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ARTICLES

The Birth of the Leviathan. Heterodoxy and Daemonology in Western Political Thought

Pier Giuseppe Monateri

Summary:

1. Portraying the Leviathan: the Heterodox Sea-Monster

In a recent publication, I tried to demonstrate the *demonological origin* of modernity linking the heterodoxy of magic with the rise of the modern concept of the 'political'.[1] The strange interconnection between sovereignty, witchcraft, and the political appeared to me as the hidden paradigm buried at the heart of our own political tradition. My theory was that the works of Jean Bodin and King James I, as well as the English legislation on magic enacted during the 17th century CE, became the subtle points of passage towards the demonological, and as such exotic and heterodox, origin of modern Western conceptions. In that article, I analyzed also to what extent King James was concerned about witchcraft, and at the same time how he developed a mystic of the royal prerogatives to the point of having jurisdiction even upon magic. According to this theory, the politicization of magic lies then at the threshold of modernity, producing a sovereign who can command and judge even the devils.

It is precisely starting from these assumptions that we may now underline the role played by heterodoxy in the unfolding of modern sovereignty in strict association with the mysteries pertaining to the indefinite and unfathomable royal prerogatives.

This occult philosophy of sovereignty and its link to the mystic of the sovereign as a fragmented image of the Emperor as *Dominus Mundi* – the Lord of this World – surfaces explicitly in several authors' works, but especially in Hobbes. Indeed, it is in his famous frontispiece that we find the most dramatic representation of the modern temporal and spiritual supreme

[1] See Pier Giuseppe Monateri, "Political Sublime: Heterodoxy and Jurisdiction at the Origin of Modernity", in Daniela Carpi and Marett Leiboff, *Fables of the Law. Fairy Tales in a Legal Context* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 95–110.

authority, as well as the most thrilling demonic reversal of the old theological complex lying behind the legitimacy of the world ruler.

Hobbes's frontispiece represents what is clearly the portrait of a demon with the face of a king and a body composed of his subjects to form a unique "corporate entity" governing, from atop a mountain, a city and its surrounding space. As portrayed in Image 1 and Image 2, the Leviathan here is represented as a monster adorned with all the symbols of spiritual and temporal powers.

Our main question in this article is then: how could the King of England accept as a present a book with a frontispiece portraying him as a devil?[2] What kind of heterodoxy could have been transforming the old liturgy of the presence of a power on earth parallel to that of God, into the blatant exhibition of a demonic icon? How could the devil become the Savior? And last, but not least, why do we find a sea serpent atop a mountain?

[2] Remember that the earlier edition of the Leviathan was prepared by Hobbes for Charles II, having the faces in the Leviathan's body turned toward the royal reader. See Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes Der Leviathan Das Urbild des modernen Staates und seine Gegenbilder. 1651-2001* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 54.

Image 1: Abraham Bosse, Frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, 1651. Copy on parchment. British Library, Mss. Egerton, 1910.

This final detail, in the tradition of iconology, could well reveal to be the most fundamental of all. Many scholars have approached the frontispiece from more immediately striking conceptual and political features; but if we try to see it essentially for what it is – an image, an icon, an emblem – it must be analyzed through its details, especially those that are out of place.[3]

[3] See Maurice M. Goldsmith, "Picturing Hobbes's Politics? The Illustrations to Philosophical Rudiments," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 44 (1981): 232.

Image 2: Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Crooke, London 1651. Frontispiece of the First Edition.

Surely, the frontispiece is full of iconic details of dazzling relevance, including the enigmatic presence of small figures in the city wearing plague doctor masks. This detail in particular possibly derived from Hobbes's translation of Thucydides, where the plague of Athens is considered the origin of civil disorder in the city (ἀνομία). But there is one further detail that we should note: that the sea-monster is standing over a mountain. A long association of images and metaphors have linked the Leviathan to the waters and the sea, just as the Behemoth was associated with hills and mountains.

Now, undoubtedly, Hobbes associated Leviathan with a mountain provoking an iconographic inversion, parallel to the normative inversion of

portraying the monarch as a monster and a demon. Of course, our major interest lies in the *permanence* of such an inversion, to the point that it is not even thematized by most of the learned authors who confronted it.

What we shall try to do in this first paragraph is, first, to reconstruct the interpretative tradition that caused Leviathan to be identified with the Great Enemy as well as associated with the sea. Then, we shall try to rebuild an alternative tradition which can justify Hobbes's frontispiece from the standpoint of new conceptions of sovereignty. Finally, we shall reappraise the frontispiece with the extant legal notions that Hobbes could have had at hand, along with the iconological device of the Column of Antoninus and Dante's eagle. Our claim is to cast light on the esoteric and heterodox background of modern theories of sovereignty, emphasizing the inversion that happened on the threshold of modernity between theological and demonological elements, as they have always been structurally within the pervading ambiguity of the notion of world lordship.

As it is rather well known, the two biblical monsters to whom Hobbes devoted two of his works appear in the Book of Job.[4] They have been the subjects of long and contradictory exegeses of a rather occult and hermetic nature.[5] One of the clearest and at the same time most embarrassing points – and just for this reason, the object of particular speculations[6] – is that the two monsters were thought to be evidence of the almighty nature of God. It is amidst the Book of Job that we are told that 'He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment' (Job, 41:31); and that no

[4] Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Id., *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[5] Marco Bertozzi, *Thomas Hobbes: l'enigma del Leviatano* (Ferrara: Bovolenta, 1983); Christopher Scott McClure, "Hell and Anxiety in Hobbes's "Leviathan"" *The Review of Politics* 73 (2011): 1.

[6] Cyrus H. Gordon, "Leviathan: Symbol of Evil" in Alexander Altmann (ed), *Biblical Motifs. Origin and Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 1–9; Chiara Peri, *Il regno del nemico. La morte nella religione di Canaan* (Brescia: Paideia, 2003), 125.

creature on earth is stronger than the Leviathan: '*Non est super terram potestas quae comparetur ei*' (Job 41: 25), who is also the king of the children of pride: '*Ipse est rex super universos filios superbiae*'.

The starting image of chapter 41 of the Book of Job (41:1-2) provides another interesting point in this direction. It clearly depicts the Leviathan as a formidable sea-monster: 'Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? Or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down? Canst thou put an hook into his nose? Or bore his jaw through with a thorn?'.

Other lines on this king of the children of pride heavily influenced its representation and interpretation. The first is the peculiar question (Job 41:13): '*Who can discover the face of his garment?*', which is curious because Hobbes showed his face and it was that of the King of England. A second crucial point consists in the assertion (Job 41:23) that: '*The flakes of his flesh are joined together: they are firm in themselves; they cannot be moved*', an assertion supporting the iconographic rendition in the frontispiece of his "corporate" body. Then there is a third ambiguous statement (Job 41:10) made directly by God about His relations with the monster: '*None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?*'. This latter pronouncement is dazzling because it blurs the distinction between good and evil. Is the Leviathan the great enemy, or is he a symbol of the Lord's omnipotence? Both meanings are indeed generated by the phrase. One is that nobody on earth can confront the devil, so that nobody can dare to confront God who is stronger than the devil. The other may be that God is so powerful that he even created this monster as a sign of His supreme majesty. If we cannot resist this creature of His, how could we try to resist the Lord? In both cases it is rather clear that God, *because* of His power, is the Lord of the Universe to whom we must bow.

2. Tracing Back the Origins: St. Jerome's Tradition

In his comment on the Book of Job[7], St. Jerome (347-420 CE) established the tradition to read the Leviathan and the Behemoth as symbols of the Enemy. Leviathan is the Satan who, at the beginning of the book, is tempting Job to give in and abandon his faith in God. It is intriguing that in Jerome's comment it is Behemoth who is interpreted as a plural[8], rendering this monster a creature with a body composed of many devils: "*Proinde inimicus diabolus cum toto corpore satellitum suorum hoc loco a Deo describitur*" (So the enemy devil is described by God in this place with all the body of his guards). Here the Devil is depicted as a *corporation*, a corporate body made up of his cronies, the men and angels whom he has subjugated. For Jerome, a typical sign of the demonic nature of Behemoth is his uncontrollable luxury. Behemoth is slave to his '…*ventris voluptas, vel carnis luxuria*' (throat pleasure or body lust).

In St. Jerome, Leviathan is a demonic entity. The only difference between the two monsters is their opposite locations: Behemoth on the land, and Leviathan in the sea as a "*magnus draco*" (great drake). Such description of Leviathan establishes a link with the Beast of the Sea of the book of Revelation (Revelation 13: 1-10) and with the Psalm 74 (Ps. 74:12-14) [KJV]:

> *For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.*
>
> *Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.*
>
> *Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.*

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[7] St Jerome, *Commentarii in Librum Job*, in 26 PL clm 619-802.

[8] In Hebrew, the termination in *–oth* normally denotes feminine plurals, something which does not imply that some words or names can end in *-oth* without being plurals.

Moreover, the human impossibility of drawing out the Leviathan with a hook becomes associated with Ezekiel (17:20) [KJV]:

> *And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me.*

In this case, the "hook" by which Leviathan can be drawn out is interpreted as Christ and His Cross, and the "net" is patently His teaching.

It is not without importance that Ezekiel's text is thought to make reference also to the Pharaoh, as we find in Bodin the same analogy between the sea-monster and the tyrannical lord of Egypt:

> *Son of man, set thy face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt: Speak, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.* (29:3-4[KJV])
>
> …
>
> *Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou art as a whale in the seas: and thou camest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers.*

> *Thus saith the Lord God; I will therefore spread out my net over thee with a company of many people; and they shall bring thee up in my net* (32:2-3[KJV])

Here, the context or the real historical meaning is of course irrelevant: it is a method completely opposite to that of philology[9]. What is essential to this method is indeed that a given collection of books – the canonical Bible or Justinian's Digest – are forming a nested set of phrases, each of which can open a link toward another part of the collection. Reading is the art of seeing these marks and following these links as if they were contrived corridors that the reader must enter to capture their meaning.

A powerful political association linked to these texts was that of an intrinsic correspondence between the devil and the lord of Egypt. Equating the Leviathan to the great crocodile set in the Nile, Bodin follows this same tradition.[10] The Leviathan and the evil king are one and the same thing, and both appear patently as a representation of the lordship of the devil on earth. Leviathan, the Pharaoh, and the apocalyptic dragon represent then the evil and arbitrary government of the world.

The final evidence that the Leviathan is a symbol of the devil and of the evil kingdom (Egypt) is offered by St. Jerome with reference to its attribute of being "… a *king over all the children of pride*"(Job 41:34 [KJV]). It is this passage which constitutes the unifying factor that links Leviathan to the Pharaoh and the devil.

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[9] See James Gordley, "Humanists and Scholastics", in Calum M. Carmichael (ed), *Essays on Law and Religion, The Berkeley and Oxford Symposia in Honour of David Daube* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), 13.

[10] Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Genève: Droz, 2016), book 1, ch 1, 5; Id., *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 48.

As is well known, Jerome's interpretation has been very successful, influential and far reaching. It is sufficient, here, to remember the image of the Lord as a fisher-king, and of the Christ and His cross as a lure and a hook for the big fish. In such images, the Leviathan is deceived by the apparent fragility of the hook such that Christ can finally overcome it. This is an image perfectly represented in an illumination of the *Hortus Deliciarum* of the Abbess Herrade von Landsberg[11], upon which also Schmitt placed his attention.[12] But we may also find other typical images corresponding to these conceptions, as those contained in the *Liber Floridus* (ca. 1120)[13], where we see Behemoth mounted by a horned devil and the Leviathan portrayed as a serpent saddled by the Antichrist.

Moreover, Jerome's reading of the monsters as a corporation of the rogues was consciously used by John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus* (ca. 1159) in opposition to the good republican government. In his appraisal, all the evil men are forming a compact corporate body to fight against the Lord and His Christ: '…*convenerunt in unum adversus Dominum et adversus Christum ejus*'.[14] This image, of course, conveys the precise opposite concept of that illustrated in Hobbes's frontispiece, where it is the legitimate government that is a corporation of devoted subjects forming the unitary body of the sovereign. For us, the magic performed by Hobbes was that of mixing the two images in a new and extravagant compound, reversing the old meaning of the Leviathan as a monstrous sea-serpent.

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[11] See for example the image portrayed in Gérard Cames, *Allégories et symboles dans l'Hortus Deliciarum* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 40-42, picture 35.

[12] See Carl Schmitt, "Die vollendete Reformation. Bemerkungen und Hinweise zu neuen Leviathan – Interpretationen" *Der Staat* 4 (1965): 68–69.

[13] Jessie Poesch, "The Beasts from Job in the Liber Floridus Manuscripts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1970): 41.

[14] John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VI, 1, in 199 PL clm 589–92.

There is another element worth being noted. In John of Salisbury, we face the rogues forming a corporation to fight the Almighty: the strict, compact alliance of the villains which is well represented by the thick skin and scales of the Leviathan, which Hobbes inverted into the opposite concept.

> *Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? Or his head with fish spears?*
> (Job 41:7[KJV])
> …
> *His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal.*
> *One is so near to another, that no air can come between them.*
> *They are joined one to another, they stick together, that they cannot be sundered*
> (Job 41:15-17[KJV])

Many questions rise at this point. If this empire of evil, unbeatable because of the consistency of his corporate body, is an enormously efficient image, how could this tradition of reading, from Jerome to Salisbury be reversed? How could the great Pharaoh, as a symbol of the devil and of tyrannical government, become Hobbes's specular opposite image of the sovereign-savior to whom we owe our lives and our political existence? What kind of an "inversion of all values" could have taken place between John of Salisbury and Thomas Hobbes? In the next paragraph we will try to answer to these doubts.

3. Calvin's Re-Interpretation

If we delve into the genealogy of Hobbes's frontispiece, a necessary step is to investigate the role played by Calvin (1509-1564) because it was he who rather abruptly reversed the whole tradition attributed to St. Jerome.[15]

In his work[16], Behemoth is identified with an elephant, when most other accounts were referring to it as a hippopotamus, and Leviathan is a whale rather than a sea serpent. Both are deemed to be symbols of God's power, *not* the devil's.[17]

The shift in the bestiary is not without meaning here. It is much more acceptable to have a whale as a symbol of the majestic power of God, than trying to convince someone that God's power can be mirrored on earth by a sneaky slithering slimy water serpent. An elephant is also a rather more acceptable political emblem. So Calvin is, we presume, rather consciously changing the standard imagery of the Leviathan, completely transforming it. The two beasts, here, cease to be emblems of the devil to become manifestations of the '*puissance de Dieu*', or the power of God. After all, was God not saying (Job 41:10[KJV]) that no one is so fierce to dare stir up Leviathan when He said "…*who then is able to stand before Me?*". This phrase can well be interpreted as indicating that Leviathan is a manifestation of His transcendent powers. And isn't the Psalmist saying (Ps 104:25-26[KJV]): *'So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great*

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[15] On the relationship between Calvin and Hobbes, see Jonathan J. Edwards, "Calvin and Hobbes: Trinity, Authority, and Community," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 42 (2009): 115; Aloysius P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 334.

[16] John Calvin, "Sermon CLXI", in Edouard Cunitz, Johann-Wilhelm Baum, Eduard W.E. Reuss (eds), *Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* [Corpus Reformatorum] vol 35 (Brunsvigae: CA Schwetschke, 1863) clm 463-476, at 464–5.

[17] Bertozzi, *Thomas Hobbes: l'enigma del Leviatano*, 5.

beasts. There go the ships: there is that Leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein?'. If the Lord is playing every morning with Leviathan, can he be evil?

Of course, Calvin did not displace the older interpretation all at once. As we noted, Bodin, in his *Daemonomania* (1581), still portrayed Leviathan as a symbol of the Pharaoh, the arbitrary and tyrannical ruler, as well as of the devil.[18] In his analysis, Leviathan is not satisfied by devouring men's bodies only, he is also in search of their souls, to seduce them, and for this reason it is impossible to make a covenant with him. He is the absolute enemy, and he represents an admonishment to all those who plan to have commerce with arcane spirits. Also Joseph Caryl, whose commentaries were certainly known and appreciated by Hobbes[19], still interpreted Leviathan as a figure of evil, affirming that under the name of '…that great Leviathan' are to be included all of the enemies of Christ and the Church[20], reproducing the image of a corporate society of villains assembled in a unitary body. This is done, again, by pointing to his impenetrable scales, so perfectly connected to one another, and taking for granted that the name of the beast is to be traced back to the Hebrew root *Lavah*, meaning "united" or "associated". This may be why the Leviathan was interpreted as a society or an association.[21]

At this point, it is rather clear that Hobbes was following a minor and heterodox interpretative current, which transmuted the Leviathan into an emblem of the Lord's world rule. At the same time, it is evident that there is a strong parallel between Hobbes's reading and that of Calvin.[22] In order to

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[18] Bodin, *De la démonomanie*, book 1, ch 1, 5; Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* 48.

[19] William H. Greenleaf, "A Note on Hobbes and the Book of Job," *Anales de la Cátedra Francisco Suárez* 14 (1974): 21.

[20] Joseph Caryl, *An Exposition with Practicall Obseruation upon… the Books of Job* (London: L. Fawne, H. Cripps and L. Lloyd, 1647): 141, 374.

[21] William H. Greenleaf, "A Note on Hobbes and the Book of Job," 22–23, 25.

[22] On the Calvinism of Hobbes, see Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 46.

fully appreciate this interpretative inversion, we can resume for the reader the last three chapters of the Book of Job.

In chapter 40, God shows Job His might, reminding him that He has created such a marvelous monster as Behemoth, and in chapter 41 He mentions His even more spectacular other creature, the Leviathan, before whom nothing on earth can stand, and who – because of this irresistible power – is said to be the king of all that are proud. In this context, God explicitly states (Job 41:11) that everything under heaven belongs to Him. God *is* the *Dominus Mundi*. Is, then, Leviathan the sign of His lordship?

Of course, we want to emphasize this point. God is the Master of the World, *Adonai*, which could imply that Leviathan is a kind of God's lieutenant, made to compel the proud to pay respect to Him. God's argument proved to be effective, and finally, in chapter 42, Job bows irrevocably to God's mysterious will and projects, acknowledging that He can do all things. In this sense, God is the Lord of the Universe, and the emblem of His lordship on earth can precisely be the Leviathan as the definitive appearance of God's power, to whom even the righteous but quarrelling Job must eventually bow.

Given this succession of chapters, it may appear that, though a heterodox reading, Leviathan could be interpreted as the political aspect of God. The Leviathan could be His sovereign aspect: that power than no man can dare to resist, which is precisely what Hobbes tried to portray in his frontispiece through the citation of Job 41:24 [Vulg.]: '*non est super terram potestas quae comparetur ei*'. There is no power *on earth* that can be compared to his.

As we may easily grasp, Hobbes's citation is at the end of God's speech, when Leviathan is proclaimed the king of all children of pride and Job ends his questioning. The book ends in chapter 42 with the acknowledgment by

Job of the powers of God, so that the climax is reached in chapter 41 through the revelation of Leviathan as the emblem of God's power.

4. Hobbes and the Occult

The parallel between Calvin's and Hobbes's readings can hardly be denied, but what could have been its political meaning in the English context at the time? Was Hobbes simply dissociating Leviathan from the Devil, or was he reversing the values associated with tyranny and the republic? Or was he not giving a peculiar new depiction of the nature of political power opposite to classical political theology who tailored the sovereign as an image of God on earth?

The two lines of argument to be followed here are intermixed: on one side, they concern the interest of Hobbes in occult and magic; on the other side, they pertain to Hobbes's use of classical legal sources of previous authors.

Although Hobbes assessed that ideas of demonic possession had abated in his time, his observation may be considered, according to Stark, as "utterly absurd" given the sheer number of witchcraft trials and discussions about contemporary cases of demonry occurring throughout the seventeenth century.[23] While it is true – as Starck oberves – that the Anglican Church terminated its office of exorcism in 1550, this act did very little to cease the belief in demonic possession. Rather, as we have seen, this marked the politicization of witchcraft trials as crimes of treason.

Additionally, it is worth noting the unskeptical interest that scientists showed to have for cases of possession. For example, William Whiston, the

[23] See Ryan J. Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 28 ff.

successor of Newton in the Lucasian chair of mathematics, perceived demonic possessions as a normal event in the world in the same way that gravity was a normal event[24]. Demonic activities are not to be denied simply because we cannot, at present, give a direct solution of them, which looks like a sound epistemological advice. His argument goes so far as to trace a parallel between possessions and occult events and scientific theories: magic events, as well as Boyle's experiments on the elasticity of the air, or Sir Isaac Newton's demonstrations about the power of gravity, are not to denied, only because neither of them are to be solved by mechanical causes.

We know that Hobbes was discussing magic with his noble protectors, but also that he always displayed the greatest incredulity toward alleged demonic manifestations.[25] Quite surely, he could have thought that after the turbulences which afflicted Charles I's reign and brought him to his execution in 1649, a viable way out could be represented by the establishment of a strong central government.

If it is so, the title that he gave to his work on the civil war would be the evidence that he was playing with the symbols of a long-established tradition of political metaphors surrounding the two monsters, as others like Bishop John Bramhall were doing.[26]

Indeed, he could have found in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* a connection between Leviathan and the king (*rex*) and Behemoth and the people (*populus*)[27]. Following this parallel, Behemoth – the beast made up of a

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[24] William Whiston, *An Account of the Daemomaniacks, and the Power of Casting Out Daemons* (London: Boyle's Head, 1737), 74; Stark, *Rhetoric, Science and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England*, 28.

[25] Arrigo Pacchi, *Convenzione e ipotesi nella formazione della filosofia naturale di Thomas Hobbes* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1965), 48–49, fn 27.

[26] Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 110–23.

[27] See Janine Chanteur, "Note sur les notions de «Peuple» et de «Multitude» chez Hobbes," in Reinhart Koselleck and Roman Schnur (eds), *Hobbes* (Berlin: Forschungen, 1969), 223–236.

multitude of beasts – could well have represented the rioting multitude and its representatives, unbound in their luxury for passions and power, and by contrast, Leviathan could have represented their reunion in an ordered political body. This explanation, based on the idea that Behemoth and Leviathan can be seen as the constantly potentially present and clashing forces of state and revolution is not wholly convincing *per se*. As we have seen the Leviathan was always anyway surrounded by a sinister aspect of demonic power, with the strong and important exception of Calvin, to whom Schmitt makes no reference in his enquiry. Other scholars have traced back the device of opposition, instead of complementarity, between Behemoth and Leviathan in the apocalyptic myths, envisaging a final struggle of the former against the latter[28]. It is almost given for granted that Hobbes depicts the end of monarchy in terms of a regression of civil society toward the primeval chaos of violence and civil war[29], such that he could prefer the "evil" of a monarch which was more tolerable than the chaos of a long-parliament Behemoth.[30]

As we may easily grasp from these references, the use of metaphors with an occult meaning is so pervasive in these interpretations of the Book of Job, that it must be thematized. Hobbes's relations with occult philosophy remains an obscure matter. Radical in his rejection of metaphysics and spirituality, he nonetheless shared with Bacon and Sennert a basic concern about the vocabularies of magic. Hobbes's 'anxiety about occult tropes'[31] appears most obviously in *The Leviathan* when he complains about 'the use of Metaphors,

[28] Lois Drewer, "Leviathan, Behemoth and Ziz: A Christian Adaptation," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1981): 148.

[29] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 3, ch 42, § 125.

[30] Bertozzi, *Thomas Hobbes: l'enigma del Leviatano*, 22.

[31] Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century* England, 25–26.

Tropes, and other Rhetorical figures, instead of words proper'.[32] Hobbes dismisses obscure and ambiguous expressions because they are often of a "mystical" nature, though his polemic against figurative language may sound rather odd since *The Leviathan* itself appears to be a rather prolonged metaphor on a demonic figure.

Hobbes was never invited to join the Royal Society partly because his materialism and skepticism 'went too far down the road of disbelief'[33] and many scholars of the time, including Bacon, remained entirely *non-skeptical* on the topic of witchcraft. Browne maintained that the devil does possess some men, the 'spirit of melancholy' others, and still others are possessed by the spirit of delusion[34]. Here we find, once again, that deep association between witchcraft and melancholy which connoted Bodin's conceptions expressed in the *Daemonomanie*. There is a malaise, a melancholy, of the spirit, which either resembles that of the devil, or makes people inclined to be hooked by the devil. This is an association underlined even by Hobbes, though in a more materialistic mood, when he declares 'there were many Damoniaques in the primitive Church, a few Madmen, and other such singular diseases; where at these times we hear of, and see many Madmen, and few Demoniaques, proceeds not from the change of Nature; but of names'[35].

The point in this passage displays a certain degree of nominalism where folly and possession can become interchangeable depending on our lexicon,

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[32] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 1, ch 5, § 24.

[33] Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century* England, 27.

[34] Thomas Browne, *Religio medici* [1643] (New York: John B Alden, 1889), 60, on whose influence see Kathryn Murhphy, "The Physician's Religion and "salus populi": The Manuscript Circulation and Print Publication of "Religio Medici"," *Studies in Philology* 111 (2014): 845.

[35] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 4, ch 45, § 9.

strengthening the need for the use of "words proper". How can, then, Leviathan be a proper name for the Sovereign?

This monstrous association happened in the context of a strong opposition that was developed against what may be called the *preternatural* rhetoric – made of strange metaphors, suggestive allusions or conceits – in favor of a plain English *scientific* use of the language. This polemic reached its height in the eighteenth century, when '…deism and Sadducism as forms of cosmology, took root as appropriate methodological starting points for scientific enquiry'.[36] The opposition to the occult rhetoric that lay at the foundation of the plain style as the *organon* of scientific enquiry raises many problems in relation to Hobbes and his political vision. It was Glanvill in *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681), a text likely edited by Henry More, who strightly directed the charge of skepticism against '…*those Hobbians <sic> and those Spinozians*, *and the rest of that Rabble*, who flight Religion and the Scriptures, because there is such express mention of Spirits and Angels in them…' .[37]

Notwithstanding his proclaimed skepticism toward witchcraft, Hobbes's text is entirely constructed around occult metaphors, from the apparition of the Leviathan to the final chapter on the Kingdom of Darkness, and the long discussion of what is a "fairy".[38] If we pay due attention to the *text* it may become more apparent to what extent the modern theory of the political has been formulated in a frame of occult rhetoric, tropes and images, though Hobbes himself openly complains about the use of metaphors '…and the Rhetoricall figures, instead of words proper'.[39] This passage is of a peculiar

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[36] Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century* England, 29-30.

[37] Joseph Glanvill, *Sadducismus Triumphatus or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (London: J Collins, 1681), 16.

[38] Hobbes, *Leviathan,* part 4, ch 47, § 21.

[39] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 1, ch 5, § 24; Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England*, 25.

importance since it places words *proper*, probably as the correct designation of realities, in opposition to tropes and 'ambiguous expressions' which are often of a mystical nature. We find in this passage a condemnation of figurative language as improper and an association of it with the enchantments deriving from magic. Now what is at stake in the complaints about the use of metaphors is perhaps the striking inner contradiction, which is revealed within Hobbes's text, leading him to deny on the surface what is actually pursued in depth.

Can the inventor of the frontispiece and of the most overwhelming demonic trope of political modernity condemn his work as unscientific? Or, is there a sublime irony in condemning the *true* nature of government as demonic? Hobbes himself declared that 'The Light of Human minds is Perpicuous Words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity'[40]. And what is the Leviathan if not the most ambiguous possible portrait of the Sovereign?

At this point, it would be hard to separate the matter of witchcraft from language *and* government. As Stark reports[41], active participation of demons could provide an explanation for how certain tropes and phrases seemed to work together. Tropes may have natural magical force. Modern theory conceptualizes rhetoric as an adornment rather than a charm, but the opposite idea could persist, that it should be possible to master tropes as an inherently enchanted vocabulary.

Now the vocabulary of sovereignty and the tropes invented by Hobbes are perhaps there just to prove the extent to which this "enchanted vocabulary" can dominate our own political imagination for centuries. If this is true, there

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[40] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 1, ch 5, § 20. See Philip Pettit, *Made with Words. Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 53.

[41] Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England*, 23.

is an inherent occultism in the modern philosophy of politics that cannot easily be overthrown.

5. Fisher King

Now that we have reconstructed the two clashing lines of interpretation of Leviathan attributed to St. Jerome and Calvin, and shown the importance of civilian metaphorical speculations on the nature of the body politic, we will next approach the particular use made by Hobbes of the biblical text from which he derived his frontispiece.

We can better frame our problem if we consider the extreme variance which distinguishes the Greek and Latin versions of the Book of Job, the former being known as the *Septuagint* and the latter as the *Vulgata*. The Book of Job was likely composed in the 6th century BCE to become a book in the Ketuvin section of the Tanakh (the so called Hebrew Bible) whose authoritative Hebrew and Aramaic text was established between the 7th and the 10th centuries CE. According to tradition, the *Septuagint* was composed in the 3d century BCE by seventy-two sages enclosed in a tower by Ptolemy II, to be of use for Greek speaking Jewish communities of the Western diaspora.[42] The *Vulgata* was the translation of the Old Testament done by St. Jerome himself in the 4th century CE (ca 384), using a variety of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek sources. Both the *Septuagint* and the *Vulgata* were constantly copied and printed at the time and used by learned scholars, but

[42] Charles B. Wheeler and John B. Gabel, *The Bible as Literature. An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 167.

the puzzling difference between the two versions has been strangely overlooked by many authors who wrote about the frontispiece. [43]

Now, the passage that must eminently be scrutinized commences in chapter 40 of the Book of Job (Job 40:1) when God eventually answers to Job's critique of His justice:

> *Repondens autem Dominus Iob de turbine* [Vulg]
>
> καὶ ἀπεκρίθη κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῷ Ιωβ καὶ εἶπεν [Sept]
>
> And God replied to Job from amidst the tempest [KJV]

God the *Dominus* shows to Job His creations and creatures and, as we said, Behemoth appears in the Latin version at Job 40:10:

> *Ecce Behemoth quem feci tecum, fœnum quasi bos comedet* [Vulg]
>
> ἀλλὰ δὴ ἰδοὺ θηρία παρὰ σοί χόρτον ἴσα βουσὶν ἐσθίει [Sept]
>
> *Behold now Behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox* [KJV]

"Behemoth" as a name is completely missing in the parallel Greek version (Job 40:15) where it is simply rendered with a plural for *beasts* (θηρία) eating grass "like oxes" (ἴσα βουσὶν).

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[43] Notice that even the number of chapters and verse may vary between the Greek and the Latin version and they will be indicated when they do not match.

The simple reason for this variance is that the Hebrew text refers to a plural generic name for a kind of wild and huge animal, as indicates the termination in "*-oth*". In this way, the Greek version maintains the generic reference of the Hebrew text, whereas St. Jerome decided to leave that word untranslated, and so, *invented* 'Behemoth' as a proper name for some unknown mythical monster; a marvelous beast generated in the translation from a Hebrew common plural root, into a singular *untranslated* term.

The same happened for the name Leviathan.[44] The name of Leviathan appears in the Latin version, which is simply rendered as *drakonta* (δράκοντα) in Greek. Once again, we have a generic name for serpent in one version and a non-translated term, Leviathan, in the text of St. Jerome, becoming the proper singular name of a monster. In sum, we have in the text of St. Jerome the non-translation of Hebrew words, which are transformed into proper names for fabulous monsters, names that are not present as such in the Greek text.

We can say that the creation of Behemoth and Leviathan as monsters having proper names was the work of St. Jerome as a translator, mixing his own interpretation of Hebrew and Greek sources. This is absolutely consistent with the translation of the Ps. 104 as the other major locus where the Leviathan appears.[45]

In St. Jerome's Latin version, we find:

> *Hoc mare magnum et latum manibus ibi reptilia innumerabilia animalia cum grandibus*
> *Ibi naves pertranseunt*
> *Leviathan istum plasmasti ut inludere ei* [Vulg]

[44] 40:25 [Vulg]; 41:1 [Sept].
[45] Ps 104:25 [Vulg]; Ps 103:25 [Sept].

In the *Septuagint* version, we have:

> αὕτη ἡ θάλασσα ἡ μεγάλη καὶ εὐρύχωρος, ἐκεῖ ἑρπετά, ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀριθμός, ζῷα μικρὰ μετὰ μεγάλων·
> ἐκεῖ πλοῖα διαπορεύονται, δράκων οὗτος, ὃν ἔπλασας ἐμπαίζειν αὐτῇ [Sept]

An English translation from the Greek would be as follows:

> *[So is] this great and wide sea: there are things creeping innumerable, small animals and great.*
> *There go the ships; [and]* this dragon *whom thou hast made to play in it.*

As we know, the King James version has:

> *So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts.*
> *There go the ships: there is* that Leviathan*, whom thou hast made to play therein.* [KJV]

It easy to grasp that modern versions followed St. Jerome's translation, and not the older Greek version of the text. In this way, the simple serpent or generic 'dragon' of the Greek text becomes a real character, a specific unique monster known as Leviathan. It is absolutely unclear if it was created by God "to play in it" as a bizarre creature, or "to play therein", to play *with* it, as a pleasure for God, as an enjoyable creature, a sort of pastime like swimming with a dolphin. Another possible interpretation is, also, that Leviathan *enjoys*

the sea and plays in it. Nevertheless, the creation of Leviathan as such, not simply a dragon or a big fish but a creature-character with its own name written capitalized, is probably a transliterated Hebrew word (*livyathan*) meaning "twisted" or "coiled". This term is sometimes used to denote a serpent or a crocodile, or sometimes as a metaphor to denote the reign of Egypt as a "crooked serpent" (Isaiah 27:1), but it is never used as a proper name. This transformation is accentuated in most modern versions, where it is normally taken for granted that Behemoth and Leviathan are proper names for fabulous beasts. This matter is of direct importance for our argument and for a parallel reading of the Bible and the Digest, as was used in medieval interpretations.

In what is Job 41:2 in Latin and 41:3 in Greek, God uses the example of the two powerful beasts to reaffirm what is written in Deuteronomy (10:14), namely that:

> *Omnia quae sub cielo sunt mea sunt* [Vulg]
>
> πᾶσα ἡ ὑπ᾽ οὐρανὸν ἐμή ἐστιν [Sept]

Here it is clear in all versions that God is the *owner*, the *dominus* of all things on earth, and that (Deut. 10:17) God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords.

> *Quia Dominus Deus vester ipse est Deus deorum et Dominus dominantium* [Vulg]
>
> ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν οὗτος θεὸς τῶν θεῶν καὶ κύριος τῶν κυρίων [Sept]

> Indeed your Lord is the God of gods and the Lord of lords [KJV]

In these passages, we have a literal dominion of all things that are under heaven, including the many gods and lords alluded to in the text. Most importantly, the reason given in the Book of Job for the Lord's property of all things consists in His might. His might is evidenced by His creation of beasts such as the personified great hippopotamus (Behemoth), devouring forests and riding atop the hills, and the personified great crooked creature dominating the seas (Leviathan). Moreover, the strict connection between God's lordship and the two monsters is openly stated in the *Septuagint* at 40:19 (Vulgata 40:14) where it is said of Behemoth that:

> τοῦτ'ἔστιν ἀρχὴ πλάσματος Κυρίου, πεποιημένον ἐγκαταπαίζεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ [Sept]

> *Ipse est principium viarum Dei: qui fecit eum applicabit gladium ejus* [Vulg]

> *He is the chief of the ways of God; he that made him can make his sword to approach unto him* [KJV]

In the Greek text there is a textual reference to God's messengers (*angels*) which is completely omitted in St. Jerome's version, upon which the English version depends. The Greek passage could be translated as follows:

This is the beginning [chief] of the creation of the Lord; made to be played with by his angels [messengers].

But can the angels play with Behemoth? Can the angels rejoice with the great serpent? Can the angels rejoice with the pharaoh or the big crocodile of Egypt?

This is not only a matter of philology, but of orthodoxy. Of course, we cannot find such a reference in St. Jerome and the *Vulgata*. No angel may play with the Leviathan or Behemoth in Jerome's interpretation. This is a classical case where interpretation constructs the text to be constructed. On the contrary, if Leviathan is not a monster but the symbol of Lord's power as the Lord Paramount of the universe – The Lord of the lords – it becomes natural that angels may play with it.

Nonetheless, the most important difference between the Greek and the Latin version concerns exactly the phrase selected by Hobbes for his frontispiece (Job 41:24-25 Vulgata; Job 41:25-26 Septuagint).

Non est super terra potestas qae comparetur ei
Qui factum est ut nullum timeret
Omne sublime videt
Ipse est rex super unversos filios superbiae [Vulg]

The King James version translates:

Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear.
He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.
[KJV]

Here we have the key to interpret the Leviathan as the devil, as the prince of demons and as the Old Serpent, because he is "*rex super universos filios superbiae*" – he is a king over all the children of pride. But why, then, is he beholding *all high things*? Why can it see "*omne sublime*", all the sublime things? Is the sublime demonic?

In Greek, the whole passage sounds rather different:

> οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὅμοιον αὐτῷ πεποιημένον ἐγκαταπαίζεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων μου·
>
> πᾶν ὑψηλὸν ὁρᾷ, αὐτὸς δὲ βασιλεὺς πάντων τῶν ἐν τοῖς ὕδασιν. [Sept]

Something that we can translate as:

> *There is nothing upon the earth like to him, formed to be sported with by my angels.*
>
> *He beholds every high thing:* and he is king of all that are in the waters.

At the very end, if we follow the Greek version, Leviathan *sports* with angels and knows all that is sublime, as he is *king over the water*. These two texts could hardly have been more different. It is no matter here which text is closer to an original of the 6th century BCE. Both versions (3rd century BCE and 4th century CE) can, indeed, be consistent with the Masoretic text (7th-10th century CE) where it is said that Leviathan is king over all the *bᵉné šāhas*. This word (*šāhas*) appears only twice in the biblical Hebrew and both times in the

Book of Job. In Job 28:8, in connection with *šāhal*[46], it seems to indicate all insolent or arrogant creatures (υἱοὶ ἀλαζόνων in Greek), in line with St. Jerome's translation of Job 41:26b. But this etymology is contested as there are no other occurrences of it in the Hebrew text. That is why the Greek version could translate the same expression with reference to "*all* (the proud beasts) that are *in the waters*" in Job 41: 26b (πάντων τῶν ἐν τοῖς ὕδασιν).

What matters is that we may have an answer to the question of why Charles II could have received that frontispiece as a present. Hobbes could have been "ironically" making reference to the sovereign as the "King over the Water", as the Greek version of Job maintains that Leviathan is "king of all that is in the waters", and in clashing parallel to the Digest (14.2.9) affirming that the Roman emperor is the "owner of the land" and the "rule of the sea".

Hobbes's play on the strategic use of the Latin and Greek versions of the text allowed for the conclusion that the Leviathan is not a demon or the tyrannical pharaoh, but the sublime emblem of God's power as *Dominus Mundi* and as Lord of the Sea.

This is, of course, speculation but may be a consistent interpretation. We know that Hobbes was perfectly acquainted with Greek[47] and citing the Latin, he could well have alluded to the Greek in order to *exclude* the "*hoi polloi*" from understanding. Hobbes does not conclude the phrase in the frontispiece. He just cites the beginning: '*Non est super terram potestas quae comparetur ei*'. Certainly, in the Calvinist appraisal of the Leviathan, Job understood the emblem, because it is after this vision that he exclaims (42:5):

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[46] Sigmund Mowinckel, "sahal", in David Winton Thomas and William D. McHardy (eds), *Hebrew and Semitic Studies: Presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), 95–103.

[47] Hobbes used to extensively translate ancient Greek works, like Aristotle's *Treatise on Rethoric* and Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*.

νυνὶ δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός μου ἑόρακέν σε [Sept]

Nunc autem oculus meus videt te [Vulg]

now mine eye seeth thee [KJV]

Job *sees* the Lord through the Leviathan's appearance. What we then have at the end is this dazzling and mystifying experience of the transmutation of the image of the *Dominus* into that of the Leviathan. The Old Serpent of St. Jerome, this emblem of the association of the rogues, becomes the icon of the body politic of the sovereign. The luminous detail of the mountain upon which the Leviathan rises in its entire majestic figure can then receive a consistent interpretation. The English title denoting the king can be, as we all know, that of Lord *Paramount*, a word patently derived from the Norman-French *paramont*, meaning above the mountain. Just as the king is the lord of lords who also governs the seas, the sea serpent is in the highest position on the mountain, and also rules the waves. He is the lord paramount and king over the water.

From this perspective, the frontispiece would represent a sovereign claim on land and the sea through a cryptic reversal toward a demonological and occult imagery. The cryptic dimension was certainly not alien to the sort of royal occultism that can be traced in the Jacobean reflections on witchcraft, the government of souls and the mystic of prerogatives royal. If something can display the *demonological* origin of the modern political, it would be the transfiguration of the Leviathan operated in the heterodox line of interpretation followed by Hobbes. The perturbing novelty of the frontispiece could well have been created to illustrate the global claim to

universal dominion through the heterodox interpretation of the Leviathan in the context of the mystic of royal powers.

6. Conclusion: The Heterodox and Demonological Origins of Modernity

In this article, I tried to show the extent to which the politicization of the "dark arts" reversed the traditional imagery linked to sovereignty, producing the stunning frontispiece of the Leviathan as the icon of the modern political. The famous emblem designed by Hobbes can be deconstructed as a skillful use of previous sources, including the Digest and heterodox interpretations of the Book of Job, but still remains in it an irreducible excess, which marks a dramatic turning point in political imagination.

The tentative conclusion is, then, the *demonological*, and as such exotic and heterodox, rather than theological and level headed, origin of the modern Western concept of the political. If something can establish the demonological origin of this modern concept of the political, it would certainly be the transfiguration of the Leviathan: the tremendous transformation of the major of devils into the emblem of political salvation.

The deep presence of monster entities and in general of monstrosity is not an exclusive prerogative of political theory. In his seminal collection of essays entitled *Signs Taken for Wonders*, Franco Moretti develops an intriguing theory around the fascinating presence of the monster in European literature. Quoting Hobbes and his *Leviathan*, Moretti argues that the *monster* is the metaphorical element par excellence, the key-figure which 'expresses the unconscious content and at the same time hides it'.[48]

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[48] Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders. Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 1997), 103.

As Freud would have said, the repressed returns always in the disguised form of something terrible and nefarious. The monster — in our case, the Leviathan — is really one of the most relevant loci in the history of western culture, revealing the abysmal and at the same time irrational incarnation of fear and terror. In other words, showing the *sublime* and occult nature nestled at the heart of our Western literary and political tradition.