Sometimes,’ he says, the ‘insignificant Speeches of Mad-men [were] supposed to be possessed with a divine Spirit; which Possession they called Enthusiasme; and these kinds of foretelling events, were accounted Theomancy [...] And therefore the first Founders, and Legislators of Common-wealths [...] have in all places taken care, First, to imprint in their minds a beliefe, that those precepts which they gave concerning Religion, might not be thought to proceed from their own device.’⁹

If the modern liberal disdains the kind of supercilious totalitarianism implied in this solution—and of course, for Hobbes, in a Christian commonwealth this is not a matter of spreading lies in the form of

9. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XII.

In an ordered society, the insectoid buzz of heterodoxy must always and already appear as a nightmare

pagan myths, but of upholding the truth of scripture itself—she may see Hobbes's point better when confronted by the reality of the civil war in the context of which he was writing. His later retrospective, *Behemoth*, sketched the problem in gruesome detail. The English Civil War had its roots in the proliferation of swarming sects with infinite 'names and peculiar doctrines', incubating chambers spawning 'enemies which arose against his Majesty from the private interpretation of the Scripture, exposed to every man's scanning in his mother-tongue'.¹⁰ On the surface, this is a limited point about a specific historical episode; but in its shadow lies the nightmare of society itself. For radically, in an ordered society, the insectoid buzz of heterodoxy must *always and already* appear as a nightmare. The liberal who proclaims against Hobbes the doctrine of free speech will often prove just as susceptible to the terror: for the state, there must always be a limit to thought.

There is, however, a curious quality, a deep dissatisfaction, lurking in Hobbes's mythic solution of the problem—on its *own* terms, and not just those of an exterior moralism. If the commonwealth installs itself as the king of the proud, the avatar of God, how does it not itself become sectarian? To maintain itself, the state must neuter or eliminate 'every religion that exalts itself to be its judge'; but in doing so, the state must itself assume the aspect of a 'definite form of religion', becoming the fount of truth.¹¹ So far, so good, perhaps, as long as the commonwealth can monopolise the thought of its members—but in the emergency where it cannot, things soon take on a rather different appearance. The more sharply it is confronted by the prophets of catastrophe, the more ruthlessly sectarian it must become, dividing the good and the evil, denouncing its enemies with furious vitriol. The *Persona Civitatis* becomes caught in the very matrix of the religious paranoia it denounces, as it shrieks the ill omens betokened by its opponents. It is precisely this contradiction that Leo Strauss articulated through the paradox

of Hobbes's 'Platonism'. Following Plato, Strauss argued, Hobbes desires a 'completely passionless, purely rational political philosophy', yet he wishes also a 'norm [...] applicable under all circumstances, under the most unfavourable circumstances, in the extreme cases' (the case, we may add, of the Enthusiast). And so his norm enters, despite itself, into 'accord with the passions'; it must become radically anti-Platonist.¹² Finally, pretending to transcend the Enthusiast, the commonwealth itself becomes a 'demonic machine', a tremendous enthusiasm mobilised against every other, all themselves constituted as enthusiasms relative to it.¹³

The process, of course, operates just as much in the opposite direction. The sect tends to become like a state. This is the sociological tendency described in Max Weber's theory of the routinisation of charisma, the processes of mediation that transform the compact charismatic community that adheres around a leader 'completely outside everyday social organisation' into an extensive and bureaucratised institutional church:¹⁴ from the early Christians to the Catholic Church; from the immediacy of the original Raëlian UFO cult, where the revelations of the literally alien Outside were made manifest directly to the faithful, to the bureaucracy of the latter-day Raëlians, with its increasing regulation of access to the divine.¹⁵ The same idea is found equally in the genealogy of the state itself, in Rousseau's figure of the Legislator, that promethean silhouette at the origin of every state whose genius projects its entire constitutional course—is this not the figure of a prophet?¹⁶ Can there be an orthodoxy that is more than an overgrown heterodoxy? Can there be a heterodoxy that does not assume the position of an orthodoxy? The whole endeavour of human politics seems little

12. L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* [1936], tr. E. Sinclair (Chicago and London, 1952), 150.

13. On Leviathan as infernal machine, see P. Springborg, 'Hobbes and Schmitt on the name and nature of Leviathan revisited', in Johan Tralau (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt: The Politics of Order and Myth* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 39–58.

14. M. Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization*, tr. A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 367.

15. See S. J. Palmer, *Aliens Adored: Raël's UFO Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 101.

16. J.-J. Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter 7. As Schmitt recognises, the gaze of the Legislator lurks at the root of every constitution: C. Schmitt, *Dictatorship: From the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to the Proletarian Class Struggle*, tr. M. Hoelzl and G. Ward (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 109–10.

10. T. Hobbes, *Behemoth: or, the Long Parliament*, Dialogue I.

11. F. Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', *Untimely Meditations*.

more than the current alternating between the two, the state flipping across the cycles of history, oscillating endlessly between sect and church.

3. The Despot and the Patchwork

Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down
its tongue with a rope? ... Will traders barter for it?
Will they divide it up among the merchants?
—Job 41:1, 6

The character of the state—not just in the architecture of Hobbes’s theory, but *as such*—is precisely that of a demonic machine. The impasse of enthusiasm is not simply an intellectual failing on Hobbes’s part, then; we cannot dissociate, as Schmitt attempted, the rational sovereign of Bosse’s image from the esoteric Leviathan of Job 41. To sustain itself in the most extreme of conditions, the rational sovereign must become entirely, furiously, irrational. This impasse is inherent to the state form itself. Hobbes’s enduring insight lies precisely in his ability, at the very origins of the modern state, to formulate its paradoxes so decisively.

Two competing responses have arisen to the manifest terror of Leviathan—a revivalist and an antagonist response

Two competing responses have arisen to the manifest terror of Leviathan. They are, respectively, a *revivalist* and an *antagonist* response. The revivalist response is best characterised by Schmitt, who mourns the fall of ‘the “mortal god” [...] from his throne’: in the pluralistic society, he complains, ‘the parties slaughter the powerful Leviathan and slice pieces from the flesh of his body’.¹⁷ Gripped by processes outside the control of the state, the world has decayed from the Hobbesian ideal—so we are told. Yet it is precisely this degeneracy that lets us see, with crystal clarity, the enduring wisdom of the sage of Malmesbury, and behoves us to restore Leviathan’s ruined throne. Shorn of his inconvenient imagery, Hobbes must be revived. In his essay on the ‘Dark Enlightenment’, Nick Land has—seemingly unknowingly—repeated this Schmittian

17. C. Schmitt, ‘Staatsethik und pluralistischer Staat’, quoted in J. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 276.

complaint. ‘Governments are made out of people,’ Land states, ‘and they will eat well’. The question, then, is this: ‘How can the sovereign power be prevented—or at least dissuaded—from devouring society?’¹⁸ For Schmitt, the question was of similar dimensions: How is the independence of ‘the political’ from the aesthetic, the economic, from all the other ‘various relatively independent endeavours of human thought and action’, to be maintained?¹⁹

In the end, Hobbes shows us that it cannot be maintained. Precisely like Schmitt, like the ‘Dark Enlightenment’, Hobbes wanted a sovereign as restrained as necessary for a stable society: it would deal not with ‘sciences Mathematicall’, for instance, but strictly with law and ethics, maintaining merely the covenant that is the essential ground of any civil society.²⁰ But to be sustained even in the most radical state of exception, in conditions of overwhelming catastrophe, the commonwealth’s domination must expand irrepressibly from the radical root of human thought into every circle of existence. It must ‘devour society’. This was the root of Hobbes’s byzantine obsession with the occult, the delirious loops that trapped him in the ‘kingdom of darkness’: even the most restrained of states cannot tolerate the existential opposition of the Enthusiast, and as sectarian exceptions and negative glitches flood the body of Leviathan, the shields over its body must lock down, and the monster must transform into its terrible mode of siege, switching from Bosse to Job as it becomes a creature of fire and blood. Schmitt, just prior to the dawn of the Third Reich, tried to distinguish the ‘qualitative totalitarianism’ necessary for the sustenance of the state, which he drew from Hegel, from the ‘quantitative totalitarianism’ of intervention in every sphere of human life.²¹ The distinction failed. Once threatened, Leviathan must warp everything around itself in order to maintain its existence—all thought, all ideology, all behaviour. Politics must get a grip—whatever the cost.

If revivalist Hobbesianism proves foreclosed, the political theorist may feel led to an *antagonist*

18. N. Land, ‘The Dark Enlightenment’, <<http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/>>.

19. C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, tr. George Schwab (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007), 25.

20. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI.

21. C. Schmitt, ‘Weiterentwicklung des totalen Staats in Deutschland’ (1933).

response to Hobbes. Land himself posits this alternative when he suggests that neoreaction is ‘recognizably Hobbesian [...] devoid from its beginning of any Rousseauistic enthusiasm for popular expression’: if Hobbes is too frightening, perhaps we should turn to Rousseau.²² Superficially, this may seem like an obvious choice: after all, is Rousseau not the very opposite of Hobbes, believing mankind to be inherently good, praising the state of nature, condemning human artifice? For the historian of political thought, however, the dichotomy quickly falls apart. Rousseau’s underlying ‘Hobbism’ has been a perennial topic of note: Rousseau, like Hobbes, believes that ‘before the social contract there could be neither government nor courts’;²³ Rousseau, like Hobbes, sees the natural condition of civilised man as the war of all against all. In his infamous letter to Mirabeau, Rousseau made this explicit. The underlying issue of all political thought, ‘the great problem of Politics’, he states, is ‘to find a form of Government that might place the law above man’. But ‘if unfortunately this form cannot be found, and I frankly admit that I believe that it cannot be [...] I would wish the despot could be God. I see no tolerable mean between the most austere Democracy and the most perfect Hobbism’—and democracy, for Rousseau, can only ever be a government of the superhuman.²⁴

This may seem like an issue peculiar to Rousseau himself, but the problem can be generalised. Radical democrats in power have ever devoted themselves to the task of political education: for them as for Rousseau, civilised man has become corrupt, and the state must be mobilised to restore them to a purer state—the Montagnards and the Leninists each identified perverse and ghoulish tendencies of a corrupted humanity that needed ruthlessly to be stamped out. The reality of popular desire exceeds

22. For an explicit case for radicalism against Hobbes, see, for instance, J. Gilbert, *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism* (London: Pluto, 2014). Gilbert has elsewhere posited this explicitly against Land, accepting Land’s dichotomy between Hobbesian reaction and anti-Hobbesian radicalism. See also Gilles Châtelet’s denunciation of Hobbes’s ‘social physics’ and its neoliberal legacy, in *To Live and Think Like Pigs* (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2014).

23. I. Hont, ‘Adam Smith’s history of law and government as political theory’, in R. Bourke and R. Geuss (eds), *Political Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131–71: 148.

24. Rousseau to Mirabeau, 26 July 1767, in J.-J. Rousseau, V. Gourevitch (ed), *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 270.

The Relative Enthusiast must install, by sociological inevitability, a state. The mask of the anti-Hobbesian is ripped off—and the despot as God stares out from beneath

necessarily their own. But the moment of maturity is endlessly deferred, the exception in which a dictatorship is established yawns into eternity: political education turns into grim authoritarianism. It assumes the character of the sect. This, then, locates exactly the problem of the *Relative Enthusiast*. Just as the state must assume the aspect of sectarianism to stamp out the sects that challenge it, the Enthusiast who wishes to demolish the state by appeal to the transcendent becomes, in power, the king of the proud, since she herself has now taken the mantle of mediator between God and the profane, and must suppress the theomantic short circuit that reaches over her head. The Relative Enthusiast must install, by sociological inevitability, a state. The mask of the anti-Hobbesian is ripped off—and the despot as God stares out from beneath.

Ripping up Leviathan is harder than it seems. Perhaps we will be better served by another vehicle that Land has mobilised to restrain the power of Leviathan—at least on the level of its extensive territoriality. This is the neo-Westphalian theory of the *patchwork*. Derived from the neoreactionary thinker Curtis Yarvin, the patchwork presents an image of endless fission, ‘a global spiderweb of tens, even hundreds, of thousands of sovereign and independent mini-countries’, each with its own internal, ‘neocameralist’ sovereign.²⁵ This image should not be dismissed as ‘fascist’. It reprises a tradition of Western political thought that reaches back across the doctrine of *cuius regio* to the very origins of nationalism in the medieval French reaction against the universalist pretences of the Emperor; in its substance, it is clearly antagonistic to the universality of the fascist state with its insatiable thirst for conquest and death.

25. ‘Mencius Moldbug’ (Curtis Yarvin), ‘Patchwork: A Positive Vision (Part 1)’, <<http://unqualified-reservations.blogspot.de/2008/11/patchwork-positive-vision-part-1.html>>.

We must turn from a patchwork of states to the infectious patchwork within the state

Yet patchwork remains, despite itself, peculiarly ambivalent. It is obsessed with the state: creating new states, cutting up states, states on top of states.... At an elementary level, however, it seems that competition between states must favour states themselves, and for this we have many great proofs throughout history—the emergence of the truly protofascist Qin Empire from the fissiparous warring Chinese states; the rise of Alexander’s empire from the Greek *poleis*; the birth of *raison d’état* in Renaissance Italian city-states. (At least part of this tendency has been formulated rigorously by Peter Turchin.)²⁶ To truly move beyond Leviathan in all its universalising terror requires not the multiplication of Leviathans, at which point we are already within the Hobbesian trap, encouraging the monster in its sectarianism, provoking the pathologies that have led to imperium. It requires a radical ambivalence to the state as such—an uncompromising identification with those processes today of mass production and mass flows of politics that overwhelm and obsolesce the state itself. States, of course, decay. It is something altogether more radical to posit that the state form itself will decay. We must turn from a patchwork of states to the infectious *patchwork within the state*, a recursive dissolution that leaves not a network of states, but an endless flux in which the state itself disintegrates into the very war that sustains it. For this conception, we must turn to Nietzsche.

4. The Swarm of the Future

Who can strip off its outer coat? Who can penetrate its double coat of armour?
—Job 41:13

Nietzsche was the first radically anti-Hobbesian political philosopher. This all-important point has been made, independently, from two very different perspectives. In his book *Nietzsche’s Great Politics*, the intellectual historian Hugo Drochon has argued systematically that ‘Nietzsche does offer a

26. See note 33 below.

systematic political theory of the state [...] one that is an *alternative* to the social contract tradition’. Where Hobbes writes in a period of decay and collapse yet assumes the role of the philosopher of the commonwealth triumphant, Nietzsche writes in a time of overwhelming bureaucratisation, at the apex of Hegelian *Staatswissenschaft*, yet becomes the philosopher of the state’s decay.²⁷ Meanwhile, in a brief passage of his *The Thirst for Annihilation*, Land, too—despite his later turn to Hobbes—points out the essential novelty of Nietzsche’s political theory. For Nietzsche, he says, the state does not merely suspend within its territory the primal war of all against all, as it does in Hobbes and all the theorists who follow him. Rather, ‘even in his earliest writings Nietzsche is explicit [...] that the *polis*—along with its telic integration—is a consequence of pre-political militarism’: it is not the regulatory end, but the vessel and conduit of war ‘in its uninhibited and extravagant root’.²⁸

The stratified state itself seethes with viral conflict between its strata—on this, Nietzsche aligns with Marx

If we are to escape from the conceptual Hobbesian antinomy, from the crushing unity of the nominally anti-Hobbesian radicalism of many on the left and the explicit reassertion of Leviathan on the right, we could do worse than to return to Land’s early work, and begin anew with Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, states are an epiphenomenon, conduits instantiated merely as moments of a great flow of intensities. The state is not a determinate contract, established, as for Hobbes or Rousseau, through agreement implicit or explicit, once and ideally for all eternity—the ‘Covenant of every man with every man’.²⁹ In its origins, it is instead the contingent and violent imposition of force by a ‘conquering horde’, a military caste ‘raised [...] pyramidally upon the lowest, broadest, slavish stratum’.³⁰ The stratified state itself seethes with viral conflict between its strata—on this, Nietzsche aligns with Marx. ‘There is no

27. H. Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 51.

28. N. Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 105.

29. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVII.

30. Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics*, 10; Nietzsche, ‘The Greek State’, quoted in Land, *Thirst for Annihilation*, 105.

hope of a nation without war, or a people without conquest.³¹ The most ‘transparent’ state is not the modern constitutional democracy, then: it is ancient Sparta, which each year declared war upon its own subjects. Tangled unavoidably in the war that forms the condition and basis of its existence, the state is subjected to a ‘zone of impotence’, penetrated by an ‘insurrectionary flow of mobilisation [it] converts and diverts without being able to control and define’.³²

This alternative conception of the origins of the state has now found considerable empirical support in recent historiography. We may cite here, for instance, Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s observation that many of the states of early modern Asia were formed ‘through the mediation of migratory elites’ circulating across the continent, or Peter Turchin’s quantitatively informed ‘mirror-empire’ theory, which explains the process of ‘imperiogenesis’ as an escalating arms race between nomad and settler populations.³³ In each case, the high-minded pretensions of the state to transcendence as the ‘king of the proud’ and avatar of God are collapsed into its transcended reality as a secondary circuit of the grand flux of war—better, it remains the avatar of God, but *War is God*.

For the human political subject, this neo-Heraclitean conception is far more ruinous than that of Hobbes: with the very possibility of a social contract or covenant demolished, the state returns radically to its basis in slavery. Yet this very reduction liberates, renders inhuman, the figure of the Enthusiast, which now reaches beyond the circuit of sectarian politics. In Hobbes’s theory, the state must block the road to the occult and catastrophic heart of reality; what is more, it must assume this task with paranoiac obsession, since if it fails, society and history themselves will collapse, endless competing sects erupting from the decaying body politic. In Nietzsche’s atheology, by contrast, the state is nothing so important: it is itself an insurrectionary feature of war, disposable and contingent. At its terminus there

remains nothing around which it is necessary to route. Catastrophe, once exteriorised, now extends into the state itself; ‘the net itself is infected’ and the body of Leviathan rots with spectacular diseases.³⁴ In this context, the *relative* enthusiasm of the traditional sect into which the Hobbesian state itself digresses is juxtaposed to an *absolute*, swarmachinic enthusiasm that is not merely opposed to the state, but ruthlessly indifferent, even ironical, a subjectivity beyond political comprehension pulsing transcendental heterodoxy: not a force of destruction motivated by a feeling of the transcendent, but a force of obsolescence in total communion with war.³⁵ Nietzsche himself conceived of his work as a *religious* intervention—it is a ‘tremendous asset’, he stated in a letter, ‘to be read like the Bible’.³⁶ But it was an intervention far beyond anything that had come before.

It is an escalating system-failure that crashes Hobbes’s political theology, pointing to the obsolescence of the state form itself

It is always tempting to perform yet another restoration of Hobbes, whether explicit as in the ‘Dark Enlightenment’, or occulted as in the Left’s straight-Enlightenment nostalgia for the many mutations of social contract theory. All of these accept as friend or enemy the Hobbesian commonwealth as a site of order and interiority in which the catastrophic outside is suspended: they thus repeat the trajectory of the Relative Enthusiast. This image itself is Hobbesian, and Schmitt’s revivalism lurks in the very distinction between enemy and friend; the counterhegemonic project constructs mirror-empires in place of moving beyond imperium itself. The terminal development of technocapitalism as it overwhelms the state compels the theorist to take a more radically opposite view. That Leviathan can no longer make a ‘sinister impression’ in an age of

31. Katastromancer, ‘On Impossibility’. urcC, <<https://urcc.space/circuit/?katastromancer/Sequence%20I-I>>.

32. S. Metcalf, ‘Killing Time’, *Abstract Culture* 2:1 (Ccruc), <http://www.ccruc.net/swarm2/2_killing.htm>.

33. S. Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700* (Chichester: Wiley, second edition, 2012), 21; P. Turchin, ‘A theory for the formation of large empires’, *Journal of Global History* 4:2 (2009), 191–217.

34. S. Plant and N. Land, ‘Cyberpositive’ [1994], in R. Mackay and A. Avanesian (eds), *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth and Berlin: Urbanomic/Merve, 2014), 303–13.

35. The figure of the Absolute Enthusiast is also foreshadowed in Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh’s reading of the sectarian: see J.B. Mohaghegh, *Insurgent, Poet, Mystic, Sectarian: The Four Masks of an Eastern Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), Part IV: ‘Sectarian’.

36. Nietzsche to Paul Duessen, 26 November 1888 (No. 1159). My translation.

'total technology' is not the mere 'failure of a symbol' that frees Hobbes from the disastrous weight of his symbology, the moment that lets the modern reader at long last 'across the centuries reach out: Thomas Hobbes, now you do not teach in vain!'³⁷ It is an escalating system-failure that crashes Hobbes's political theology, pointing to the obsolescence of the state form itself, the self-overcoming of the Hobbesian era.

Against Leviathan's grip on humanity, its suppression of heterodoxies, the reality of the fluid and globalised Earth, with its expanding spaces of negativity, its intensifying excesses and flows of mobilisation, and its opportunities for exit, calls us towards a higher register, to formulate an *Anti-Leviathan*: an enthusiasm that will be absolute, not relative, comfortable in its disjuncture, a theoretical orientation that is not dependent on a praxis of repetition of hegemony, but is open and expectant towards the processes that are ripping up the Leviathan—divesting it of its oceanic pretences, and drowning it in the expansive flux of the deep, green sea....

37. Schmitt, *Leviathan in the State Theory*, 86.