

Vainglory, Modesty, and Political Agency in the Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes

Julie E. Cooper

Abstract: Histories of political theory have framed the story of the emergence of sovereign states and sovereign selves as a story about secularization—specifically, a story that equates secularization with self-deification. Thomas Hobbes’s investment in modesty and humility demonstrates the need for, and the possibility of, an alternative secularization narrative. Scholars have long insisted that “vainglory” is a key term for the interpretation of *Leviathan*. But Hobbes’s task is not complete once he has discredited vainglory. Hobbes must also envision, and cultivate, contrary virtues—and modesty is one virtue that Hobbes would cultivate. An analysis of Hobbes’s attempt to redefine and rehabilitate the virtues of modesty shows that Hobbes warns against the temptation to self-deification. In *Leviathan*, the political task is not to enthrone humans in sovereign invulnerability, but rather to achieve the right balance between bodily security and consciousness of finitude.

Hobbes scholars have long insisted that, “as its very title expresses, it [*Leviathan*] is directed primarily against the passion of ‘pride.’”¹ It is a commonplace that *Leviathan* aims to subdue vainglory, which threatens political community as the dominant, and most dangerous, passion,² or the passion

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¹Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 55. See also Joshua Mitchell, *Not by Reason Alone: Religion, History, and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 57.

²See Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 55; Mitchell, *Not by Reason*, 50; Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle’s “Rhetoric” to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 45, 80; Richard Tuck, “The Utopianism of *Leviathan*,” in “*Leviathan*” After 350 Years, ed. Tom Sorell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 131; Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1975), 35–36; A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 49–50; Gabriella Slomp, “Hobbes

to which all others can be reduced.³ Scholars who accord vainglory pride of place generally assume that *Leviathan* offers a definitive “solution” to the “problem” of pride.⁴ On this view, Hobbes arranges society so as to reduce detrimental consequences of the passions, but he concedes that destructive passions can neither be corrected nor disciplined—and, more importantly, they need not be disciplined. The sovereign must marshal sufficient power to contain unruly passions, but he or she (or they) need not encourage subjects to cultivate a measured self-estimate.

This essay presents a critical engagement with these influential traditions of Hobbes scholarship. I follow previous scholars in taking “vainglory” as a key term for the interpretation of *Leviathan*. However, I offer a contrarian interpretation of the political, theological, and rhetorical work that “vainglory” and its traditional antonyms (e.g., “humility,” “modesty”) perform. I contend that Hobbes is pessimistic about the likelihood of vanquishing pride solely through the sovereign’s sword. Rather, Hobbes recognizes that, to achieve lasting security, subjects must also cultivate a measured self-estimate. Toward that end, Hobbes redefines the traditional virtues of modesty and humility, and recuperates them for politics. In critical dialogue with traditional morality, Hobbes develops new ways to think about human limitation and human power, and he makes cultivating the proper relationship to vulnerability a task for politics.

Although scholars have long catalogued liabilities of vainglory, few have thought to examine Hobbes’s treatment of pride’s traditional antonyms.⁵

on Glory and Civil Strife,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s “Leviathan,”* ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181, 190, 192; and Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 241–42. Jean Hampton characterizes this position as “the passions account of conflict” (*Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 63–64). For a view that says that glory looms even larger in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* than it does in *Leviathan*, see F. S. McNeilly, *The Anatomy of Leviathan* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1968), 146, 163, and Gabriella Slomp, *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 85.

³See Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 12; Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 85–86; and Haig Patapan, “‘Lord Over the Children of Pride’: The Vaine-Glorious Rhetoric of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33, no. 1 (2000): 78, 79.

⁴See Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 13; Mitchell, *Not by Reason*, 11, 48, 50, 57, 59, 63, 70; Philip Pettit, *Made with Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4, 13, 22, 115, 132; Patapan, “Lord,” 74, 80, 91; and Slomp, “Hobbes,” 196.

⁵Leo Strauss is one of the few scholars who appreciate Hobbes’s investment in modesty. See Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 127, and *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 93, 97. While

Why have scholars overlooked the contribution of modesty and humility to Hobbes's project? One could read this oversight as reflecting the relative paucity of references to modesty and humility in *Leviathan*. But given that, in *Leviathan*, references to vainglory barely outnumber references to modesty and humility,⁶ scholarly neglect of modesty cannot be explained solely by the text's structure and content. The fact that scholars have lavished attention upon Hobbes's critique of vainglory, while ignoring his engagement with the contrary virtues of modesty and humility, also reflects pervasive assumptions about Hobbes's approach to managing the passions. Specifically, it reflects the assumption that Hobbes solves the problem of vainglory through strategic deployment of force, without trying to foster modesty in political subjects.

On my reading, Hobbes never promises that such a solution is possible. As scholars who showcase Hobbes's reliance on the rhetorical tradition have demonstrated, even the most fearsome sovereign is vulnerable if subjects entertain subversive opinions and nurture corrosive vices.⁷ As a theorist of political obligation, then, Hobbes's task is not complete once he has discredited vainglory. Hobbes must also craft, and cultivate, "civic virtues"⁸—and modesty, *properly defined*, is one virtue that Hobbes would cultivate. Modesty and humility must be redefined, because Hobbes recognizes that, for political purposes, unreconstructed humility is as dangerous as pride. During the English civil war, Puritan divines extolled the virtue of humility in an effort to encourage, and justify, seditious claims of conscience. With the argument that Hobbes crafts an ethos of modesty at odds with both the aristocratic

Strauss argues that Hobbes equates reason with modesty, he considers Hobbes's political project thoroughly immodest. See Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 107: Hobbes inaugurates the modern quest for boundless progress, a quest made possible by the belief that man "can extend the limits of his power at will." Although I am indebted to Strauss for highlighting Hobbes's investment in modesty, I differ on what that investment reveals about Hobbes's views on the possibility, and the desirability, of human mastery.

⁶By my count, the words "modest" and "modesty" appear in *Leviathan* six times; the words "humble" and "humility" appear eight times; and "vainglory" and "vainglorious" appear nine times. Thus, if we judge solely by the numbers, Hobbes does not seem significantly more preoccupied with vainglory than he does with modesty and humility.

⁷See Mary G. Dietz, "Hobbes's Subject as Citizen," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 91–119; Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); James M. Martel, *Subverting the Leviathan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); and Slomp, *Thomas Hobbes*.

⁸Dietz, "Hobbes's Subject," 91–92, 96.

cult of glory and the Protestant cult of humility, I contribute to lines of inquiry that depict Hobbes as a “theorist of the virtues,”⁹ and emphasize Hobbes’s reliance on “good books, good teachers, good sermons and the like” as counters to vainglory.¹⁰

Examining Hobbes’s definition of modesty proves fruitful not only for the contribution it makes to portraits of Hobbes as a theorist of virtue. Scrutinizing modesty’s place in Hobbes’s texts also yields a radical rethinking of Hobbes’s political project. Once we appreciate Hobbes’s investment in modesty, we have reason to reject received portraits of Hobbes as a confident, arch-rationalist who “seeks to make man master and possessor of nature.”¹¹ The claim that Hobbes trusts human “Artificers” to master the human “Matter” with which they are consigned to work appears questionable—because the Hobbes who recognizes that modesty would provide the only solution to the problem of vainglory also acknowledges the difficulty of cultivating modesty in a stable commonwealth (L, Introduction).¹² By Hobbes’s admission, the commonwealth offers new inducements to pride, for security breeds smugness and complacency. In this sense, Hobbes’s ostensible “solution” is actually part of the problem. As Hobbes concedes, “The condition of man in this life shall never be without Inconveniences” (L, Ch. 20). Although inconveniences are greatly reduced in the commonwealth, the commonwealth is no panacea—the political forms that Hobbes devises are not without their own liabilities.

Moreover, the theology that Hobbes deploys to mitigate these liabilities—a theology drawn from the Book of Job—exposes limits to the state’s ability to solve fundamental human problems, precisely because it posts limits to human mastery. In Job, God’s transcendence creates space for human agency. But Job asserts a categorical distinction between divine and human creativity. Humans can create a “Mortall God,” but they remain subject to an immortal God who is not of human creation, and who is beyond human control (L, Ch. 17). As Hobbes explains, “Sovereign Power . . . is as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it” (L, Ch. 20). Sovereign power is

⁹Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 11.

¹⁰Slopp, “Hobbes,” 193.

¹¹Gillespie, *Theological Origins*, 42; see also 209, 222, 231, 254; Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 105–7, 168; and Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), xiv–xv, 148, 159–60, 188, 204–5.

¹²Hobbes citations refer to the following editions: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (hereafter L), ed. C. B. Macpherson (New York: Penguin, 1985); Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen* (hereafter DH), ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998); Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (hereafter E), ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* (hereafter DC), ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

indeed great, but its greatness is a specifically *human* greatness—and, as a human artifact, sovereign power cannot insulate subjects from divine power.

Thus, on my reading, Hobbes does not merely endorse modesty as a virtue for obedient subjects. Hobbes's claims for the power of human artifice, and the possibilities of human mastery, are more modest than one might expect from a theorist who compares the original contract to divine fiat. Hobbes extols the power of human artifice, but he recognizes that human artifacts cannot render their makers omnipotent or invulnerable, precisely because, unlike God, humans are ineluctably finite.¹³ Thus, in *Leviathan*, the political task is not to enthrone humans in sovereign invulnerability, but rather to achieve the right balance between bodily security and consciousness of vulnerability (both equal vulnerability as individuals, and absolute vulnerability as humans).

The essay has four sections. The first two sections, devoted to Hobbes's definitions of vainglory and modesty, survey challenges that vanity poses for political community. Hobbes tackles these challenges by crafting a new ethos of modesty in which consciousness of individual vulnerability elicits recognition of collective power. In section three, I examine the "law of honor"—Hobbes's protocol for distributing honorary titles (Duke, Earl, etc.). Laws of honor, which use reward and punishment to channel vainglory in salutary directions, epitomize the approach to pride that scholars usually impute to Hobbes. But the law of honor cannot be Hobbes's last word on solving the problem of pride, for, by Hobbes's admission, the law does not provide a foolproof solution—indeed, it risks exacerbating the problem. To contend with challenges posed by pride, I argue, an ongoing campaign to cultivate modesty is required. In the final section, I argue that the Book of Job affords Hobbes theological resources for educating subjects in the virtues of modesty.

Vainglory

In *Leviathan*, vainglory is one symptom of the ill fit between human nature and communal life. According to Hobbes, the passions make it difficult for humans to live together without (artificially constituted) authority. Although Hobbes imputes corrosive power to many passions, he singles out three for opprobrium: "So that in the nature of man, we find three principall causes of quarrell. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory" (L, Ch. 13). On the evidence of this passage, Hobbes does not consider glory the only incendiary passion, or even the most intense, but he does eye it warily. What accounts for this wariness?

¹³Here, I echo Samantha Frost, *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker: Hobbesian Reflections on Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 7, 12, 134–35, 172.

As Hobbes explains in *Leviathan's* catalogue of the passions, glory is the delightful sensation that accompanies affirmation of one's power. "Joy, arising from imagination of a mans own power and ability, is that exultation of the mind which is called GLORYING" (L, Ch. 6).¹⁴ According to Hobbes, humans like to feel powerful. Indeed, the allure of potency is seductive. Individuals who relish the sensation of power are liable to affect powers that they lack, and be taken in by their own masquerade. Hobbes laments the propensity toward delusions of grandeur in the passage's continuation, which distinguishes glory from its groundless counterpart, vainglory. Hobbes says that glorying,

if grounded upon the experience of his own former actions, is the same with *Confidence*; but if grounded on the flattery of others; or onely supposed by himself, for delight in the consequences of it, is called VAIN-GLORY: which name is properly given; because a well grounded *Confidence* begetteth Attempt; whereas the supposing of power does not, and is therefore rightly called *Vaine*. (L, Ch. 6)

When Hobbes distinguishes glory from vainglory, he admits the possibility of well-founded confidence. When individuals correctly estimate their abilities, it is legitimate to revel in the self's power.¹⁵ Although, to the best of my knowledge, the term "self-esteem" never appears in Hobbes's English works, this passage could suggest that Hobbes endorses "right self-esteem."

It is incontrovertible that Hobbes admits the possibility of legitimate "confidence" (DH 52–53). Moreover, as scholars have argued, Hobbes envisions a political role for grounded glory—"a Glory, or Pride in appearing not to need to breake" a covenant is one of two potential supports of obligation (L, Ch. 14).¹⁶ But given the rarity of "Generosity," Hobbes argues, glory's political potential is limited; rather, "The Passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear" (L, Ch. 14). Thus, although Hobbes admits that glory can support obligation, he does not accord glory pride of place in the catalogue of civic virtue. Indeed, Hobbes is wary of relying on glory not only because pursuit of

¹⁴Hobbes's definition of glory shifts from *Elements of Law* to *Leviathan*. In *Elements*, Hobbes defines glory in comparative terms: "GLORY, or internal gloriation or triumph of the mind, is that passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us" (E 50). By contrast, in *Leviathan*, individuals need not outdo peers in order to experience, and exult in, their power. (Slomp argues that, despite superficial differences, Hobbes's definition of glory remains constant.)

¹⁵See *Elements*, 50.

¹⁶See Michael Walzer, "Good Aristocrats/Bad Aristocrats: Thomas Hobbes and Early Modern Political Culture," in *The Presence of the Past*, ed. R. T. Bienvenu and M. Feingold (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 41–53; Keith Thomas, "The Social Origins of Hobbes's Political Thought," in *Hobbes Studies*, ed. Keith C. Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 185–236; and Oakeshott, *Hobbes*, 127–33.

“Wealth, Command, or sensuall Pleasure” has dulled most men’s capacity for generosity, but also because glory is a slippery passion (L, Ch. 14).

After all, Hobbes identifies glory—*not* vainglory—as a principal incitement to the war of all against all. In the state of nature, “Glory” provokes quarrels surrounding “Reputation”: Men are liable to attack “for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other signe of undervalue, either direct in their Persons, or by reflexion in their Kindred, their Friends, their Nation, their Profession, or their Name” (L, Ch. 13). In the passage cited above, Hobbes exculpates glory, distinguishing grounded confidence from groundless delusions. Yet in the state of nature, glory is hardly innocent. Given Hobbes’s fastidiousness with definitions, his decision to identify glory as a “principal cause of quarrel” is significant. Hobbes betrays ambivalence about glory, precisely because glory is volatile, liable to devolve into vainglory. Indeed, in *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes emphasizes the proximity of the two passions: “this passion [glory], by them whom it displeaseth, is called pride: by them whom it pleaseth, it is termed a just valuation of himself.”¹⁷ Here, Hobbes suggests that “glory” and “pride” are two names for the same passion, confirming the adage that “men give different names, to one and the same thing, from the difference of their own passions” (L, Ch. 11). Given that Hobbes uses “glory” to indicate both a just self-estimate and an irrational incitement to war, we should hesitate before concluding that glory always “pleases” Hobbes.

If, as Hobbes suggests, vainglory is groundless glory, why do individuals exult in their power when they have no grounds to do so? Moreover, why is groundless glory dangerous? If vainglory is really “vain” (that is, empty or fruitless), it seems unlikely to incite violence. In the passage under discussion, Hobbes concedes that, while the vain overestimate their prowess, their delusions rarely “begetteth Attempt,” because overestimation takes place in the imagination. If the vain hesitate to attempt bold feats, they seem unlikely culprits for the violence that plagues the state of nature. Yet, as we have seen, Hobbes blames glory for an epidemic of aggression. To understand how “vain” glory could incite violence, it helps to recognize that Hobbes identifies two strands of vainglory. This distinction is clearest in *Elements of Law*, where Hobbes offers a threefold taxonomy of glory that disappears in later versions of the argument. In *Elements*, Hobbes distinguishes “glory” from “false glory” and “vain glory.” False glory is derived “not from any conscience of our own actions, but from fame and trust of others, whereby one may think well of himself, and yet be deceived” (E 50). The deceived undertake feats destined to meet with “ill-success” (E 50). By contrast, vainglory is a form of harmless daydreaming which “begetteth no appetite nor endeavour to any further attempt . . . as when a man imagineth himself to do the actions whereof he readeth in some romant”

¹⁷*Elements*, 50. For the relationship between glory and pride, see *Leviathan*, Ch. 8.

(E 50–51).¹⁸ The vain do not risk hazardous ventures—they rest content with quotidian affectation.¹⁹

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes maintains the distinction between glory that inspires rash ventures and glory that bears no fruit, but he abandons the term “false glory,” classing both phenomena as instances of “vainglory.” As Hobbes explains in *Leviathan*, some vain men (akin to the “vainglorious” from *Elements*) recognize the groundlessness of their self-estimate, and hesitate to act lest their pretensions be exposed. “Vain-glorious men, such as without being conscious to themselves of great sufficiency, delight in supposing themselves gallant men, are enclined onely to ostentation; but not to attempt: Because when danger or difficulty appears, they look for nothing but to have their insufficiency discovered” (L, Ch. 11). When a grandiose daydreamer shrinks from combat, he betrays a modicum of self-consciousness. However, Hobbes recognizes that many harbor delusions of grandeur, and in their case, “vainglory” resembles the *Elements*’ “false glory.” When the vain credit their delusions, they are liable to attempt feats that exceed their abilities.

Vain-glorious men, such as estimate their sufficiency by the flattery of other men, or the fortune of some precedent action, without assured ground of hope from the true knowledge of themselves, are enclined to rash engaging; and in the approach of danger, or difficulty, to retire if they can: because not seeing the way of safety, they will rather hazard their honour, which may be salved with an excuse; than their lives, for which no salve is sufficient. (L, Ch. 11)

When the vain lack “true knowledge of themselves,” they are not idle, pretentious daydreamers—they are pugnacious, rash engagers. Although rash men are capable of rational behavior (i.e., retreat) once battle is joined, their reservations come too late, after violence has been unleashed. Although some forms of vainglory prove harmless, delusional vainglory breeds instability because men who overestimate their abilities attack at the slightest affront and, once unleashed, violence is not easily quelled.

Moreover, if we examine Hobbes’s indictment of delusional vainglory, we see that the passion has two distinct but mutually reinforcing sources. Delusions of grandeur may result from social dynamics (“the flattery of other men”), but men are susceptible to flattery because they lack “true knowledge of themselves.”

Hobbes tackles social inducements to vanity when he depicts a state of nature riven by conflicts of honor. In the state of nature, lust for prestige wreaks havoc because there is no agreed standard of measure. As Hobbes

¹⁸See Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), chap. 6; and Hobbes, *Elements*, 63.

¹⁹See *Elements*, 51.

reminds readers, "The question who is the better man, has no place in the condition of meer Nature" (L, Ch. 11). But even though natural equality renders questions of comparative worth moot, men continue to pose them, with disastrous results. The vainglorious demand confirmation of their superiority and, when disappointed, attack those with the temerity to disrespect them. In the absence of an arbiter, disputes surrounding reputation escalate into mortal combat:

Men have no pleasure, (but on the contrary a great deale of grieffe) in keeping company, where there is no power able to over-awe them all. For every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himself: And upon all signes of contempt, or undervaluing, naturally endeavours, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power, to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other,) to extort a greater value from his contempters, by dommage; and from others, by the example. (L, Ch. 13)

As Sheldon Wolin has argued, these conflicts expose the instability of definitions in Hobbes's conventionalist account of language.²⁰ On this account, nature provides no metric for evaluation. Given nature's silence, men are free to devise personal standards; given human passion, these standards clash. In the absence of a natural, and therefore uncontroversial, definition of words like "honorable" and "dishonorable," the only way to achieve peace is to enforce conventional definitions. A "power able to over-awe them all" is a necessary counter to semantic anarchy, of which vanity is both a source and a symptom.

If Hobbes's attacks on vainglory were merely designed to spotlight the anarchy latent in language, then vainglory would be susceptible to a straightforward solution: appointing a "Great Definer" to promulgate, and enforce, a public table of values.²¹ But as a critic of vanity, Hobbes does not only expose the need for authoritative standards. When Hobbes bemoans inordinate sensitivity to petty slights, he also diagnoses a propensity toward self-delusion, men's inability or refusal to achieve "true knowledge of themselves." As Hobbes intimates, the "true knowledge" that escapes the vain is knowledge of equality. Examined from this angle, "vainglory" involves refusal to acknowledge that humans are equal, because they are equally vulnerable.²² Indeed, Hobbes condemns "vain conceipt" as the passion "which may perhaps make such equality incredible" (L, Ch. 13).

In the state of nature, refusal to acknowledge equality incites conflict because the vain, oblivious to their frailty, attack on the slightest pretext. As Hobbes explains, "generally all vainglorious men, (unlesse they be withall

²⁰Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 257. See also Pettit, *Made with Words*, 92–97.

²¹Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 260.

²²See *Leviathan*, Ch. 13.

timorous,) are subject to Anger"—men who harbor delusions of superiority are especially testy, and men who harbor delusions of invulnerability are especially belligerent (L, Ch. 27). Of course, in the state of nature, vanity contains a (potential) corrective. When belligerent men respond to petty slights by attacking peers, they find themselves caught in escalating battles, battles which ultimately present a more dire threat to self-esteem: human mortality. As Leo Strauss reconstructs this chastening confrontation, the specter of violent death lifts the veil from men's eyes, piercing delusions of invulnerability. "The ideal condition for self-knowledge is, therefore, unforeseen mortal danger," because unforeseen mortal danger forces acknowledgment—first visceral, then rational—of one's limitations.²³ In the face of imminent death, Hobbes wagers, even the most stubborn braggarts will forsake the dubious pleasures of overestimation for a more realistic self-assessment. It is in this sense that Strauss asserts: "Reason is modesty. This formulation sums up the spirit of Hobbes' philosophy."²⁴

If vanity expresses deep resentment against equality, then the project of taming vanity is more complicated than it first appears. As Hobbes defines it, vanity is a passion with (at least) two aspects, and, as a "solution," the "Great Definer" only addresses one aspect, leaving the more fundamental problem, the problem of self-delusion, unaddressed. The sovereign can discourage contests of honor by regulating protocols of esteem, but, as I argue below, regulation will likely falter absent prior acknowledgment of equality. The subjects most likely to observe the sovereign's protocol are those who acknowledge equality, and therefore acknowledge the sovereign's legitimacy. In other words, a definitive "solution" to the problem of pride would require that subjects forsake delusions of grandeur for "true knowledge of themselves."

Modesty

Consequently, we must determine what Hobbes considers "true" self-knowledge, and investigate its potential sources. The place to look is the laws of nature, which Hobbes enumerates in an effort "to craft the means of civil peace and so forestall within a citizenry the emergence of pernicious dispositions that would threaten to dissolve the commonwealth."²⁵ In Hobbes's taxonomy, "modesty" is the virtue of individuals who correctly assess their power and their position vis-à-vis peers. Hobbes endorses modesty when he insists, against Aristotle, that we admit natural equality. "If Nature therefore have made men equall, that equalitie is to be acknowledged: or if Nature have made men unequall; yet because men that think themselves equall, will not enter into conditions of Peace, but upon Equall termes, such equalitie must be admitted" (L, Ch. 15). If vainglory, which

²³Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 19. See also Oakeshott, *Hobbes*, 92.

²⁴Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, 97.

²⁵Dietz, "Hobbes's Subject," 102.

Hobbes classes as an inaccurate self-estimate, tends “to the excluding of natural equality,” then an accurate self-estimate would involve acknowledgment of equality (E 96). When Hobbes enumerates the laws of nature, he defines the normative practice of equality as a practice of modesty, and he classes this practice as the antithesis of “arrogance” and “pride” (L, Ch. 15). The ninth law of nature asserts human equality and enjoins “every man” to “acknowledge other for his Equall by nature. The breach of this Precept is Pride” (L, Ch. 15).²⁶ The tenth law of nature details the conduct that follows from acknowledgment of equality. As Hobbes explains, acknowledging equality entails proportionality in the transfer of rights that founds the commonwealth. One who refuses to treat peers equitably, holding on to rights that others have forfeited, “makes nonsense of the equality recognized in the previous article” (i.e. the ninth law of nature) (DC 50).²⁷ Thus, the tenth law of nature prohibits the subject of contract from reserving rights that he would deny others. Hobbes deems observers of this protocol modest: “The observers of this law, are those we call *Modest*, and the breakers *Arrogant* men” (L, Ch. 15). Thus, as a preliminary approximation, we can say that Hobbes bestows the title “modest” on those who observe equity in the transfer of rights.²⁸

However, to better appreciate the distinctiveness of Hobbes’s conception of modesty, we must explore seventeenth-century connotations of “modesty.” Hobbes exploits modesty’s contemporary cachet—but, at base, he is engaged in a project of redefinition.

In seventeenth-century English, “modesty” signifies a protocol of women’s deportment;²⁹ a protocol for scholarly disputation;³⁰ an ethos of moderation and temperance;³¹ and a topos of prefatory rhetoric.³² Multiple constructions of modesty circulated in the seventeenth century, and the sources from which

²⁶See Joel Kidder, “Acknowledgment of Equals: Hobbes’s Ninth Law of Nature,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 131 (1983): 133–46.

²⁷See also *Elements*, 94.

²⁸One could object that I place inordinate emphasis on modesty, which is, after all, just one of the laws of nature. But in privileging modesty, I follow Hobbes, *De Cive*, 62, who contends that the ninth law “encompasses all the other laws within itself.”

²⁹See Anne Laurence, “Women, Godliness, and Personal Appearance in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Women’s History Review* 15, no. 1 (2006): 69–81; Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1992), 169.

³⁰See Joris van Eijnatten, “From Modesty to Mediocrity: Regulating Public Dispute, 1670–1840: The Case of Dutch Divines,” *Common Knowledge* 8, no. 2 (2002): 310–32.

³¹See Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 79–81 and Stéphane Gerson, “In Praise of Modest Men: Self-Display and Self-Effacement in Nineteenth-Century France,” *French History* 20, no. 2 (2006): 182–203.

³²See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 83; Skinner, *Reason*

they derive—classical antiquity and Christian ethics—account for divergent emphases. Classical ethics bequeath the association of modesty with moderation, and classical rhetoric recommends affected professions of inadequacy as a means of ingratiating oneself with an audience. By contrast, Christian ethics associate modesty, defined as a mode of virtuous comportment, with humility, defined as affirmation of sinfulness and dependence on God. In the words of a seventeenth-century theologian, “Let there appeare in your exterior, humility accompanied with gravity & religious maturity, and you will not fayle of that modesty which is required.”³³

At first blush, the tenth law of nature appears to amplify modesty’s classical connotations, while muting its Christian resonance. After all, Hobbes defines modesty as a *practice* of equity, rather than a mode of comportment. The argument that Hobbes adopts a classical definition finds support in *Elements of Law*, where Hobbes couches the injunction to an egalitarian transfer of rights—“*Whatsoever right any man requireth to retain, he allow every other man to retain the same*”—in the rubric of “distributive justice,” equity, and proportionality (E 94). In *Elements*, observance of egalitarian protocols “is properly termed EQUITY,” and their breach, “ENCROACHING” (E 94). The language of “pride,” “arrogance,” and “modesty” is nowhere to be found in the *Elements’* catalogue of the laws of nature. However, in parallel passages from *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, Hobbes abandons the equity/encroaching antithesis for the modesty/arrogance antithesis: the later texts uphold egalitarian transfer of rights as the prime instance of “modesty,” and dismiss attempts to reserve rights as examples of “arrogance.”³⁴ The various iterations of Hobbes’s theory feature the same law of nature, but the law’s resonance shifts in later texts with the introduction of a vocabulary freighted with ethical and religious connotations. Hobbes’s preference for this vocabulary militates against the conclusion that classical moderation exhausts Hobbesian modesty. Clearly, Hobbes appreciates modesty’s classical pedigree, and moderation is one component of modesty.³⁵ But Hobbes also exploits modesty’s Christian resonance.

If “equity” or “proportionality” exhausted the conduct that Hobbes is trying to capture and endorse in *Leviathan’s* tenth law of nature, he would have retained the *Elements’* equity/encroaching antithesis. That Hobbes does not retain this antithesis, but replaces it with the modesty/arrogance antithesis, suggests that the law’s observance involves something more than a practice of proportionality or moderation—namely, it involves a distinctive

and *Rhetoric*, 362, 377; and Kevin Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

³³F. Alfonso Rodriguez, *A Treatise of Modesty and Silence* (1632).

³⁴See *De Cive*, 50 and *Leviathan*, Ch. 15.

³⁵See *Elements*, 78; *De Cive*, 50; *Leviathan*, Ch. 13; and McNeilly, *Anatomy of Leviathan*, 140.

self-relation. Indeed, when Hobbes catalogues the laws of nature, he explicitly links the *practice* of equity to cultivation of an egalitarian *disposition*. “On this [ninth] law,” which demands the acknowledgment of equality, “dependeth another [the tenth],” which requires egalitarian transfer of rights—and those who violate the latter “do contrary to the precedent law, that commandeth the acknowledgement of naturall equalitie” (L, Ch. 15). In other words, acknowledgment of equality entails the practice of modesty—and, as Hobbes explains in *De Cive*, this acknowledgment springs from accurate self-estimation: “One man practices the equality of nature, and allows others everything which he allows himself; this is the mark of a modest man, one who has a true estimate of his own capacities [*quod modesti hominis est, & vires suas recte aestimantis*]” (DC 26). Here, Hobbes explicitly links modesty as a practice of equity and modesty as a virtue of self-estimation. Unlike their deluded peers, the modest correctly assess their capacities, and this “true estimate” finds expression in equitable distribution of rights.

The argument that Hobbes would exploit ethical connotations of “modesty” finds further support in the fact that Hobbes retains the alliance between “modesty” and “humility” familiar to Christian ethics. When Hobbes asserts that acknowledgment of equality entails the egalitarian transfer of rights, he asserts a relationship of entailment between “humility” and “modesty”—for Hobbes defines “humility” as acknowledgment of equality.³⁶ In *De Cive*, to demonstrate the identity of the natural and divine laws, Hobbes cites verses from Matthew, Proverbs, and Isaiah as scriptural support for “Law 8,³⁷ on acknowledging natural equality, i.e. on *humility* [*de humilitate*]” (DC 62).³⁸ While modesty excludes mortification and abasement—in Hobbes’s taxonomy, “modesty” is not synonymous with “dejection”³⁹—it is animated by a kind of humility, namely, consciousness of equality.

³⁶Hobbes’s definition of “humility” appears to shift from *Elements* to *De Cive*. In *Elements*, 51, humility signifies recognition of weakness (“The passion contrary to glory, proceeding from apprehension of our own infirmity, is called HUMILITY by those by whom it is approved; by the rest, DEJECTION and poorness; which conception may be well or ill grounded”), while in *De Cive*, humility signifies recognition of equality. Yet the association of humility with equality is present elsewhere in *Elements*, suggesting both that Hobbes’s definition remains constant, and that the definition links recognition of weakness to affirmation of equality. See *Elements*, 100–101: the humble are “contented with equality.”

³⁷Law eight in *De Cive* is law nine in *Leviathan*.

³⁸Hobbes does not define “humility” in *Leviathan*. When Hobbes enumerates the laws of nature, in Chapter 15, he defines refusal to affirm equality as “pride,” but he neglects to offer a term that signifies acknowledgment of equality. Humility’s absence could suggest that the disposition is incidental to Hobbes’s political projects in *Leviathan*. However, humility does appear in the catalogue of the laws of nature in Chapter 31.

³⁹See *Leviathan*, Ch. 6.

As a theorist of civic virtue, Hobbes retains traditional moral vocabulary only to recast it for his own purposes. Allusions to Christian ethics serve Hobbes's rhetorical and political purposes, because they address an audience which professes humility, but whose delusions of theological grandeur stoked the English civil war (e.g., contemporary Protestants).⁴⁰ Given that Protestant exhortations to humility failed to temper—and may have encouraged—seditious claims of conscience during the English civil war, Protestant humility leaves something to be desired as a political disposition. Critics often read Hobbes's indictment of pride as evidence of a debt "to an old Christian, even papal tradition."⁴¹ But Hobbesian modesty and humility are not identical to Protestant, let alone "papal," modesty and humility. Indeed, for political purposes, unreconstructed humility is as dangerous as pride. As a critic of vainglory, then, Hobbes's task is not complete once he has discredited the aristocratic cult of glory.⁴² Hobbes must also contend with political limitations of a prominent contemporary antidote to vainglory, namely, the modesty and humility celebrated by Protestant divines.

What are the political liabilities of Protestant humility? In the seventeenth century, English Protestants embellish the canonical critique of pride—articulated most forcefully in Augustine's *City of God*—with graphic catalogues of human impotence and depravity. Citing the biblical admonition that "pride is the start of every sin," Augustine interprets Adam and Eve's disobedience as a turn away from God (to whom humans should rightfully defer) and toward themselves.⁴³ Following Augustine, Protestants trace sin to pride—"There is scarce a sin to be thought on that is not a spawn in the bowels of Pride"⁴⁴—and they define pride as insubordination motivated by delusions of self-sufficiency. As Richard Baxter (1615–1691), a prominent Puritan theologian (and critic of Hobbes), explains in *A Christian Directory*:

Pride causeth men to set up their supposed *Worth* and *Goodness* above or against the Lord: So that they make themselves their principal End, and practice that which some of late presume to teach, that it is *not God* that can or ought to be *mans End*, but *himself alone*: As if we were made only for our selves, and not for our Creator; Pride makes men so considerable

⁴⁰See Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 25, 47, 51–52, 53. See also Robert P. Kraynak, "Hobbes's *Behemoth* and the Argument for Absolutism," *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 4 (1982): 837–47.

⁴¹Holmes, *Passions*, 96. See also Martinich, *Two Gods*, 74, 48–50; Oakeshott, *Hobbes*, 62, 63–64, 130, 161.

⁴²For Hobbes's critique of aristocratic culture, see Dietz, "Hobbes's Subject," 107; Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 50, 55, 113, 114; and Deborah Baumgold, *Hobbes's Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 122, 124.

⁴³Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1984), 571.

⁴⁴Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (1673), Chap. IV, Part V, sections 83, 86.

in their own esteem, that they live wholly to themselves, as if the world were to stand or fall with them.⁴⁵

To counter pride, Protestant divines prescribe self-mortification, instructing believers to confess worthlessness and dependence on God. "You should most strive, for such a [s]ight of your *sinfullness* and *nothingness*, as will teach you highly to esteem of *Christ*, and to *loath your selves*, and take your selves to be as vile and sinful as you are. . . . *This is the Humility* which you must labour for."⁴⁶ The egalitarian tendencies of Protestantism notwithstanding, seventeenth-century divines also invoke humility to buttress, and reconcile believers to, (purportedly natural) hierarchies.⁴⁷

More importantly, in the tradition that Augustine inaugurates, and seventeenth-century Protestants embellish, injunctions to humility serve to discredit—and discourage—human initiative. On Augustine's interpretation, Genesis exposes the inadequacy of human reason, will, and power, and, consequently, the folly of forsaking divine oversight for self-direction. In the seventeenth century, Richard Allestree, a Royalist divine, condenses Augustinian admonitions against human initiative into a pithy motto: God, "able to do all things, and we able to do nothing."⁴⁸ In this tradition, the humble submit to divine guidance. Yet in a striking twist, in seventeenth-century England, exhortations to humble deference license claims of conscience against the state that, from Hobbes's perspective, appear indistinguishable from brazen self-assertion.⁴⁹ Allestree's royalism notwithstanding, he comes in for sustained attack in *Behemoth*, for his conception of humility entails a distinction between active and passive obedience that seditious Presbyterians can invoke to justify rebellion.⁵⁰ Indeed, Puritans who share Allestree's convictions regarding human inadequacy, but make no profession of royalism, contend that humility requires resistance to commands that conflict with God's laws. In *A Christian Directory*, Baxter anticipates and refutes the objections of an imaginary critic who, voicing a Hobbesian suspicion, dismisses conscientious disobedience as the worst form of pride. Baxter counters that "it is no *Pride* to prefer God before *men*; and to fear damnation more than imprisonment or death"—for it would be absurd to insist that "humility required us to please and obey men at the price of the loss of our

⁴⁵Ibid., section 11.

⁴⁶Ibid., section 86.

⁴⁷See Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man* (London, 1664), 34 and Baxter, *Christian Directory*, Chap. IV, Part V, sections 3, 5, 87.

⁴⁸Allestree, *Whole Duty*, 32.

⁴⁹See Gross, "Virtues of Passivity in the English Civil War," in *Secret History of Emotion*, chap. 3.

⁵⁰See Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 47–53 and Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 85.

salvation.⁵¹ Baxter instructs believers to exercise discretion, pleading “conscience and the commands of the God of Heaven” when confronted with laws that run counter to God’s commands.⁵²

The humility that Augustine bequeaths to seventeenth-century Protestants cannot support the modes of obligation that Hobbes would justify. Protestant humility cannot ground a Hobbesian theory of obligation, because, with its insistence on human inadequacy, it denies the capacity to create worthwhile institutions without divine guidance—the very capacity to which Hobbes appeals. *Leviathan* imagines the commonwealth as an artifice of human design. Hobbes trusts that the story he tells about the commonwealth’s genesis through contract will offer a more powerful rationale for obligation than would an argument from nature. Yet Protestant encomiums to humility, which showcase human “vilenesse, iniquities, transgressions, and sinnes,” are liable to mute the appeal from artifice, because they deny that humans can create worthwhile institutions without divine guidance.⁵³ Thus, Hobbes resists, and revises, the claim that pride is irremediable without God’s grace, because this claim inhibits modes of collective agency on which the state is founded, and from which obligation derives. Moreover, unreconstructed humility erodes the bonds of obligation because, as Allestree and Baxter demonstrate, it justifies passive obedience, and even conscientious disobedience, when the sovereign’s commands (appear to) conflict with God’s. As Hobbes defines it, modesty is not a mark of distinction that elevates self-appointed saints above the political world—rather, it is a disposition that enables ordinary mortals to build and sustain a political world.

To support *Leviathan’s* argument for obligation, then, Hobbes crafts an ethos of modesty which provides an alternative to Protestant humility and the aristocratic cult of glory—an ethos in which consciousness of individual vulnerability elicits recognition of collective power. Although Hobbes asserts individual weakness, he rejects theological assertions of human “insufficiency and impotencie to good.”⁵⁴ Against Augustinian traditions, Hobbes would encourage humans to act in concert without divine oversight.

Moreover, I say that Hobbes would *foster* modesty because, on his account, modesty runs counter to our natural tendencies. Hobbes allows that, in the state of nature, some “would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds”—some are naturally modest (L, Ch. 13). Yet, to Hobbes’s chagrin, the naturally modest are rare: “For the Lawes of Nature (as *Justice, Equity, Modesty, Mercy*, and (in summe) *doing to others, as wee would be done to,*) . . . are contrary to our naturall Passions, that carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge, and the like” (L, Ch. 17). Having reconstructed modesty and

⁵¹Baxter, *Christian Directory*, Chap. IV, Part V, section 7.

⁵²*Ibid.*, section 20.

⁵³Robert Bolton, *Helpes to Humiliation* (1630), 11–12.

⁵⁴Baxter, *Christian Directory*, Chap. IV, Part V, section 35.

humility, how will Hobbes cultivate “qualities that dispose men to peace, and to obedience” (L, Ch. 26)? Hobbes indicates potential sources of modesty when he relates the story of the commonwealth by institution—which is, implicitly, a story about chastening pride. (Hobbes tells more than one story about the commonwealth’s genesis—a commonwealth can also arise by acquisition—but the stories have roughly the same moral when it comes to questions of modesty.⁵⁵) As Hobbes’s narrative begins, pride plagues the state of nature, slights proliferate, and individuals squander their power in irrational contests of honor. In these contests, combatants experience a passion, fear of violent death, which pierces delusions of grandeur, sparks rational assessment, and moves men to associate.⁵⁶ In this narrative, political agency derives from consciousness of individual frailty. Instead of sulking, individuals attuned to their limitations can ameliorate their predicament through collective exercise of power. Indeed, chastened mortals can muster resources to create a mortal God—without the immortal God’s direction.

⁵⁵To be clear, I focus on the stories Hobbes tells about the commonwealth’s genesis—the rhetorical appeals Hobbes makes to get readers to think differently about obligation. I do not explore the question of how sovereign power is actually acquired in a given commonwealth. Admittedly, Hobbes’s account of the commonwealth by acquisition could suggest that Hobbes makes two distinct appeals to readers, one of which undermines the argument that Hobbes values modesty. The individual who acquires sovereignty through violent conquest is presumably immodest—yet Hobbes justifies sovereignty by acquisition. But Hobbes’s allowance for a commonwealth by acquisition does not constitute an endorsement of immodesty. While Hobbes retroactively justifies usurpation if the conquered consent to the conqueror’s dominion, in the reply to the fool, Hobbes expressly condemns usurpation as an irrational, self-contradictory violation of the laws of nature (L, Ch. 15). Hobbes’s commitment to stability yields competing imperatives. On the one hand, Hobbes would discredit, and discourage, glory-seeking rebellion. On the other hand, Hobbes concedes the legitimacy of a commonwealth by acquisition to remove any pretext for disobedience on the part of subjects (many of whom live in states founded upon violent conquest). But given Hobbes’s reply to the fool, it is a stretch to say that he admires glory-seeking rebellion. Indeed, Hobbes goes out of his way to remind readers that the legitimacy of a sovereign by acquisition derives not from his feat of conquest, but from the fact that individuals “do authorize all the actions of that Man, or Assembly, that hath their lives and liberty in his power” (L, Ch. 20). Once authorized, the sovereign by acquisition has the same rights, and the same responsibilities, as the sovereign by institution—both are “obliged by the Law of Nature,” which enjoins modesty (L, Ch. 30). Similarly, as the language of authorization suggests, subjects of a sovereign by acquisition view themselves as owners and authors of the sovereign’s actions—they adopt the same stance toward sovereign power as subjects in a commonwealth by institution, and cultivate the same political virtues.

⁵⁶*Leviathan*, Ch. 13 identifies “Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living” as another passion “that encline[s] men to Peace.” I focus on the peace-inclining potential of “Feare of Death” because, as I explain below, Hobbes betrays ambivalence regarding “commodious living.”

Hobbes's great feat in *Leviathan* is to whip up formidable power from meager ingredients. While Protestant divines dismiss the claim that humans can perform worthwhile deeds without divine guidance as a form of pride, Hobbes worries that pride inhibits political agency. Thus, Hobbes would chasten human pretension in order to enhance human power.

The Law of Honor

Readers persuaded of Hobbes's investment in modesty may wonder whether Hobbes sees the need for an ongoing project to cultivate modesty. Granted, Hobbes appeals to modesty to tell a story about the sources of obligation—but he “needs to appeal to it just *once*, for the purpose of *founding* a state so constituted that the problems created by passionate men are solved once and for all.”⁵⁷ On this interpretation, Hobbes invokes modesty to explain the commonwealth's generation—individuals who own their limitations perceive the need for a state, and individuals who affirm equality do what it takes to create a state (i.e., equitable transfer of rights). However, Hobbes can dispense with modesty when accounting for the state's stability. If the sovereign is sufficiently powerful and institutional constraints well engineered, political stability can be achieved even if subjects nurture pride—for the specter of punishment will deter public bids for glory.

To determine whether a campaign to foster modesty is indispensable, we must examine the “law of honor,” a protocol that Hobbes devises to regulate social practices of esteem. Although the law of honor has received scant attention in the critical literature,⁵⁸ it epitomizes the approach to pride that scholars impute to Hobbes. Laws of honor neither correct, nor countervail, vanity. Rather, they appeal to vanity, in hopes that it can be channeled into more productive avenues. Clearly, this approach, which uses reward and punishment to redirect the passions onto salutary “objects,” is a centerpiece of Hobbes's theoretical repertoire (L, Introduction). But the law of honor is not Hobbes's last word on wrestling with the challenges of pride. Hobbes never hails the law of honor as a definitive “solution” to the problem of pride. By Hobbes's admission, laws of honor may frustrate the end for which they were established—namely, peace—for they are liable to exacerbate, rather than redirect, the passion of vainglory.

Given Hobbes's ultimate ambivalence about laws of honor, why does he entertain the possibility that they could temper the ravages of pride? In *Leviathan*, Hobbes numbers conferral of honorary titles (e.g., Duke, Earl, Baron) among the “incommunicable and inseparable” prerogatives of

⁵⁷ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 31.

⁵⁸ The exceptions are Frost, *Lessons*, 161–65, and Keith Thomas, “Social Origins,” 231.

sovereignty—prerogatives the sovereign cannot cede without abdicating sovereignty (L, Ch. 20). Hobbes endorses honorary titles because he wagers that strict canons of protocol will mute the controversies that would arise were private evaluations to proliferate.

Considering what values men are naturally apt to set upon themselves; what respect they look for from others; and how little they value other men; from whence continually arise amongst them, Emulation, Quarrels, Factions, and at last Warre, to the destroying of one another, and diminution of their strength against a Common Enemy; It is necessary that there be Laws of Honour, and a publique rate of the worth of such men as have deserved, or are able to deserve well of the Commonwealth; and that there be force in the hands of some or other, to put those Lawes in execution. (L, Ch. 18)

In the state of nature, men assert their value only to be snubbed by peers who subscribe to alternative metrics. In the commonwealth, however, the sovereign ordains the subject's value, putting a stop to the proliferation of clashing standards. Of course, one might wonder why Hobbes endorses honors of any kind. Abolishing honors would seem more consistent with Hobbes's injunction to affirm equality. Hobbes's egalitarianism notwithstanding, he is willing to experiment with political dignities because he appreciates the stubbornness of vanity. Convinced that few can abide a regime of stark equality, Hobbes wagers that the sovereign's law of honor is a safe way to sate persistent cravings for glory.

The law of honor is safe, in Hobbes's initial estimation, because titles are conventional—they neither recognize, nor create, intrinsic differences between subjects. As Hobbes explains, "A Sovereigne doth Honour a Subject, with whatsoever Title, or Office, or Employment, or Action, that he himselfe will have taken for a signe of his will to Honour him" (L, Ch. 10). Reflecting the sovereign's "will to Honour," rather than the honoree's intrinsic merits, titles engage subjects' desire for reputation, even while they direct attention away from the self's natural properties, toward the sovereign's (artificial) standards. Titles deprive subjects of occasion to boast of inherent superiority—or even of prerogative. When Hobbes relates the history of heraldry, he locates the political efficacy of titles in their lack of significant prerogatives. Following John Selden, Hobbes traces a history of heraldic deflation, in which titles were evacuated of their original prerogatives. "By occasion of trouble, and for reasons of good and peaceable government," titles which formerly conferred "Office, and Command," were stripped of their perquisites and "turned into meer Titles; serving for the most part, to distinguish the precedence, place, and order of subjects in the Commonwealth" (L, Ch. 10). "Meer Titles" promote "good and peaceable government," for they lower the stakes, minimizing controversy and invidious comparisons.

The law of honor could seem to exemplify strategies of political pacification that scholars impute to Hobbes: “non-regenerative” politics,⁵⁹ and a public/private split.⁶⁰ On this view, Hobbes arranges society so as to minimize destructive consequences of vainglory, but he concedes that vainglory is intractable. Instead of disciplining the passions, Hobbes reserves the public sphere for the sovereign’s evaluations, and he relegates personal evaluations (some of which may be vainglorious) to the private sphere. In other words, honorary titles are masks that display “the publique worth of a man,” but subjects are free to glory privately (L, Ch. 10).⁶¹ Upon closer examination, this interpretation appears questionable. As Hobbes acknowledges, honorary titles not only conceal passion behind an impenetrable wall of protocol; they also circulate on the public stage. Once in circulation, their meaning is constituted through “the opinion of the beholders” as much as through sovereign fiat (L, Ch. 31).⁶² Modest subjects read titles as a political expression of natural equality.⁶³ However, subjects who harbor private delusions of grandeur are liable to misinterpret titles as tokens of innate distinction, and these misinterpretations have devastating, and public, consequences.

When Hobbes catalogues the causes of crime, he concedes that vainglory is liable to surface in public, even where laws of honor are in place. By Hobbes’s admission, vainglory is a prime cause of criminality within the commonwealth. Because the vainglorious overestimate their savvy (“a false presumption of their own Wisedome”) and underestimate the vigilance of the police, they are prone to criminal activity (L, Ch. 27). Hobbes complains:

Of the Passions that most frequently are causes of Crime, one, is Vain-glory, or a foolish over-rating of their own worth; as if difference of worth, were an effect of their wit, or riches, or bloud, or some other naturall quality, not depending on the Will of those that have the Sovereign Authority. From whence proceedeth a Presumption that the punishments ordained by the Lawes, and extended generally to all Subjects, ought not to be inflicted on them, with the same rigour they are inflicted on poore, obscure, and simple men, comprehended under the name of the Vulgar. (L, Ch. 27)

Here, Hobbes concedes that distinctions designed to promote peace can exacerbate vainglory, prompting criminal malfeasance. Individuals who crave approbation are liable to mistake artificial inequality (“difference of

⁵⁹Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 267, 273.

⁶⁰See Richard Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality, and Chastened Politics* (Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993).

⁶¹This interpretation finds support in *De Cive*, 148.

⁶²See also *Leviathan*, Ch. 31: “a signe is not a signe to him that giveth it, but to him to whom it is made; that is, to the spectator.” See also Martel, *Subverting the Leviathan*, 34, 38, 55.

⁶³See *Leviathan*, Ch. 18.

worth") for evidence of inherent superiority ("an effect of their wit, or riches, or bloud, or some other naturall quality"). In this case, the vanity that titles were designed to channel leads subjects to misinterpret their significance, and place themselves above the law.

Although titles are arbitrary, signifying nothing but the sovereign's will to honor, in practice, titles work because they flatter pretensions to distinction. If titles are to sate subjects' lust for glory, they cannot be perceived as empty. But when the vain misread titles as tokens of innate distinction, they are liable to break the law. Moreover, if titles are to be considered honorable, they must also be rare. But, by Hobbes's admission, the rarity of titles creates another set of problems, for many who crave recognition will "have to be passed over; for they are not all what they believe themselves to be, and even if they were, there are too many of them to be all employed in public office"—and the sense of "personal insult" leads the losers to "passionately expect opportunities for revolution" (DC 138). If subjects must already be modest to decipher the law of honor, the law has limited power to contain vanity. Enforcing protocols of precedence mutes ostentation, but it does not touch the more fundamental problem of which vanity is a symptom—the problem of delusional overestimation.

To address the problem of self-delusion, Hobbes will have to discipline vainglory and foster the contrary virtues of modesty and humility. Hobbes's more categorical pronouncements regarding glory have led scholars to conclude that vainglory is universal, uniform, and immutable.⁶⁴ However, as my analysis reveals, all are not equally susceptible to vanity—the state of nature contains "a few men, more modest [*modestiores*] than everybody else" (DC 53). Moreover, vainglory is not uniform. People exhibit vainglory in different ways, and in different measures, and variation derives not only from individuals' diverse constitutions, but also from discrepancies in exposure to social practices that nurture vanity (e.g., flattery, Presbyterian theology, the literary genre of romance). Because vainglory is not just a brute fact of nature, but assumes varying forms given social circumstances, it is susceptible to more radical forms of therapy than channeling or redirection. By Hobbes's admission, the vainglory to which youth are prone "is corrected often times by Age, and Employment" (L, Ch. 6). If vanity thrives on misguided educational practices, then vanity is susceptible to educational "correction"—which is not synonymous with eradication, although it promises a more thoroughgoing intervention than laws of honor.

Further, "cultural transformation" through education is a necessary supplement to coercion because, by Hobbes's admission, laws do not reliably produce the affective and intellectual dispositions on which they depend.⁶⁵ "The grounds of these [the sovereign's] Rights, have the rather need to be

⁶⁴See *De Cive*, 23.

⁶⁵Johnston, *Rhetoric*, 128–33.

diligently, and truly taught; because they cannot be maintained by any Civill Law, or terrour of legal punishment" (L, Ch. 30). Hobbes specifies virtues requisite for political subjection when he enumerates "*those things that Weaken, or tend to the DISSOLUTION of a Common-wealth*": The commonwealth's vulnerability to "intestine disorder" derives from men's "want, both of the art of making fit Lawes, to square their actions by, and also of humility, and patience, to suffer the rude and combersome points of their present greatnesse to be taken off" (L, Ch. 29). By Hobbes's admission, both deterrence ("fit Lawes") and civic virtue ("humility") are required to sustain the commonwealth.

However, having cast aside Christian humility and attendant disciplines of self-mortification, how will Hobbes cultivate acknowledgment, and practice, of equality? In the story that Hobbes tells about the state of nature, a very particular kind of fear, the fear of unanticipated violent death, chastens the proud.⁶⁶ Although the sovereign has myriad legal and political tools at his disposal, he cannot readily inspire the fear of *unanticipated* violent death. Nor would it be in his interest to do so—for the commonwealth's legitimacy derives from the regularity it introduces into human affairs. Entering the commonwealth, individuals trade fear of violent death for fear of punishment. On Hobbes's view, this trade represents a good bargain because punishment follows a predictable logic, and can therefore be avoided by prudent subjects.⁶⁷

Sometimes a man desires to know the event of an action; and then he thinketh of some like action past, and the events thereof one after another; supposing like events will follow like actions. As he that foresees what wil become of a Criminal, re-cons what he has seen follow on the like Crime before; having this order of thoughts, The Crime, the Officer, the Prison, the Judge, and the Gallowes. (L, Ch. 3)

But man's natural condition is so harrowing, and so humbling, because it is utterly unpredictable. If modesty results from visceral experience of existential insecurity, then there are no easy *political* antidotes to vanity.

This limit to sovereign power reveals a tension within Hobbes's theory of obligation. For Hobbes, "security of a mans person, in his life," is "the motive, and end for which this renouncing, and transferring of Right is introduced" (L, Ch. 14). In the state of nature, modesty results from visceral experience of existential insecurity. But in a commonwealth that supports a transparent, equitable legal system, subjects have no cause to fear unanticipated violent death. With the advent of bodily security, consciousness of mortality (and, by extension, affirmation of equality) is liable to dwindle. In the commonwealth, subjects gain opportunities to pursue the

⁶⁶Here, I follow Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 19.

⁶⁷See Keally McBride, "State of Insecurity: The Trial of Job and Secular Political Order," *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 1 (2008): 11–20.

complacency-inducing satisfactions of “commodious living”—and, on Hobbes’s diagnosis, sated subjects are smug, ostentatious, and arrogant (L, Ch. 13). Given Hobbes’s qualms about contentment, readers should hesitate before branding him a bourgeois apologist.⁶⁸ Hobbes often complains that security and satiety breed dispositions inimical to civic virtue: “Man is then most troublesome, when he is most at ease: for then it is that he loves to shew his Wisdome, and controule the Actions of them that governe the Common-wealth” (L, Ch. 17).⁶⁹ The more secure the commonwealth, the more vulnerable it is to corrosion by pride. Thus, Hobbes’s ostensible “solution” is part of the problem. Security is the end of political association, but security can breed smugness, complacency, and “ignorance.”⁷⁰

Dust and Ashes

Acknowledging that security is no panacea leads us to adopt a revised account of Hobbes’s project in *Leviathan*. The commonwealth aims not, as some have suggested, to free subjects from feelings of insecurity and fear,⁷¹ but rather to achieve the right balance between bodily security and consciousness of vulnerability (both equal vulnerability as individuals, and absolute vulnerability as humans). Although Hobbes promises subjects “perpetuall, and not temporary security,” he concedes liabilities of founding a state on a campaign to eliminate feelings of vulnerability (L, Ch. 19). Indeed, security is liable to be “temporary” if subjects forget the state’s ultimate justification—that is, if they forget that they are mere mortals—because smug subjects are unwilling to do the work required to sustain the commonwealth. Consequently, Hobbes must devise strategies for recalling subjects to their limitations without exposing them to violent death (and the state to dissolution). Hobbes’s challenge is to envision (and, ultimately, to create) a culture hospitable to modesty, a culture in which subjects can recognize limits to their power as individuals, even while they affirm both the necessity and the possibility of exercising power collectively to sustain political community.

Given the seductiveness of aristocratic glory and Protestant humility, this is a formidable challenge. However, Hobbes is determined to identify resources for cultivating modesty—sources that expose individual vulnerability

⁶⁸See C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), chap. 2; Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 118, 121; and Michael Bray, “Macpherson Restored? Hobbes and the Question of Social Origins,” *History of Political Thought* 28, no. 1 (2007): 56–90.

⁶⁹See also *Leviathan*, Chs. 29, 30, 45; *De Cive*, 138; *De Homine*, 66; and *Hobbes’s Thucydides*, ed. Richard Schlatter (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1975), 13.

⁷⁰For a warning that security can lull subjects into forgetting the sources of legislative authority, see *Leviathan*, Ch. 26.

⁷¹See Tuck, “Utopianism,” 138.

without denying human powers of collective agency. Presumably, reading *Leviathan*, a text that “recalls man to his littleness, his imperfection, his mortality, while at the same time recognizing his importance to himself,” could serve this purpose.⁷² But Hobbes acknowledges that subjects consumed by the comforts and demands of civilized life are easily “diverted from the deep meditation, which the learning of truth, not only in the matter of Naturall Justice, but also of all other Sciences necessarily requireth” (L, Ch. 30). If security breeds subjects too complacent to heed philosophical arguments for equality, it behooves Hobbes to identify alternative chastening discourses. Given the composition of Hobbes’s audience, and given Hobbes’s “top-down” theory of education, he relies heavily on theological discourses, which the sovereign can disseminate to “Divines in the Pulpit” who shape public opinion (L, Ch. 30).⁷³

Hobbes finds a biblical alternative to Augustinian self-mortification in the Book of Job, a canonical text that held sway with contemporary Protestants. When Hobbes identifies the source of *Leviathan*’s titular metaphor, he intimates that Job is the authoritative biblical treatment of the political challenges posed by pride:

Hitherto I have set forth the nature of Man, (whose Pride and other Passions have compelled him to submit himselfe to Government,) together with the great power of his Governour, whom I compared to *Leviathan*, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of Job; where God having set forth the great power of *Leviathan*, called him King of the Proud. *There is nothing*, saith he, *on earth to be compared with him. He is made so as not to be afraid. Hee seeth every high thing below him; and is King of all the children of pride.* (L, Ch. 28)

Scholars usually read this allusion as a boast vaunting the sovereign’s solution to the problem of pride.⁷⁴ On this reading, Job confirms Hobbes’s “non-regenerative” approach to politics. The sovereign need not cultivate modesty, because if he is sufficiently powerful, he will cow proud subjects. But this interpretation misses the passage’s equivocal tone—for acknowledgment of the commonwealth’s fragility tempers Hobbes’s celebration of sovereignty. His “great power” notwithstanding, the king “is mortall, and subject to decay,” and Hobbes enumerates threats to his viability in the chapter to which this passage provides a transition, “*Of those things that Weaken, or tend to the DISSOLUTION of a Common-wealth*” (L, Chs. 28, 29). As Hobbes understands, dissolution is likely if the sovereign relies solely on deterrent power. Given the allusion’s context and force, we should hesitate before

⁷²Oakeshott, *Hobbes*, 163.

⁷³See also *Behemoth*, 39–40, 59, 144, 159–60.

⁷⁴See Sheldon Wolin, *Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1970), 23–24; and Samuel Mintz, “Leviathan as Metaphor,” *Hobbes Studies* 2 (1989): 3.

concluding that Hobbes reads Job as an endorsement of coercive solutions to the problem of pride. Rather, Job is the authoritative biblical text on pride because it offers a chastening dramatization of the reciprocal relationship between divine omnipotence and human finitude.

As W. H. Greenleaf has argued, Hobbes's affinity for Job reflects his preference for Ockhamist over Augustinian traditions of theology.⁷⁵ While Augustinians insist that divine omnipotence entails human impotence, Ockhamists contend that God is so powerful, and so unfathomable, that humans are left no choice but to manage their own affairs, because God is unavailable for consultation. (As Hobbes develops this line of argument, submitting political life to divine direction betrays sinful pride, because it presumes that humans can know God.⁷⁶) In *Leviathan*, Hobbes interprets Job within a broadly "Ockhamist" frame, as a testament to God's unfathomable power. Theological merits aside, Job's unfathomable God is useful for political purposes. An unfathomable God leaves room for human agency, but the recognition that God is unfathomable exposes limits to human power—limits that underscore the need for modesty.

On Hobbes's interpretation, Job affirms God's sovereignty by nature and offers a graphic exposé of what life is like for subjects of an omnipotent God. Hobbes ascribes two forms of sovereignty to God. God reigns over all who "acknowledge his Providence, by the naturall Dictates of Right Reason,"⁷⁷ but God also reigns over "one peculiar Nation (the Jewes)" through positive laws whose legitimacy derives from consent (L, Ch. 31). While God's sovereignty over the Jews has contractual underpinnings, God's sovereignty by nature derives from God's "Power Irresistible"—God has the "Right to All things," including the right to "reigne over all the rest," because God alone has the power to rule over all (L, Ch. 31). As Hobbes explains, "But if God has the right to reign on the basis of his omnipotence, it is evident that men incur the *obligation* to obey him because of their weakness" (DC 174). Hobbes cites Job to illustrate God's prerogatives as sovereign by nature. Job teaches that even the virtuous can suffer at God's hands, because God's "Right of Afflicting, is not always derived from mens Sinne, but from Gods Power" (L, Ch. 31). Thus, when Job demands an

⁷⁵W. H. Greenleaf, "A Note on Hobbes and the Book of Job," *Anales de la Catedra Francisco Suarez* 14 (1974): 9–34. See also Frank M. Coleman, "Thomas Hobbes and the Hebraic Bible," *History of Political Thought* 25, no. 4 (2004): 642–69; Gillespie, *Theological Origins*, 248; and Elshtain, *Sovereignty*, 39–40.

⁷⁶See Gordon Hull, "'Against this Empusa': Hobbes's *Leviathan* and the Book of Job," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2002): 3–29.

⁷⁷Hobbes reserves subjection in God's kingdom by nature for theists. Strictly speaking, atheists are God's enemies, rather than God's subjects, although atheists are still subject to God's power (as are inanimate objects). See *Leviathan*, Ch. 31: "Whether men will or not, they must be subject alwayes to the Divine Power. By denying the Existence, or Providence of God, men may shake off their Ease, but not their Yoke."

explanation for his ordeal, God confirms Job's innocence, but nevertheless justifies Job's "Affliction by arguments drawn from his Power" (L, Ch. 31). Job's ordeal demonstrates that insecurity is the fate of subjects in God's kingdom by nature, because "the right to do anything whatsoever is an essential and direct attribute of omnipotence" (DC 31). Prosperity, piety, and the amenities of civilized life do not render Job invulnerable. At the same time, Job's recognition that he is subject to the whims of an omnipotent God does not prove debilitating. In the book's epilogue, Job embraces worldly commerce with renewed vigor. However, unlike the bourgeois, of whom Hobbes is justly suspicious, Job does not grow smug with renewed prosperity.

Of course, Job is not the only subject in God's kingdom by nature. Although Job is exceptionally virtuous, and his ordeal exceptionally harrowing, as subjects of an omnipotent God, all humans are vulnerable to similar tribulations. Thus, Hobbes cites Job not to elicit pity for an unlucky man, but rather to remind readers that, as limited beings, their lot is as precarious as Job's.

How does asserting human vulnerability at the hands of an omnipotent God advance Hobbes's project of cultivating modesty? Job teaches that political subjection does not exempt individuals from natural subjection to God. Indeed, individuals inhabit two "kingdoms" simultaneously (the natural and the political), but in this case, dual subjection does not threaten divided loyalties or conflicting jurisdictions. God's sovereignty by nature does not undermine human sovereignty because the only laws that bind God's natural subjects are the laws of nature—laws that indicate both the commonwealth's desirability and the means of its achievement. Thus, reminding political subjects that they are subject to God is another way of stressing their obligation to uphold the laws of nature (including the tenth law, modesty). If "fear, or the awareness of one's own weakness (in the face of divine power)" binds individuals to the laws of nature, then the omnipotent God of Job provides a key supplement to sovereign power, working on the theological register to cultivate civic virtue (DC 175).

As an exegete of Job, Hobbes assigns distinct, but complementary, portfolios to the mortal and immortal Gods. The mortal God deploys the threat of punishment to achieve security and predictability. Unpredictable by definition, the immortal God deploys the "argument from power" to expose limits to human powers of mastery. Although individuals may find security in political subjection, they are also subject to a sovereign not of their own creation. Hobbes hopes the realization that humans are but "dust and ashes" will elicit ongoing confirmation of the need to erect and sustain a commonwealth, but it will also ensure that subjects exercise their power with due modesty—without succumbing to the delusion that, because they can create a state, they are like God: invulnerable and no longer in need of a state.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Job 42:6. For a contrary view, which sees Hobbes as appealing to human pride and exploiting the temptation to Prometheanism, see Norman Jacobson, *Pride and Solace*:

To put it another way, Job counters two forms of forgetting that menace established commonwealths: forgetting that humans are equal and forgetting that humans are human. Job attacks the propensity for delusional overestimation that Hobbes diagnoses as the root of vainglory. In a stable commonwealth that reduces the threat of violent death, subjects are liable to forget that they are equally mortal. As an exegete of Job, Hobbes mobilizes theological convictions and religious affect to secure compliance with the laws of nature—laws that require affirmation and practice of equality. Through a confrontation with divine power, Job achieves the “true knowledge” of himself that eludes the vain. Properly interpreted, the Book of Job has the potential to inspire a similar reckoning among subjects. But Job’s assertion of divine sovereignty also counters the tendency to forget the qualitative difference between human and divine creativity. The God of Job posts absolute limits to human power. Even when humans acknowledge equality, and act in concert to reduce the likelihood of violent death, they remain subject to God’s unfathomable power.

One might worry that exposing humanity’s ineluctable vulnerability could breed disaffection. After all, why would subjects invest in a commonwealth that cannot insulate them from divine violence?⁷⁹ But acknowledging God’s sovereignty by nature is a potential prophylactic against disaffection, for it checks the tendency to mistake the mortal God for the immortal God. On my reading, subjects who acknowledge God’s sovereignty by nature are likely to have more realistic expectations regarding the degree of security that a state can provide and the “inconveniences” that are the price of security. The modest acknowledge that, as authors of sovereignty, humans can mitigate their predicament, but they cannot master it, for they remain subject to forces beyond human control. Thus, subjects who understand that individual vulnerability necessitates the state’s creation, but that, as a human artifice, the state cannot extinguish human vulnerability (for “nothing can be immortal, which mortals make”), are better poised to accept the inevitable disappointments of political life (L, Ch. 29).⁸⁰ In sum, Job affords theological resources for cultivating modesty because it dramatizes individual weakness without ceding the political realm to divine oversight.

The Functions and Limits of Political Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 53; George Shulman, “Hobbes, Puritans, and Promethean Politics,” *Political Theory* 16, no. 3 (1988): 426–43; Shulman, “Metaphor and Modernization in the Political Thought of Thomas Hobbes,” *Political Theory* 17, no. 3 (1989): 392–416.

⁷⁹See Peter J. Ahrens Dorf, “The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Nature and the Problem of Anarchy,” *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 3 (2000), 579–93.

⁸⁰On the inevitability of imperfection and disappointment, see Oakeshott, *Hobbes*, 162; and Victoria Silver, “A Matter of Interpretation,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 160–71.

Conclusion

I have argued that once we appreciate Hobbes's investment in modesty as a virtue for political subjects, we can see that Hobbes's claims for the power of human artifice and for the possibilities of human mastery are more modest than scholars have argued. One could object that I inflate modesty's theoretical significance, drawing radical conclusions about the complexion of Hobbes's project from passages peripheral to *Leviathan's* central concerns. Moreover, those who accept my characterization of Hobbes's project may judge Hobbes unduly sanguine about its prospects for success with Protestant readers, many of whom would find invocations of a transcendent God unpersuasive, coming from a notorious materialist like Hobbes. To be sure, modesty is not *the* key to deciphering *Leviathan*—and modesty gains significance as part of a constellation of terms (e.g., *pride, glory, vainglory, arrogance, humility*) that figure in *Leviathan's* arguments, and can only be understood relative to one another. However, once we appreciate their interrelations, we are poised to grasp one of *Leviathan's* central insights: education is a necessary supplement to coercion, because laws do not reliably produce the dispositions on which they depend. Further, the question of the plausibility of Hobbes's interpretation of Job for staunch Protestants is a question that haunts the entire second half of *Leviathan*. As a matter of fact, clerics greeted *Leviathan* with suspicion, horror, and outrage, Hobbes's theistic rhetoric notwithstanding.⁸¹ But Hobbes is not as deluded about his audience as *Leviathan's* reception history might suggest. Precisely because Hobbes appreciates the threat posed by an independent, university-educated clergy, he addresses *Leviathan* not to divines, but to the sovereign—who has the right “to be Judge of what Opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what concurring to Peace; and consequently, on what occasions, how farre, and what, men are to be trusted withall, in speaking to Multitudes of people” (L, Ch. 18). Hobbes offers his interpretation of Job in the guise of a public theology that the sovereign can endorse—and that the sovereign may endorse, if he or she (or they) grasps its political merits. In short, I have sought neither to make modesty *the* key to *Leviathan*, nor to assert that, as an exegete of Job, Hobbes has devised a foolproof solution to the problem of pride, guaranteed to persuade all clerics. (After all, on my reading, Hobbes never promises foolproof solutions—indeed, he reminds readers that disappointment and inconvenience are inevitable.) Rather, I have sought to draw out the logical conclusions of Hobbes's arguments for modesty, toward the end of rethinking his political project and, ultimately, his place within narratives of secularization.

⁸¹See Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

Historians often credit seventeenth-century political theorists with envisioning and dignifying new forms of sovereign agency. On one influential historiographical account, in the seventeenth century, humans claimed properties once reserved for the nominalist God, such as power, will, and mastery. Framed in these terms, the story about the emergence of sovereign states and sovereign selves is a story about secularization—specifically, a story that equates secularization with self-deification.⁸² As a purported architect of both political sovereignty and the voluntarist self, Hobbes figures prominently in these accounts.

My argument suggests that, while Hobbes's project advances secularization, it is not one of self-deification. Indeed, my reading of Hobbes demonstrates the need for, and the possibility of, an alternative secularization narrative. In the seventeenth century, theorists advance secularization not only by asserting human power, but also by coming to terms with its limits. Just as fear does not *replace* humility in *Leviathan*, neither does the mortal God *replace* the immortal God.⁸³ Hobbes invites humans to act in concert without divine guidance. But the invitation to forsake divine oversight is not an invitation to self-deification. Throughout *Leviathan*, Hobbes insists that political agency is a human prerogative. However, because delusions of grandeur sap human power, humans can only exercise this prerogative when they abjure pretensions to mastery.

⁸²See Elshtain, *Sovereignty*, 160, 170, 204. For debates about the secularization narrative, see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983); Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Gillespie, *Theological Origins*.

⁸³Here I differ from Strauss, *Philosophy of Hobbes*, 28.