

Hobbes, Schmitt, and the Mythological Legitimization of Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

Hobbes, Schmitt and the Mythological Legitimization of Sovereignty

Michael O'Brien

This thesis explores the role of political mythology in grounding the legitimacy of sovereign authority, specifically in popular democratic states. It begins with Hobbes, taking the political theology of Leviathan as foundational to modern Western theories of sovereign authority and popular identity, also investigating his justifications for a sovereign control over public confession. The thesis proceeds in the second chapter to a study of Carl Schmitt's critique of political theology and of the extra-legal and extra-rational foundation of political legitimacy. Schmitt's assessment of contemporary theories of political myth is addressed as well. Against the historical background of the development of political theology and mythology, it is argued in the final chapter that the identities of populace with people, of people with sovereign, and of peoples and sovereigns with themselves across time, necessarily involves mythological fictions. The use of such myth-making to legitimize sovereign authority and justify its use is then applied to the particular case of caring for future generations, by a mythological overcoming of presentist democratic mandates.

Dedications and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this work with respect and gratitude to my family,
colleagues, and partners in unorthodox interrogation.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	32
Chapter 3.....	54
Conclusion.....	75
Bibliography.....	78

Introduction

This thesis is the product of two somewhat distinct threads that I have pursued over the past two years of my studies (and to some degree before). One thread is an ecological ethics in the form of a responsibility to natural posterity, something which I have engaged with both theoretically and politically outside of my academic work. In exploring different theoretical approaches to framing and grounding an ethical commitment to ecological stewardship, I encountered a literature on rearrangements of democratic relations aimed at giving more weight to future concerns and the interests of non-persons.

Another thread is the interrogation of sovereign legitimacy and state power, spurred by a political concern over the strengthening of the unitary executive under the Straussian Neo-Conservative movement during the junior Bush administrations. This pursuit, shared with other students in discussion groups and private conversations, came to encompass a political theological literature, centred first on Agamben's *Homo Sacer* and working backwards through Schmitt, Strauss, Benjamin, Sorel and others. The Schmittian thread was already picked up via Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* following Dr. Fritsch's seminar on Derrida's politics in the Fall of 2007, and came to be my main focus. This focus on Schmitt's ideas in turn led back to Hobbes as the originator of the tradition which I had been pursuing in reverse order (backward both in the sense of regressing from recent to past, and from concrete event to theoretical origin).

All this to say that the thesis presented here is a reduction and crystallization of elements in a wider and less defined personal project, and not primarily driven by a

scholastic engagement with particular historical works as the objects of inquiry. I use my sources as instances of ideas in a history of development, and frequently use their ideas in ways which are not strictly faithful to their own finite expressions thereof. I do take care to be fair and accurate in identifying the essential elements of these sources' contributions to the tradition of ideas which I am trying to develop, and do not wish to be mistaken either for having misinterpreted historical sources or for having deliberately marshalled such writings into alignment with my own project. Because of the wide range of material incorporated into this work, there is an equally wide range of relevant work not addressed. Most apparent among these omissions are the contributions to Schmitt scholarship by Arendt, Derrida and Mouffe. I would have liked to incorporate these thinkers, but the volume of sources already used for this thesis is already burdensome enough, and the integration of some sources, for instance Derrida, would have been a separate philosophical project in itself.

This project is an investigation into a politics beyond the rational. I don't wish to oppose the rational and embrace some kind of politics of sentiment or aesthetic will. I simply am interested in understanding the limits of political, and particularly public, rationality as a sufficient and deciding factor in the actions, justifications and self-understanding of a political community. This began (prior to the formation of the thesis here presented) with a look at propaganda, deliberate attempts to over-ride the rational with emotive or existential force. But as a theoretical object of inquiry this is rather uninteresting, merely an expedient abuse of social psychology. The mythical, or phantasmal, was far more interesting as it represents a certain form of thought unto itself,

which persists quite apart from the adequacy of rationality to rational matters. Though the mythic aspect of political discourse is conceived differently in the different sources I use, my own sense is as follows: the presentation of the speculative as factual, the presentation of the potential as realized, and the presentation of the remote as immediately present. These concretizations are not lies (“there exists some threat X, here and now, hidden from detection”) but rather fictions which present possible worlds as phenomenologically and psychologically immediate. Thus myth does not obscure or replace truth, but supplements it.

I leave moral consideration of the permissibility of using myth to shape politics to the very end, not wishing to cloud an already cloudy issue in mid-discussion. My primary task is to show where these ideas take form, and where they may lead, though not without a complete obliviousness to the ethical concerns raised by any but the most abstract political investigation (and even then...). I hope this survey of historical ideas, along with my own perspective and argument, proves informative and interesting to the reader, at best a helpful contribution to the discussion of these issues and at least bearable.

Chapter 1

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate Hobbes' position on the authority, and the duty, of sovereign powers to engage in mythological discourse as part of their stewardship of the popular good. I will first explain why Hobbes is a necessary thinker to the project of this thesis, and also clarify what parts of Hobbes' thought I think can be applied as universal points of political relevance, versus which parts may be discarded or modified in adapting his thinking to more contemporary circumstances. I wish to show that the unyielding absolutism of Hobbes need not be followed in practice, though his analyses of the problems of human competition and co-operation, which leads him to absolutism as the unavoidable final prescription for order, cannot be disregarded in any discussion of the question "how are states made, and preserved?". This embracing of absolutism is understandable as a response to the bloodshed brought on by factional conflict; shared power arrangements will always contain the possibility of conflicting claims to primacy, or for a right to greater shares of power than those originally agreed upon. And the rationale for a division of powers and relations among such divisions is always subject to reinterpretation. But to embrace an absolute unity of power, invested in a single person (natural or legal), is a fundamental rejection of openness and accountability that, while perhaps seemingly reasonable in the wake of civil war, is not tenable morally or politically, *pace* Hobbes. His granting of complete doxastic control to the sovereign, for the enforcement of public credence in such absolutist notions of right, is consequently also untenable, on balance. But insofar as the conditions which Hobbes sought to preclude remain a danger to the common wealth and security, the spirit and

reasons of his prescriptions retain a relevance to all politics.

The central question of my thesis is whether the construction of mythological narratives of the future of a political collectivity, such as a state or people, is a necessary part of legitimizing a program of action to the person of that collectivity. Beginning with Schmitt and his analysis of the political, the literature quickly led to Hobbes as the originator of the questions surrounding such issues of legitimacy and efficacy of power; the beginning of "political theology" in its currently recognized form is to be found in his transformation and inversion of the sovereign's religious role. By this I mean that the scriptural and philosophical arguments for the sovereign's rights over both church and state not only bestow on the sovereign a theologically *derived* authority, but also an authority which is framed in, and has decisional rights over, theological concepts. Thus I begin with his thinking on matters of public doctrine and the duties of providential guidance, as they constitute the primal source of the western political traditions of accommodating public good with exclusionary concentration of authority.

In addition to referring to Hobbes as an originating point for the ideas addressed in this work, I also seriously take up some of his positions as not only historically important, but enduringly valid and applicable positions that may still be taken up by people dealing with political questions outside of the particular setting of Hobbes' time. That is to say, Hobbes' thought is valuable not only as an influential example of one moment of thinking on these issues, to be read as a key to the genealogy of persisting ideas; much of his work is still very much alive, owing to his success in perceiving inevitable conflicts between duties, interests, and tendencies that are at play in any

political situation. These essential elements of his philosophy can be applied to contemporary and even future questions so long as it still makes sense to think of states and peoples, and perhaps even beyond that horizon of possible arrangements of life.¹

Of the essential elements of Hobbes' thought, I would identify the problems of assigning deciding authority and defending the indivisibility of sovereign authority as prime parts, followed by negotiating the tension between assurances of freedom and of security. The recognition of a sovereign duty over and above responsibility to popular demand is another element that continues to inform how political questions are framed, despite the ubiquity of democracy in the West; the essentially paradoxical construction of modern constitutional democracy is no more removed from this unresolved conflict (between inter-subjective and objective duties of care for public well-being) than were the monarchical politics of Hobbes' time.

There are of course other sides of Hobbes' thought that seem incompatible, or at least contrary, to the political values which are now taken as sacrosanct. Ours is an age and a culture well-settled on the supremacy of public will, democratically expressed, over

1 Hobbes' definition of commonwealth, though stark, still captures the essence of government. See *De Cive*, p.73: "A COMMONWEALTH, then, (to define it) is *one person*, whose *will*, by the agreement of several men, is to be taken as the *will* of them all; to make use of their strength and resources for the common peace and defence."

He later adds the notion of authority, in the sense of being author of a will made into action, in his definition found in *Leviathan*:

"[T]he Essence of the Commonwealth [...] is *One Person, of whose acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defence.*

And he that carryeth this Person, is called SOVERAIGNE, and said to have *Sovereigne Power*; and every one besides, his SUBJECT." (121)

the sovereign prerogative invested in one, or few, agents; it may well be desirable to discard elements of Hobbes' analysis and prescription which are irretrievably anti-democratic and absolutist in their arrogation of unyielding unitary and irreproachable power to a sovereign monarch or assembly. But there is also something of value in thinking beyond the horizons of contemporary democratic fundamentalism, if only to better situate and understand the place of the democratically committed solutions to the problems illustrated by Hobbes. The final end of this thesis is to defend mythologically narrated state programs, and to do so in part on the basis of Hobbes' and Schmitt's (and others') applicability to a world which, firstly, still abides by the rules of necessity they identified, and, secondly, has juridical/political/social features which are compatible with our picture of a morally defensible and desirable politics. To that end, an account of which seemingly inadmissible parts of Hobbes (and later of Schmitt) can be assigned a merely historically determined place, and which are organic to the ideas which we desire to continue applying to our politics, is necessary.

Hobbes' view of democracy is dim, but not so much so that a Hobbesian politics is necessarily undemocratic.² That dim view in part comes from the proximity which democratic sentiments can have to anarchic designs, if the importance of control is forgotten.³ He does, at times, suggest that democracy is adequate to the task of governing

2 To the question "Why discuss democracy in Hobbes, then?", I reply: While Hobbes is not as explicitly focused on theories of democracy as later moderns, his conceptions of statehood and sovereignty framed later democratic theory as desiderata, even criteria, of a strong democratic body. The challenge of proving that a political body, with such empirical obstacles to democratic character as unitary authority and absolute sovereignty, can nonetheless be conceived of as "of the people" calls upon the kind of mythological thinking which I seek to explore.

3 "For if we could suppose a great Multitude of men to consent in the observation of Justice, and other Lawes of Nature, without a common Power to keep them all in awe; we might as well suppose all Mankind to do the same; and then neither would be, nor need to be any Civill Government, or

a commonwealth, with a few provisos. In *De Cive* and *Leviathan* he cites several problems with the functioning of mass government; it is clear from his definition of democracy and his criticisms of its functioning that he understands this system of government as closer to what was practised in Athens than what passes for democracy in the present West. It is also clear that from *De Cive* to *Leviathan* his conception of democracy becomes more representational and less participatory. He defines democracy in *De Cive* thus: "The first [kind of commonwealth] is where *sovereign* power lies with an *Assembly* in which any citizen has the right to vote; it is called DEMOCRACY"⁴. The right to vote is not simply a right to elect representatives to decide on matters of legislation and state affairs, but rather a right to vote on those decisions themselves. This is clear from Hobbes' criticisms mentioned above, which focus on the burden of representing an overwhelming volume of individual views and interests in effective and timely debate. Because the exigencies of discussion require that the mass of people delegate discussion to assemblies of select representatives, rather than debating amongst the whole of the people themselves, Hobbes faults democracy for creating large assemblies which fall prey to sociological and mass-psychological faults rather than maintaining a purposive and rational focus on the facts of matters in debate. In addition to the burdens of creating an assembly in which all have adequate knowledge of the broad and complex matters involved in questions of state, and to the risks of having a debate perverted by the emotional power of eloquent speech among a crowd, the large representative assemblies which in democracies function as a substitute for direct

Commonwealth at all; because there would be peace without subjection." *Leviathan*, 118

4 *De Cive*, 91

presentation "[t]he third reason why deliberation in a large assembly is unprofitable is that it is a source of *factions* in the commonwealth, and *factions* are the source of sedition and civil war."⁵ As with all of Hobbes' reasoning, the background of any evaluation of politics is the threat of discord and eventually war, and democracy seems to fail because, being premised on the popular sovereignty invested in the popular body, it requires representation by bodies so populous as to be replicate the conflicting interest groups, called factions, which rational government was supposed to supplant.

Hobbes does qualify that indictment, however. Again in *De Cive*, he writes:

These disadvantages found in the deliberations of large assemblies prove that *Monarchy* is better than *Democracy* in so far as in *Democracy* questions of great importance are more often passed to such [large] assemblies for discussion than in a *Monarchy* [...] But if in a *Democracy* the *people* should choose to concentrate deliberations about war and peace and legislation in the hands of just one man or of a very small number of men, and were happy to appoint magistrates and public ministers, i.e. to have authority without executive power, then it must be admitted that *Democracy* and *Monarchy* would be equal in this matter.⁶

Here Hobbes seems to be open to a democratic government if it can find

⁵ *De Cive*, 123

⁶ *Ibid.*, 124-125

acceptable ways of executing a popular sovereignty in practice that steer clear of the risks of discord and sedition. And it seems that the kind of democratic government now ubiquitous in what may be called the free world is much like the compromise described above; the people reserve their sovereignty and so remain *authors* of the actions of state, but delegate the power to decide on those actions to a singular or small number of agents for practical reasons.⁷ But the sense in which the democratic body of the people retains authority is more abstract and passive than what is considered integral to democracy following the developments in liberal thought post-Hobbes. This should be taken together with the fact that modern democracies, with a professionalization and mechanization of function, are in functional terms not much different than what Hobbes describes as Aristocracy, that is, a system where sovereignty lies in an Assembly where some few, not all, of the people have a right to vote⁸ (on decisions, not on the identity of deciders). Hobbes' aristocratic "democracy", representative but not directly participatory, is in this view not so far from the present political scene, though he is strident in defending the deficit between democratic character and democratic practice.

This strange relation to sovereignty, preserved "theologico-politically" by a people even in their legal and functional submission to absolute representatives, is one point of entry into the mythological elements of Hobbes' politics. How is it that the people are authors of actions taken by a sovereign against whom they bear no rights, nor hold competing power? This question is answered by the identity of "people" in Hobbes'

7 Richard Tuck notes this in his introduction to *Leviathan*: "Hobbes consistently endorsed [a] view which is fundamental to modern democratic politics, which is that it makes sense to say that sovereignty can lie with a people even when they do not directly exercise it." xxxvii

8 See quote from *De Cive*, p. 124-125 on preceding page.

work, as distinguished from multitude. The frontispiece of *Leviathan* shows the sovereign as composed, from the neck down, of innumerable human bodies, a visual metaphor for the organic, corporeal schema of the commonwealth. The sovereign is not simply one of a number of persons, selected out of that number to act on their behalf, by weighing the desires and wills of others and enacting the balance of that measure, no more than the brain consults with the other cells in a body to execute their combined wills. He (or she, or even they) is rather authorized by the covenant by which people surrender their sovereignty against one another in a desire to exit the state of nature. The monarch, or assembly, is alone sovereign, because that sovereignty was not newly *created* out of bits of the sovereign right of each member in a commonwealth, but rather wholly *transferred* from those persons, and as such is no longer theirs to exercise. David Dyzenhaus notes the (to put it uncharitably) ad-hoc employment and transitory nature of popular sovereignty's role in Hobbes' grounding of sovereign right; in the original scheme of rational individuals authorizing a sovereign power for their protection, "Hobbes builds his theory of public order on an appeal to individual rationality, but then seeks to preclude individual rationality from any significant place in sustaining and recreating public order."⁹

The identity of the will of the governed with that of the governing person, and of the individual human beings of a commonwealth with one another as public person, is the kind of identity that could be called abstract, mythological, or, to borrow a term from Derrida and the deconstructionist literature, phantasmal. The phantasm of indivisible sovereignty, as discussed by Michael Naas in "*Comme si, comme ça*", is presented in the

9 Dyzenhaus, "Now the Machine Runs Itself", 6.

form of "this is so", rather than merely a theoretical exercise of "consider this *as if* it were so"¹⁰. The phantasm, then, is a conception of sovereignty, and fixable identity, that is insulated from critique and deconstruction by its location in a fictional space; it is not derivative of facts, nor is it parasitic on a theoretical representation of fact. It rather claims for itself a ground beyond historical, sociological or other such plainly factual conditions, sometimes in the theological realm of divinity, sometimes in the transcendental realm of right.¹¹ In fact, Hobbes' Leviathan (the state, as well as the treatise) fits halfway into Naas' characterization of phantasms: first, that it assumes self-coincidence, a self-identity that is indivisible and inviolable; second, that it holds itself sovereign because it can act from this self-sameness; third, it reflects a supposed natural and organic corporeality of a people, not the product of mechanism or artifact, and in this sense pure of conditioning; fourth, that it appears ahistorical (though the Leviathan does have a genesis in history, its legitimizing ground is more theological than historical, and the founding transfer of sovereignty is more a conceptual stage of development than an identifiable historical event); and fifth, that it tries to pass off "historically conditioned performative fiction as a constative or objective observation".¹² Schmitt argues that the Leviathan fails precisely because it is not what it claims to be on the third point of Naas' account, non-mechanicity. He writes "The intrinsic logic of the manmade artificial product 'state' does not culminate in a person but in a machine"; and "The sovereign-representative person is only the soul of the 'huge man' state [...] As a totality, the state is

10 "The power of sovereignty lies precisely in in this elision of a fictional origin and its real effects, the elision of a performative fiction (an "as if", a *comme si*) and a constative observation (an "as this" or a "like that", a *comme ça*)." Naas, 12

11 Ibid., 9

12 Ibid., 12

body and soul, a *homo artificialis*, and, as such, a machine."¹³

This sense of phantasm, the supplement of or substitution for a factual, conditioned account of the world by a fiction conjured outside of conditioning circumstances or developed from prior unconditional sovereignties, is very close to the sense in which I employ the word "myth" in this paper. The mythological mode of discourse, of creating and presenting the fictional along with the factual, is precisely the mode which I will argue is necessary to articulate, with authority and efficacy in governance, the unrevealed world of the future which must be anticipated when deciding a course in the present. This first point, that it is only a phantasmal unity which binds the represented amongst themselves, and binds them to the sovereign in a just subjection, establishes Hobbes' thought as dealing with myth at least performatively. While Hobbes is quite explicit in presenting the state Leviathan as a metaphor, his thorough-going application of that metaphor goes beyond a mere illustration of concepts and into the leverage of mythic appeal for rhetorical force.

The difference between a People and a crowd, between natural multiplicity and a fictive unity of natural persons inhabiting a commonwealth, is of great importance, firstly because of the role such conceptions play in Hobbes' claims about the sovereign representative's legitimacy, and secondly in illustrating the political-mythical side of his thinking. On the first count, Hobbes cites a deficient understanding of the distinction between crowds and peoples as a cause of dissolution in commonwealths, clarifying "A *people* is a *single* entity with a *single will*; you can attribute an act to it. None of this can be said of a crowd. In every commonwealth the People Reigns; for even in *Monarchies*

¹³ *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, 34

the *People* exercises power; for the people wills through the will of one man."¹⁴ And earlier "A Multitude of men, are made *One* Person, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented [...] For it is the *Unity* of the Representer, not the *Unity* of the Represented, that maketh the Person *One*."¹⁵ I include yet another passage which clearly states Hobbes' view on the creation of a civil unitary person:

The only way to erect such a Common Power [...] is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will: which is as much as to say, every one to owne, and acknowledge himselfe to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person, shall Act, or cause to be Acted [...] This is more than Consent, or Concord; it is a reall Unitie of them all, in one and the same Person [...] This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that *Mortall God*, to which wee owe under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defence.¹⁶

Clearly the will of which Hobbes writes is not the same as opinion or evaluative idea, in the sense of having content or being defined by intention towards a particular object, as when we may speak of the public will on a topic of current debate. Rather, the

¹⁴ *Leviathan*, 137

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120

public will for Hobbes is an authorizing power, a capacity which can be surrendered to and thus exercised by the sovereign representative of those willing subjects. The public will may be manifested by sovereign action, or spontaneously by the multitude, with observable sociological and material effects; yet, as conceived by Hobbes (and many others) it is a supra-physical force, a transferable quality of persons, that is posited to exist and to be amenable to certain operations of displacement and consolidation, and no less opaque to empirical detection than the soul. To posit such a foundation for legitimacy is to deal in phantasm, and to proclaim it as a fact among other natural and historical facts is to engage in the mythic mode as I have described it.

The task of explaining how will can be infused from a multitude into a person is one challenge to a theory such as Hobbes'; another challenge is to describe how the right to wield sovereign authority, once invested in a person (monarch or assembly) can then be transferred to another such person. Thus, the problems of succession loom in Hobbes' theory, for this theoretical reason and also because of the more practical concerns of the risk and uncertainty engendered by any change of regime. As the artificial body of the Leviathan requires a structure to function, it also requires a process of revitalization to persist, thus an account of succession is required to keep the Leviathan from dissolving each time the homunculus guiding its actions succumbs to mortality. In *De Cive* Hobbes believes that succession is only a problem for Monarchy, because in a democracy "sovereignty rests with the same person so long as there are citizens. For a people has no successor" and "Similarly in an *Aristocracy*, when one of the *optimates* dies, another is appointed by the rest to take his place, hence there is no *succession*", nor is succession an

issue in non-absolute monarchies because "*Monarchs* who exercise sovereign power only for a time are not actually monarchs but *ministers* of the commonwealth."¹⁷ In *Leviathan*, however, Hobbes extends the scope of the problem of succession to all forms of commonwealth, as "the matter being mortall, so that not onely Monarchs, but also whole Assemblies dy, it is necessary for the conservation of the peace of men, that that as there was order taken for an Artificiall Man, so there be order also taken, for an Artificiall Eternity to life [...] which men call the Right to *Succession*."¹⁸

That the individual wills of persons in society must, for the sake of the security of all, be taken up in a person, and further that the right to bear this person must be transferable to some particular natural person or group of persons, are not self-evident facts, but rather ideas posited in the justification of sovereign right. The reason they are *for Hobbes* not idle speculations but laws, of the order of natural and divine laws in their normative and descriptive force, is that they are answers to a question of survival. He explicitly states at every turn that the preservation of peace is the justification for each power granted to the sovereign, and for the rules by which that sovereign power is exercised.¹⁹ The initial coming-together of sovereign individuals and surrendering of

17 *De Cive*, 112

18 *Leviathan*, 135

19 It is crucial to understanding the scope of Hobbes' project that "peace" be understood as much broader than the absence of physical conflict. Much of the state of nature's agony is not the product of injuries of the flesh, but rather the mental anguish of uncertainty and fear. Protection from "war" is thus an immersive project to ensure felicitous conditions for the psychological and social health of the commonwealth, and material prosperity besides (though wealth has its own dangers to harmonious commonwealth). The following passage summarizes nicely Hobbes view of war's relation to peace:

Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man. For WARRE, consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is

rights to a representative²⁰, the absolute power of the representative²¹ and the rules of succession for these representatives, both are impositions on freedom for the sake of security. An even more thorough suppression of individual freedom, one might say a pre-emptive manoeuvre against such freedom, is to be found in Hobbes' prescriptions for public discourse and doctrine.

Beyond his own employment of myth to illustrate and justify his account of sovereignty, Hobbes' also writes *about* myth itself, both in the sense of religious doctrine, and in the sense of projections of the future. In taking examples from his discussion of religious doctrine, one must be mindful of a question about Hobbes' religious attitudes; it remains unclear to what degree he could be described as faithful or religious himself. He does pay a great deal of lip service to scriptural authority in that he spends much of *Leviathan* citing the Old Testament and constructing biblically-grounded arguments. But he also dismisses much of the divinity of religion, subjecting it to a naturalist, historicist reinterpretation. This raises the question of whether his employment of religion is done in good faith, that is, in giving due place to mystery, reverence, etc. in the public life of the state; or rather, if it is merely a skilful manipulation of religious language in service to his absolutist state theory. In Richard Tuck's introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Leviathan*, he notes that the majority of historians who have scrutinized the evidence of

sufficiently known [...] So the nature of War, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. Ibid., 88-89

20 "The finall Cause, End, or Designe of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of restraint upon themselves, (in which wee see them live in Commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre [...]" Ibid., 117

21 "All the duties of sovereigns are implicit in this one phrase: *the safety of the people is the supreme law.*" *De Cive*, 143

Hobbes' motives in advocating a robust control of religious doctrine by the sovereign have concluded it was done primarily in the interests of control and not enlightenment.²²

Paul Dumouchel's take on Hobbes' religious advice is even harsher, charging that:

His solution [to conflicts between religious and civil laws] consists in asserting that both laws rarely contradict each other and that when they do, the subject patiently endure the harsh rule of his temporal master. Such a 'solution' has often suggested that Hobbes could not be sincere, that he had no understanding of religion and considered it little more than a bothersome complication in his purely rational scheme of politics. His writings on religion [are] but (largely unsuccessful) attempts to appease the anger of querulous clerics.²³

Whether or not Hobbes really did revere the Christian doctrine, or accord true piety to religious faith, it seems clear that he maintained a skeptical outlook on the publicity of revealed or absolute truth. "No Discourse whatsoever", he wrote, "can End in absolute knowledge of Fact, past, or to come."²⁴ He also believed that discourse never reached beyond the exchange of human marks for human ideas, and as such all credence given to things publicly expressed amounted to a faith in a human source. To use a religious example:

²² *Leviathan*, xlii

²³ Dumouchel, "Hobbes and Secularization", 39-40

²⁴ *Leviathan*, 47

... when wee Believe that the Scriptures are the word of God, having no immediate revelation from God himselfe, our Beleeefe, Faith, and Trust is in the Church; whose word we take, and acquiesce therein [...] So that it is evident, that whatsoever we believe, upon no other reason, then what is drawn from authority of men onely, and their writings; whether they be sent from God or not, is Faith in men onely.²⁵

Thus Hobbes shows that faith in human authority under-girds faith in anything that is reported but not seen; as suitable as such a basis is for religion, so is it for the theology of sovereign power. And since religious pronouncements rest on human authority, the highest human authority should, by rights, also claim to itself the right to determine religious truth, which Hobbes of course advocates.

The public faith is a source of great power and danger, as it can lead to factional disputes on points of disagreement, and create a rival basis of authority against the civil sovereign. The power of determining public belief is also appealing to sovereign control because it is bloodless when properly applied (i.e. not by forceful punishment of heterodoxy); the smooth and peaceful life of the commonwealth is well served by a sovereign authority which guides the populace to concord and peace through shared beliefs and values.²⁶ Schmitt notes the prominence, equal to that given to symbols of

²⁵ Ibid., 49

²⁶ "[I]t is annexed to the Sovereignty, to be Judge of what Opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what

armed force, given to symbols of religious doctrine and authority on the frontispiece of *Leviathan*, remarking "The important realization that ideas and distinctions are political weapons, in fact, specific weapons of wielding 'indirect' power, was made evident on the first page of the book."²⁷ The distaste which Hobbes felt towards violence (which may be fairly surmised, I believe, from his flight from political trouble during his life, his near-obsession with the avoidance of war, and the rather humanitarian bent of much of his writing²⁸) is one explanation for emphasizing the power of the pulpit, and of the university chair, over that of the sword in preserving peace and happiness. Another explanation is its effectiveness. As later advocates and critics of totalitarian government have noted, the control of thought, provided that an authority has the power and ubiquity to effect such control persistently and seamlessly, is far more effective than the control of action stemming from thought.²⁹

In contrast to the typical mould of totalitarian social engineering (at least in caricature), Hobbes did not seek to produce unthinking subjects. He was in fact quite

conducting to Peace; be trusted withall, in speaking to Multitudes of people; and who shall examine the Doctrines of all bookes before they be published. For the Actions of Men proceed from their Opinions; and in the well governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of men's Actions, in order to their Peace, and Concord." (Ibid., 124)

27 *Leviathan in the State Theory of Hobbes*, 18

28 For instance, this passage from *Leviathan*:

"The multitude of poor, and yet strong people still increasing, they are to be transplanted into Countries not sufficiently inhabited: where neverthelesse, they are not to exterminate those they find there; but constrain them to inhabit closer together, and not range a great deal of ground, to snatch what they find; but to court each little Plot with art and labour, to give them their sustenance in due season." (239) (It concludes, however, "And then when al the world is overchargd with Inhabitants, then the last remedy of all is Warre; which provideth for every man, by Victory, or Death." (Ibid.) War and death are never far from Hobbes view, even in his warmer moments.)

29 A literary example is the Party dictionary in George Orwell's *1984*, on which the narrator notes "The greatest difficulty facing the compilers of the Newspeak dictionary was not to invent new words, but, having invented them, to make sure what they meant." (Orwell, 1984, 304). Likewise, determining the meaning of words already in use is a prerogative both for Hobbesian science and for Hobbesian politics, as shown here: "The Use and End of Reason, is not the finding of the summe, and the truth of one, or a few consequences, remote from first definitions and settled significations of names; but to begin at these; and proceed from one consequence to another." (*Leviathan*, 33)

passionate about improving the thinking of the public, by the application of scientific thinking to social discourse and the removal of superstition (it bears mentioning that Hobbes distinguishes between religion and superstition thus: "*Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicquely allowed, RELIGION; not allowed, SUPERSTITION.*")³⁰ The eradication of superstition therefore amounts to the eradication of heterodoxy on fearful attitudes concerning matters invisible, and thus leads quite directly to a mandate for religious orthodoxy, or at least uniform profession of faith, under sovereign doctrinal authority of course). Much of the early part of *Leviathan* is dedicated to showing how thinking is done properly³¹, and how it is done improperly, and the consequences of good and bad reasoning. The correct instrumental use of reason by subjects is quite compatible with Hobbes' sovereign, even beneficial to his program, as it removes random variations in thought that can arise from the erroneous use of common facts, even if those facts are of a uniform public stock. So long as they think rightly *from the right premises* then few chances for discord, factional dissolution and war exist. The sovereign therefore can encourage brightness of mind, but limit the depth to which publicly tolerated critique can reach. Of primary importance is the teaching of sovereign right, to secure the authority by which all other actions proceed and avoid the necessity to enforce authority by violence should it be contested. From *Leviathan*:

[I]t is against his Duty, to let the people be ignorant, or mis-

³⁰ *Leviathan*, 42

³¹ "And therefore, when the Discourse is put into Speech, and begins with the Definitions of Words, and proceeds by Connexion of the same into generall Affirmations, and of these again into Syllogismes; the End or last summe is called the Conclusion; and the thought of the mind by it signified, is that conditional Knowledge, or Knowledge of the consequences of words, which is commonly called SCIENCE." (Ibid., 47-48)

informed of the grounds, and reasons of those his essential Rights; because thereby men are easie to be seduced, and drawn to resist him, when the Commonwealth shal require their use and exercise [...] And the grounds of these Rights, have the rather need to be diligently, and truly taught; because they cannot be maintained by any Civill Law, or terrour of legall punishment.³²

Because these doctrines are so important to public security, Hobbes makes their dissemination a matter necessarily of state authority, arguing "They also that have authority to teach, or to enable others to teach the people their duty to Sovereign Power, and instruct them in the knowledge of what is just [...] are Publique Ministers: Ministers, in that they doe it not by their own Authority, but by anothers; and Publique, because they doe it (or should doe it) by no Authority, but that of the Sovereign."³³ They that do *not* have authority to teach such matters, but do so anyway, are suspect as pretenders to that original authority of which approved teachers are ministers. All persons trying to convince others to accept their reasoning should be scrutinized with skeptical and careful reasoning, *except* for the sovereign him- or herself (or itself, in the case of an assembly). Hobbes' argument for this exception is as follows:

For he that pretends to teach men the way of so great felicity, pretends to govern them; that is to say, to rule, and

³² Ibid., 231-232

³³ Ibid., 167

reign over them; which is a thing, that all men naturally desire, and is therefore worthy to be suspected of Ambition and Imposture; and consequently, ought to be examined, and tryed by every man, before hee yeeld them obedience; unlesse he have yeelded it them already, in the institution of a Common-wealth; as when the Prophet is the Civill Sovereign, or by the Civil Sovereign Authorized.³⁴

The power of instruction is so great that it is to be jealously guarded. But the sovereign's concern also extends to ensuring that the contents of doctrines beyond those of his/her/its legitimacy are also conducive to the security and peace of the commonwealth. The starkness of the sovereign's claim to absolute authority, especially over the public profession of truth, is jarring, but it should not obscure the beneficent role that was envisioned for a public discourse so controlled. The creation of a society educated in its own self-care is a primary goal of this doctrinal control (in addition to the goal of peace though stability that all Hobbesian precepts serve at least indirectly), as Hobbes urges "the procuration of the *safety of the people* [...] also all other Contentments of life [...] is intended should be done, not by care applyed to Individualls, further than their protection from injuries [...] but by a generall Providence, contained in publique Instruction, bothe of Doctrine, and Example [...]"³⁵

The control of doctrine, by the promotion of beneficent doctrines as much, or

³⁴ Ibid., 297

³⁵ Ibid., 231

more, than by the persecution of noxious ones, can fairly be seen as an educational, civic and social program covering all of public life, not merely a propaganda program to prevent dissent. Hobbes makes room for dissent in the private sphere, distinguishing between public profession and private conscience, much like the distinction between the multitude and the people. Private heterodoxy is not a great threat, because the multitude is already heterogeneous by nature, and as private persons subjects may harbour whatever beliefs they wish. But the heterodoxy of public confession threatens the People, conceived as that entity formed by the persons of the multitude united; not simply in the sense that heterodox views may lead to conflict that injures individuals among the People, but also in the sense that the People itself disappears back into the multitude as their unified public person begins to be differentiated. Hobbes therefore distinguishes between:

a *Publique*, and a *Private* Worship. *Publique*, is the
Worship that a Common-wealth performeth, as one Person.
Private, is that which a Private person exhibiteth. *Publique*,
in respect of the whole Common-wealth, is Free³⁶; but in
respect of Particular men it is not so. *Private*, is in secret
Free; but in the sight of the multitude, it is never without
some Restraint, either from the Lawes, or from the Opinion
of men; which is contrary to the nature of Liberty.³⁷

³⁶ i.e. free from the authority of other commonwealths

³⁷ *Leviathan*, 239

Given that Hobbes seems to lack a religious fervour, except in employing theology to support civil doctrine, it seems entirely likely that the private worshipper really is to be left to his or her own conscience, unmolested by doctrinal fundamentalists. To insist on private conformity, on pain of punishment, to a standard that most, being individuals, would fail to attain, would be to invite the kind of anxiety and defensive circumspection that Hobbes identifies with the state of nature. The liberal approach to private belief, and its simple separation from public confession, suggest that Hobbes is not a religious but rather a civil fundamentalist; by advocating the enlistment of scriptural and ecclesiastical (not to mention also academic) authority into the service of sovereign legitimization, he argued for the use of a transcendental supplement to legal or historical accounts of legitimacy. To a significant degree this is simply strategic and pragmatic; the role of religion in political and civil life in Hobbes' time was so large as to require either exploitation or containment by a sovereign power wishing to claim and exercise authority. But beyond such practical considerations, Hobbes' intertwining of sovereign power with a theological account of right erects a mythical narrative of the just state, rooted in an ahistorical past. The adherence to formal relations of sovereign right and subject obedience, modelled on relations between divinity and humanity, is so strong that Hobbes proscribes rebellion against an infidel sovereign by Christians subject to him as not only uncivil but also sinful.³⁸

I hope to have shown thus far Hobbes' role in grounding the project of this thesis, by demonstrating his indispensability to thinking of the instrumental and moral

38 "And when the Civill Sovereign is an Infidel, every one of his own Subjects that resisteth him, sinneth against the Laws of God (for such are the Laws of Nature,) and rejecteth the counsell of the Apostles, that admonisheth all Christians to obey their Princes..." Ibid., 414

necessities of states, and the importance of extra-rational doctrine to civil discourse. In Hobbes' case the employment of the mythic mode is subtle and latent, using parallels between religious and civil relations of power to legitimize authority, rather than explicitly appealing to mythical or religious content. I would like to add another dimension in which Hobbes' contribution to political theory serves the argument to be defended in this work, which is the temporal extension of the sovereign's realm of responsibility. In Hobbes' writings, there is not a great deal of commitment to working within democratic settings; he seems to drift between benign acceptance of democratic validity (with provisos) and a more wary skepticism about its stability as compared to his preferred monarchical scheme. As such, the balancing of, on the one hand, the demands of an assembly of the living population of a commonwealth, and on the other hand, the objective and generationally unbiased assessment of sovereign responsibility, is not of any great importance to sovereign legitimacy. For the Leviathan, the demands of the multitude are a concern for competent management of the commonwealth's internal affairs, but not a legitimate claim against the sovereign's prerogative. The absolute and divinely ordained authority of the sovereign is ground enough to justify decisions favouring the historically extended interest of the commonwealth over the exigencies of any present moment. Hobbes also ascribes anxiety to humankind as a primal condition of its existence, "For being assured that there be causes of all things that have arrived hitherto, or shall arrive hereafter; it is impossible for a man, who continually endeavoureth to secure himselfe against the evil he feares, and procure the good he desireth, no to be in a perpetuall solicitude of the time to come [...]"³⁹

39 Ibid., 76

There are some indications however, which point to other, less totalizing grounds of support in Hobbes for a citation of other-timely responsibilities for political decisions. First, and rather plainly, I cite a passage in *De Cive* wherein Hobbes claims that the sovereign "has done his duty if he has made every effort, to provide by sound measures for the welfare of as many of them as possible for as long as possible [...]".⁴⁰ If we take seriously the eternal life of the sovereign personified (noting that this idea is developed in a later work than the source of the preceding quote), as granted by the fictive unity of all will and authority in the sovereign and the succession thereof, then clearly we should interpret the duty to "as many" for "as long" as possible to be an obligation to the perpetual welfare of the commonwealth, and as such argue for a strong measure of restraint and charity in balancing present concerns against likely future interests.

In another excerpt from *De Cive*, Hobbes warns against the doctrine of an absolute right to private property:

The seventh doctrine inimical to commonwealths is that *individual citizens have absolute Dominion over their possessions*; i.e. such a *property* in them as excludes the right of all their fellow-citizens and of the commonwealth itself to those things [...] Your *Dominion* therefore and your *property* are as extensive as the commonwealth wishes and lasts for just so long; as in a family, the father determines which goods are the *property* of the children and for how

40 *De Cive*, 143

long.⁴¹

Here there are two important ideas at work. First, a refutation of the right to deprive the commonwealth, both as a whole and as individuals, of the use of property privately held. This right is not only contrary to Hobbes' absolute right of sovereigns, but also to the basic logic of commonwealth, insofar as it totally denies (in principle) any claim laid on individually held property by that commonwealth which makes security of property possible. Thus the institution of property rights protects the property of subjects against appropriation by other subjects, but not by the sovereign, who may deem such appropriation necessary to the protection of the commonwealth. As for the responsibility of the sovereign to future instantiations of the commonwealth, the denial of private dominion over possessions removes an important barrier to a doctrine of cross-generational justice and provision of welfare.

The second idea at work in the cited passage is the strong paternalism and comparison of the sovereign to a father assigning possession of goods to his children. Again assuming a timeless sovereign composed of a succession of impersonations, the sovereign's determination of what goods are to be enjoyed by what generation, what opportunities of enjoyment or exploitation are enacted or foregone at whose expense, are analogous to the father's role. Two important differences are, first, that the father's natural dominion over his children derives from the power of generation, in contrast to the sovereign's right by institution, and second, that in a commonwealth the generations do not proceed by a clear serial succession as in natural families, complicating the renewal

41 Ibid., 136

of the social contract with new generations.

The power held by previous instantiations of a commonwealth over those which follow can be analogous to the relation of an imperial nation to a colony, if the commonwealth embarks on massive irreversible changes or structural and institutional entrenchments which bind the choices of the future. Hobbes writes that when a people is ruled "by an Assembly, not of their own choosing, 'tis a Monarchy; not of *One* man, over another man; but of one people, over another people."⁴² This perhaps best captures the asymmetrical, non-responsible relation of present decisions to the future bearers of consequences, as each new generation must "decolonize" their present from the past, while responsibly administering their own colonization of their future. Commonwealths are faced with the challenge of deciding whether their responsibility to posterity is best served by positive intervention or benign neglect, just as contemporaneous nations must balance the potential goods and harms of intervening in each other's affairs.

Hobbes can be heard addressing this challenge, advising restraint in esteeming one's ability to, first, predict the distant outcomes of decisions, and, second, set by some great decision the course of future generations. On the first point: "There is no action of man in this life, that is not the beginning of so long a chain of Consequence, as no humans Providence, is high enough, to give a man a prospect to the end."⁴³ This is quite in line with Hobbes' skepticism about human reasoning, and despite the divine source of a sovereign's duty, there is no supernatural power of prediction granted to those bound to perform it. Given the limited ability to predict remote consequences, a sovereign is best

⁴² *Leviathan*, 135

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 253

advised to focus on the time at hand, when actions are more predicable in their outcomes, while still giving due attention to the future.

On the second point, I cite a passage of clearly inspirational to Schmitt's conception of politics:

Nor is it enough for the security, which men desire should last all the time of their life, that they be governed, and directed by one judgement, for a limited time; as is one Battell, or one Warre. For though they obtain a Victory by their unanimous endeavour against a forraign enemy; yet afterwards, when either they have no common enemy, or he that by one part is held for enemy, is by another part held for friend, they must needs by the difference of their interests dissolve, and fall again into a Warre amongst themselves.⁴⁴

This would counsel against losing sight of future contingencies by identifying the whole commonwealth as engaged in one moment of its history, or defined by one episode of enmity to a particular enemy. The preservation of enduring interests in common is necessary to the commonwealth's survival, and distortions caused by (historically speaking) transitory passions hinder such longer-term stability. A mythic narration of the commonwealth's future is needed to plot a course beyond the contemporary circumstance, and while such fictive devices carry a risk of abuse (demagoguery,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 119

seductive optimism), participation in the imagination of the commonwealth's future is a duty that Hobbes' sovereign cannot ignore. The use of myth can be employed either to justify strong paternalism over the future, painting an optimistic picture of the consequences of development and progress, or just as well it may be used to urge restraint with cautionary images of a future ravaged by misguided ambition in the present. The mythic mode of presenting the future as concretely determined, and of identifying the people of that future with past constituents of a collective will, does not by itself argue for restraint or ambition; it does, however, engender a pointed sense of care and responsibility. By choosing to use mythic realizations and identifications, a deciding authority strengthens whatever case it has made on other grounds for some direction and degree of action, avoiding paralysis and weakness of legitimacy but not the pitfalls of poor decision. Hobbes' insistence on the control of public confession and factual disputes by the sovereign, combined with his recognition of the importance of religion and superstition in the civil and political life of the commonwealth, suggest in my view a possible endorsement of mythic presentation and justification of the state. It would be an overstatement, however, to claim that my own view of myth is shared by Hobbes in explicit or latent form.

Chapter 2

The tradition of Western political thought which was in large part shaped by Hobbes' contribution found itself challenged and transformed in the centuries following Leviathan. The emergence of nation-states, and increasing popular participation in government through elected representatives, made obsolete Hobbes' singular focus on the monarchical right to govern absolutely and raised questions of the partition of sovereignty that the political vision of Leviathan could not accommodate without revising its fundamental precepts.

The modern national states and (somewhat) popular government that took hold in the 19th century were themselves threatened by shifts in the political landscape in the late 19th and early 20th century. Whereas the nationalisms of the 19th century placed legitimacy on the basis of national representation, the increasing power of popular masses pushed this basis further along a trajectory away from singular personal sovereignty, through national representation and towards popular participation. However, the questions of power, authority and collective welfare which framed Hobbes' politics continued to frame these shifting discussions of an emerging mass age, and Hobbes' treatment can be heard echoing in the foremost theorists of this new modernity.

Carl Schmitt has been called the "German Machiavelli" or the "German Hobbes". This is not entirely inaccurate, but it should be qualified; I will return to the matter of Schmitt's divergence from Hobbes shortly. Schmitt can, arguably, be identified as the foremost thinker of his time who interrogated the nature of legitimacy, power and authority in an era of mass-society, democracy and parliamentary or republican

governments. When his earliest, and still most important, works were produced during the Weimar Republic, the nation state was already facing challenges from transnational forces. Chiefly, ideological responses to the economic order of international industrial capitalism emerged from (or, perhaps more accurately, seized upon and redefined) both the left and right poles of popular politics, and demanded a response from established state authority. The power of technological change, the dramatic shifts in wealth production and distribution, and the concentration of population in cities, all contributed to a modern crisis in which two broad camps emerged.

To the left lay those who sought to up-end the hierarchy of private wealth and state authority, either (1) by transferring wealth and power downwards to the economically and politically disenfranchised (the statist socialist approach), or (2) by destroying the economic and political systems and replacing them with less centralized and less vertically differentiated structures of organization (the anarchist approach). Mixtures of these two arch-left positions (such as anarcho-syndicalism) were prominent as well. Many of the thinkers advocating from this side were following or responding to Marxist and later Leninist socialism, though there existed a wide variety of socialist visions besides this Hegelian thread. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a contemporary of Marx, was chief among these non-Marxist socialist thinkers, and an early anarchist who was influential on a generation of socialist and anarchist thinkers straddling the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. Drawing both on Marxist history and philosophy, and on Proudhon's more anarcho-syndicalist approach, Georges Sorel emerged as an impassioned and rhetorically extreme advocate of interruptive and disruptive

revolutionary changes, and took seriously the power of irrational forces in the shaping of politics and history. He explicitly cites myth as a necessary tool to inspire and guide popular action, and not merely in the sense of cynical manipulation.

To the right, more centralization and integration of state authority and economic power was sought as a defence against these forces perceived as dangerous and disordering. Most of Schmitt's predecessors in this tradition were Catholic royalist thinkers, such as deMaistre, deBonald and Cortés, who advocated a restoration of monarchical power following the bloody chaos that was ignited by France's revolutions. Schmitt is very much the inheritor of this stridently arch-conservative lineage, but his insight and force of historical relevance is due in no small part to his very serious regard for the most trenchant critics to his left. Schmitt took Marx's thought and influence very seriously⁴⁵, and though he was certainly no Marxist, he shared Marx's antipathy for bourgeois economics and (depoliticized) politics. He recognized that Marxist politics, with its substantive goals, historical convictions and, very importantly, with its divisive categories of class, posed a challenge that liberal politics was incapable of facing. Schmitt also gives a great deal of attention to the work of Sorel, whose regard for the politics of the irrational he shared. While Sorel and Schmitt could be read as polar opposites in their values, approach and goals, they share a bond in their awareness of the inadequacy of procedural, rational politics to manage the forces immanent in all politics

45 See, for instance, the third chapter of Schmitt's *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, "Dictatorship in Marxist Thought", in which he writes admiringly of Marx's conviction, theoretical invention, and acute awareness of historical contingency. Also, in *The Concept of the Political*, he writes "The most conspicuous and historically the most effective example [of binary antitheses which replace more complex constructions in times of conflict] is the antithesis formulated by Karl Marx; bourgeoisie and proletariat." 74

and explosively charged by new qualities of modernity. Importantly for this thesis, he also shared with Sorel a view that myth is an indispensable tool in shaping, guiding, and legitimizing plans of action and forms of power.

Schmitt's contribution to this movement (the re-centering and elevation of state authority) endures in part because it goes deeper than a mere praise or apologia for the statist forces which culminated in the Fascisms of the 20s and 30s (and beyond). Rather, like Machiavelli and Hobbes, his work prior to (and in some instances after) his Nazi involvement addresses fundamental matters of power, legitimacy and authority that are historically and metaphysically prior to any realized political system, Fascist or otherwise. It is Schmitt's thoughts on a necessity to confront the political, the role of myth in providing identity and substance to a people, and the grounding of sovereign legitimacy that are of primary importance to this thesis, and I discuss his treatment of these by first outlining his critique of an impotent liberalism from which, he believed, politics needed to be saved.⁴⁶

Returning to Schmitt's divergence from Hobbes, it should be noted that while Schmitt's role in the theorizing of modern to post-modern Western governments is

⁴⁶ Here is a typical Schmittian expression of antipathy towards liberalism from *Political Theology*, using the words of Donoso Cortés: "The essence of liberalism is negotiation, the cautious half-measure, in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive bloody battle, can be transformed into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision to be suspended forever in an everlasting discussion." 63

And in his own words: "The kind of economic-technical thinking that prevails today is no longer capable of perceiving a political idea. ... Political ideas are generally recognized only when groups can be identified that have a plausible economic interest in turning them to their advantage. Whereas, on the one hand, the political vanishes into the economic or technical-organizational, on the other hand the political dissolves into the everlasting discussion of cultural and philosophical-historical commonplaces... The core of the political idea, the exacting moral decision, is evaded in both." Ibid.,

analogous to Hobbes' role in the theorizing of sovereign kingdoms, there are important substantive differences in the two thinkers' projects. Schmitt is not merely Hobbes updated for the 20th century; his contribution is not foundational of a tradition in the way that Hobbes' is (perhaps this may change). Some have even claimed that Schmitt and Hobbes are in fact strongly opposed; Yves Charles Zarka wrote that Hobbes was himself an arch anti-Schmittian.⁴⁷ One key difference is that Hobbes offers a substantive basis for the evaluation of a sovereign's actions; he claims that the protection of the peoples' physical safety and enjoyment of life is the criterion by which a monarch qualifies him or herself as sovereign. By linking sovereignty to the protection of subjects, Hobbes grounded the right of monarchs in a reciprocal relationship of duty and, as such, argued for a just basis of authority.⁴⁸ He even goes so far as to claim a divine origin for the duty laid on the sovereign, though as I have noted before this may have been somewhat disingenuous. Schmitt, by contrast, offers little in the way of a basis of just authority or moral imperatives for sovereign action⁴⁹; rather, his groundings of state authority and sovereign power are a descriptive account of the metaphysics of sovereignty and political power. While Hobbes used theology (and scriptural revision) to bolster his arguments,

47 "En somme, Il n'y a plus anti-schmittien que Hobbes. Ce qui veut dire que Schmitt est livré d'une manière constante et répétée à un détournement des positions philosophiques fondamentales de Hobbes. Or ce détournement a consisté à arracher les concepts politiques de Hobbes au contexte de la rationalité dans lequel ils ont été élaborés pour les reconfigurer dans le cadre d'une nouvelle mythologie politique." Zarka, "La mythe contre la raison: Carl Schmitt ou la triple trahison de Hobbes", in *Carl Schmitt ou le mythe du politique*, 47.

48 William E. Scheuerman notes that Schmitt's reading of Hobbes, and particularly his attribution of decisionism to Hobbes, "obscures Hobbes' dependence on normative ideas (most notably, the idea of the social contract)". "International Law as Political Myth", 540-541.

49 "Schmitt never put together a positive account of what political order should be. Indeed, he regarded such an endeavour as part of the Enlightenment legacy which attempted to impose an unattainable universal order on humankind. Rather he proceeded negatively through polemics against liberalism's attempt to construct a rational political order." Dyzenhaus, "Liberalism After the Fall", 10.

marshalling the content of religious doctrine to support his project, Schmitt uses theology as a conceptual framework onto which he maps the ontology and metaphysics of politics. In summation, Schmitt can be characterized as much more formal and abstract than Hobbes, even though he himself decried a substance-less formalism and metaphysical nihilism in the liberal politics he attacked, and insisted on concreteness of all politics.⁵⁰ He argued for a political virtue of doing well, i.e. clear apprehension and effective agency. There are two important exceptions to this lack of content in his political prescriptions: first, the political Catholicism which he endorses early on (in his 1923 work *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*) and which later disappears, at least in explicit expression, in his subsequent writings.⁵¹ After a golden age of writings from 1919's *Political Romanticism* to 1932's *Concept of the Political*, Schmitt's support of political unity and strong statism became particularized in a growing support of the Nazi party, and his writing acquired a normative content of Volkism, arguing for racial homogeneity as the basis of state survival (see 1933's *State, Movement, Volk*). It is my hope, and doubtless the hope of many other readers of Schmitt, that his theoretical framework does not inevitably lead to adoption of the kind of normative content which he himself chose in the nadir of his career.

Another key difference between Schmitt and Hobbes is the degree to which the two thinkers' notions of politics are framed by ongoing change, and the different tasks of explanation and justification posed by dominantly past- or future-regarding narratives of

50 "First, all political concepts, images, and terms ... are focused on a specific conflict and are bound to a concrete situation..." *Concept of the Political*, 30

51 See McCormick's "Political Theory and Political Theology", p. 830-840 for a useful summary of the early development of Schmitt's thought away from explicit political Catholicism.

authority and identity. Hobbes' world, while certainly tumultuous and witness to the first signs of modernity, was less dynamic than Schmitt's in that sovereign entities like kings and churches were prime movers of events in their realms. The modern and early post-modern (that is to say, post-WW1) world of Schmitt was marked by forces and events that were not necessarily controlled by the will of identifiable sources; sovereign rulers were not free to simply maintain relations with external sovereigns and manage their own affairs domestically, but rather were imposed upon by often diffuse and anonymous forces. The image of the sovereign as a God in *Leviathan* conveys the notion that he or she administers to a realm under his or her control, and by laws and orders shapes this realm by will. This sovereign's defining duty is to wield supreme power justly and competently. By contrast, Schmitt's sovereign is not all-powerful in the sense of dictating the affairs of his or her realm; the Schmittian sovereign's defining duty and power is that of decision. Faced with a world of forces beyond deliberate control, and a pace of social and technical change that outstrips any desire to be the sole author of the path of a nation's progress, decision rather than creation is the act by which a post-modern sovereign shapes events. In a world which is already always in motion, navigation may supplant construction as a prime survival skill.⁵²

Schmitt also contravenes Hobbes' insistence on internal unity and avoidance of discord by focusing on friend/enemy distinctions and insisting that a concrete internal

52 This comment merits further argument; the change in focus, from building a future from principles to navigating the currents of change towards a future shaped by non-political currents, may not be so dramatic as to constitute a complete inversion. Even if it did we may still ask if the latter position is an apt approach to pervasive unpredictability and uncontrollability, or merely a mistaken capitulation of sovereignty to "history" or "progress".

enemy be identified in order for political identity to emerge. Schmitt's heightened anxiety about defining a people and escaping a dangerous ambiguity of identity is in contrast to Hobbes' more practically tolerant (though still absolutist in principle) stance. Following the preceding point about the more politically and socially dynamic context of Schmitt's thought, however, it may be fairly accorded that a twentieth-century sovereign does not have the power to prevent factions and disputes from arising, as might have been possible in Hobbes' time; such preventative measures being obviated, reasserting unity and peace by backing "friends" against "enemies" in a dispute may be the only means of hastening their resolution, if the dispute is in fact built on irreconcilable substantive differences. Still, this does not excuse Schmitt from charges that he is overly insistent on resolution, and fails to give due consideration to the option of simply enduring disputes rather than seeking their absolute end.⁵³

Schmitt's emphasis on the need for decision and clarity above all else lies near the heart of his, and others', attacks on liberalism, particularly in liberal parliamentary democracies of a "bourgeois" stripe. Schmitt seems to respect those thinkers who are most fundamentally opposed to his views on his most dear concerns (such as Sorel), precisely because, first, they are aware of the existence and import of these concerns, and, second, they align themselves unequivocally with one side of a dichotomy. Schmitt finds this awareness and conviction lacking in the legalistic, procedural, formal understanding of politics he attributes to liberalism, or at least to a degenerate,

53 "As a guideline for politics, decisionism is obviously of limited value. There are, of course, situations which require decision-making; but other situations can be overcome only by enduring, not dissolving, tensions." Bernhard Schlink, "Why Carl Schmitt?", 433

contradictory form of liberalism. The "anti-metaphysical metaphysics"⁵⁴ of this political stance, which enforces a nihilistic view of substantive values in politics without realizing that this nihilism is itself an arrogation of values, represents for Schmitt a hypocrisy in practice and a blindness in perception⁵⁵. Failing to see that evaluative, substantive disputes cannot be avoided in politics, and seeking to exclude such matters from the practice of politics, liberalism is doomed, believes Schmitt, to fall under the wheels of history. The deliberative, discursive model of decision-making is for Schmitt merely a dodge, a procedure for separating off the parts of an issue which are not "political" in Schmitt's sense and debating them ad nauseam while the core of the matter, which does not admit of multilaterally satisfying compromise, is ignored. Citing an earlier critique by one of his main influences, he wrote "Liberalism, with its contradictions and compromises, existed for Donoso Cortés only in that short interim period in which it was possible to answer the question 'Christ or Barabbas?' with a proposal to adjourn or appoint a commission of investigation."⁵⁶

This is of course an exaggeration of liberalism's, and for that matter any parliamentarism's, bias against clear decision. In practice, decisions are sought and made, and discussions are not interminable though they may drag on for decades. But another of Schmitt's charges against liberalism, that in trying to abstain from decisions of value and

54 "On the one hand, [Schmitt] claims that [private interest groups] politics are the real politics of liberalism. On the other hand, he asserts that liberalism has no politics at all. ... It is a contradiction that pervades the doctrine to reside at its deepest level because liberalism's rationalist metaphysics is antimetaphysical." Dyzenhaus, "Now the Machine Runs Itself", 5

55 The uncharitable interpretation of liberalism's neutrality is that is nihilistic with regard to normative content. A charitable stance would be to suppose that liberalism's reliance on discussion and argument to produce consensus in fact reveals a faith, not always explicit, in discoverable normative principles.

56 *Political Theology*, 62

partisanship it ignores the essence of the political, hits deeper than his caricatures of parliamentary dithering. In one of his signature phrases,⁵⁷ Schmitt identifies as definitively political those contests in which participants may be distinguished as friends and enemies. More than simply a sociological comment about the usefulness of outside foes in political practice, this point removes “politics” from a settled, predictably mechanistic relationship with economics, technocratic management, public relations and so on, and gives it an interruptive, violent (in the abstract sense) and extra-systematic character. A politics (in the common sense) which places a premium on inclusion and neutrality cannot begin to engage political questions in Schmitt's sense, because its first instinct is to dispel or avoid the enmity which originates politics. The enemy discovered in these political moments is, says Schmitt, not abstract but an actual person capable of killing or being killed; this personification of the sources and sites of enmity makes abstraction to less bloody conceptions impossible without diverging from Schmitt.

57 ""The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy. This provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition or one indicative of substantial content." *The Concept of the Political*, 26

On Schmitt's currency as a source of emblematic phrases, Bernhard Schlink writes "Today Schmitt's slogans no longer serve as shorthand for his theories. They fascinate in and of themselves. They are superbly formulated - and yet, the much praised sheen of Schmitt's language does not result from particularly clear or beautiful speech, but from resolute and clear-cut, determined wording. It comes stomping in, allows for no rebuttal, requires no justification." "Why Carl Schmitt?", 433.

Stathis Gourgouris, in "Schmitt with Sorel", quotes Heiner Müller making a similar point: "Carl Schmitt is theater. His texts are theatrical performances. I am not interested in whether he was right or not." 1491

I cite these comments not to discount Schmitt's importance, or to suggest that his reception is based on mistaken or superficial interpretations of his work, but rather to acknowledge the significant problem of his evocative language, which, as with other theorists who employ striking style, poses a non-philosophical distraction to readers of his work. The irrational violence with which Schmitt and his theoretical cohort are associated makes this charismatic style doubly problematic in that it gives rise to a secondary literature that is emotionally as well as intellectually inspired.

Schmitt emphasizes war, the actual killing of people organized as friends against enemies, as the endpoint of political dispute. In adapting Schmitt for more peaceful purposes, I am hopeful that the power of his theoretical frames can survive a twisting of this last point away from the inevitability of bloodletting. Fritsch⁵⁸ notes that much of the recent Schmitt scholarship (in particular Mouffe) is devoted to this task of evading the bellicose and eliminationist antagonism against concrete human enemies as a consequence of Schmitt's project, while preserving Schmitt's explanation of politics and political psychology. In a section of *Politics of Friendship* referenced in Fritsch's article, Derrida claims that "Schmitt's entire discourse posits and supposes ... *a concrete sense of the concrete* which he opposes ... to the spectral (*gespentsisch*)."⁵⁹ Derrida proceeds to suggest that the concrete in Schmitt is, rather, itself spectral in its inconceivability to conceptual and abstract thinking.

As I have noted before, I do not wish to engage with Derrida here because of the separately grand task of integrating his own system into my work in this thesis. But this remark bears some attention; the "*concrete sense of the concrete*" which is at work in politics is to be contrasted with the "spectral sense of the concrete" at work in theory. The purely concrete resists theorization because it is not some instantiation of forms which operate in an abstracted understanding; to manipulate the concrete in theory (and in the themes of myth) it must be less than purely concrete, partly constructed. Perhaps an insistence on total concreteness precludes a faithful application of Schmitt's theory to concrete others, in that their total concreteness has to be mixed with a certain fictive

58 Fritsch, "Antagonism and Democratic Citizenship", 176.

59 Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 116-117.

identity as well to be identified with a role in *abstract* theoretical notions about *concrete* relations. Again, this particular thread cannot be adequately addressed here without a full treatment of Derrida's particularities, but the point he makes here is intriguing on its face.

At the time of Schmitt's early writings, only one force in the world was powerful enough to create the kind of catastrophic, lethal danger capable of giving to political debate an existentially urgent character. This force was warfare, the deliberate killing of people by other people on a huge and, in ancient times and again in the First World War, totalizing scale. By forcing a decision on whom one will fight with and against for survival, war gives a political identity; but I believe there are other forces which grant this existential character and make possible the creating of political identity. New technologies, and the cumulative effects of older ones, raise the spectre of human destruction in ways that previously could only be imagined in fires, bombs and bullets exchanged by hostile opponents. Nuclear weapons (and to a lesser extent nuclear power generation) bring the possibility of vast, even complete, human destruction by rogue decision or accident. Similarly, environmental degradation and climate change caused by industrial activity also threaten to bring disease, death, and a radical curtailment of possible forms of human life.

To these already familiar threats can be added more speculative dangers emerging from technological and industrial development, such as nano-materials, autonomous robotics, and high-energy physics research. While these dangers have not yet produced friend/enemy distinctions of an intensity comparable to those that emerged from total wars, they may yet do so if the threats they pose can be sensed as imminent and urgent

rather than merely morally or prudentially important. Importantly, the accidental quality of these threats changes the role of intentionality and agency in shaping the enmity between factions. Where the engine of destruction is a continual human action, as in wars prior to full automation, personal and absolute enmity must be sustained to bring about the crisis. Where the crisis can be assured long before its actual manifestation (that is to say, the sufficient causal prerequisites for producing a crisis met, where such causes produce their effect necessarily but at long delay), and effected by means other than deliberate human action, the role of enmity in creating the crisis that gives political identities is no longer essential. Disputes of a political character still involve the opposition of two or more sides faced with the prospect of death, but no longer solely because one side seeks to kill the other; rather, the threat of death can come from an enemy's victory in deciding on a course of action which unintentionally kills. The friend/enemy struggle in such a scenario remains existentially important and all-consuming in its urgency, but does not require enmity-inspired violence as the *cause* or *mechanism* of destruction. An example of such a scenario would be the upstream diversion or contamination of a downstream people's sole water source, or upwind operation of potentially catastrophic chemical facilities.

Such an impersonal, temporally mediate and accidental source of danger does not have the same political force upon the public imagination as the enemy on the doorstep, however. To arouse political identifications and existential seriousness, they must be perceived as imminent and actual. To effect such a shift in perception, and make such possible dangers a basis for the political in Schmitt's sense, a modal change in political

discourse is required. Simply acknowledging the factually supported possibility of disaster is often insufficient to excite the existential awareness of danger, and thus produce a political response. This is both an empirical point about thresholds of public reaction, but also a theoretical point about the engagement of the existential consciousness by myth. There must be a step beyond what can be said within the bounds of evidentiary substantiation, and beyond the immediate edicts of reason, into the realm of myth. As it happens, Schmitt already presaged the mythical politicization of technological issues.

In Schmitt's time two great myths battled for supremacy; a once-diminished but quickly rebounding nationalism, and a steadily growing socialism. Against transnational socialist myths, the invocation of strong genetic, telluric and historical ties was perhaps the only strong candidate to compete for public identification.⁶⁰

Socialism/anarchism and nationalism certainly loom large in Schmitt's discussion of competing ideologies, and defined the application of his theories in his own time. But in addition to these two already-aging spirits occupying the world, Schmitt saw another great mythological space which promised to shape the near future. The technological world-view, growing out of modern confidence in human ingenuity and industry, emboldened by the wildly successful flourishing of technology and the ways of living which it enabled, was itself taking pride of place among ideologies. While the technicality of parliamentary democracy or liberal legalism neutralized and deadened

⁶⁰ In *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Schmitt quotes Mussolini "Our myth is the nation, the great nation which we want to make into a concrete reality for ourselves." Schmitt adds, "In the same speech he called socialism an inferior mythology." 76

politics, technological alteration of life did just the opposite. In "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations", Schmitt said:

The spirit of technicity, which has led to the mass belief in an anti-religious activism, is still spirit; perhaps an evil and demonic spirit, but not one which can be dismissed as mechanistic and attributed to technology. It is perhaps something gruesome, but not itself technical and mechanical. It is the belief in an activistic metaphysics - the belief in unlimited power and the domination of man over nature, even over human nature; the belief in the unlimited "receding of natural boundaries," in the unlimited possibilities for change and prosperity. Such a belief can be called fantastic and satanic, but not simply dead, spiritless, or mechanized soullessness.

Technology is no longer neutral ground in the sense of the process of neutralization; every strong politics will make use of it. For this reason, the present century can only be understood provisionally as the century of technology. How ultimately it should be understood will be revealed only when it is known which type of politics is strong enough to master the technology and which type of genuine

friend-enemy groupings can develop on this new ground.⁶¹

The technological society represents a new step beyond the mass society in its bypassing of state control. The mass age, with millions of somewhat economically and politically enfranchised individuals generating a social dynamism beyond the direct control of sovereign political power, made the unitary, singly personified ruler of Hobbes less relevant. As Denis Tierweiler notes, "C'est précisément parce qu'il veut prendre en compte la démocratisation, et un certain pluralisme qu'il sait inévitable, que Schmitt déplace l'accent de l'État vers le politique."⁶² Schmitt's political analysis can survive a diminishment of the state because, as he notes in the opening of *The Concept of the Political*, the political is prior to the state.⁶³ In the passage above he argues that his concept will survive whatever transformations attend the technological age as well. I will argue in the final chapter of this work that, indeed, his concept does retain its relevance, because whatever the physical substrate supporting a given era's political life may be, the affairs conducted upon that physical basis retain elements of the same mythological and theological character of past epochs.

Like Hobbes before him, Schmitt believed that sovereign authority required a (new) basis for legitimacy.⁶⁴ He believed that the politics of the Enlightenment, a discursive liberalism, could not provide such a basis, in part because of its habit of using

⁶¹ *The Concept of the Political*, 94-95

⁶² Tierweiler, "Georges Sorel et Carl Schmitt: D'une théorie politique du mythe à l'autre", in *Carl Schmitt ou le mythe du politique*, 30

⁶³ "The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political." *The Concept of the Political*, 19

⁶⁴ "As do Hobbes and Kelsen, Schmitt believes that traditional modes of justifying political authority are no longer available." Dyzenhaus, "Now the Machine Runs Itself", 5.

legality as its paradigm of legitimacy. As an empty form without substantive commitments of value, legality appeals to the "nihilism" that Schmitt attributes to liberalism; by applying law equally, methodically and mechanistically, the biased imposition of values can be avoided, and neutrality preserved.⁶⁵ But legality cannot ground its own legitimacy, much as deontological formulations of ethics cannot ground moral obligations. Schmitt argues that it is legitimacy that grounds legality, and not the other way around; and as legitimacy comes "before the law", it must have a substantive basis rather than a grounding in conformity to legal form.⁶⁶

The substantive ground of legitimacy for Schmitt, Sorel, and earlier partisans of proletarian and monarchical supremacy, necessarily lies outside of not merely legal logic⁶⁷ but (partly) outside of any rational basis. The legitimacy by which the sovereign person or body claims a right to power is invented apart from the logic by which such power is applied systematically and consistently. The original monarchists invoked the divine will which favoured kings, and Hobbes articulated a somewhat subtler argument which replaced divine lineage, or manifest favour, with divinely originated duty to protect. The holder of this duty was designated by the criterion of effective protection by

65 See second quotation from *Political Theology* in fn. 46

66 "Legality, for Schmitt, is a formal condition that must be given meaning and content by a prior structure of legitimacy: legitimacy is obtained only through the representation of the unified will of the historical existence of the people, and this must be presupposed as the origin of the constitution, and indeed of all law. On Schmitt's account, politics is *before the law*, and the necessary content of law cannot be stipulated in abstraction from the particular political system in which it originates. Law, in short, cannot constitute legitimacy on its own, and law that is not informed by a particular political will is always likely to undermine the legitimacy of a political order." Seitzer, Jeffrey and Thornhill, Christopher, "An Introduction to Carl Schmitt's *Constitutional Theory*: Issues and Context" in Schmitt's *Constitutional Theory*, 9.

67 "In one of his first published works (*Gesetz und Urteil* - 1912), Schmitt vigorously contests the idea that a legal order may be treated as a closed system of norms. He forcefully denies, for example, that in a particular case, one could reach a correct decision by a process of deduction or generalization on the basis of existing legal rules." Wolin, "Carl Schmitt, Political Existentialism, and the Total State", 395

force, having the effect of not simply legitimating existing power but imposing normative standards upon its exercise. After royalty was deposed, divine favour was manifestly lacking, but the terror and suffering of post-revolutionary struggles gave Restoration thinkers a purely secular ground for monarchical legitimacy; clarity, security and order (history serves Hobbes well). Schmitt writes, in *Political Theology*, that they "heightened the moment of the decision to such an extent that the notion of legitimacy, their starting point, was finally dissolved. ... [Cortés] demanded a political dictatorship. In the cited remarks of deMaistre we can also see a reduction of the state to the moment of decision ... to an absolute decision created out of nothingness."⁶⁸ "But", Schmitt adds, "this decisionism is essentially dictatorship, not legitimacy."⁶⁹

The legitimacy that was missing from a pure decisionism had to be framed in democratic terms, Schmitt recognized. He claimed that all contemporary forms of government, save for Italian fascism, made some claim to legitimacy by way of the democratic character of their right to power.⁷⁰ The flexibility of the concept of "democracy" allowed nearly any minority assembly within a state to claim the title of true representative of the people. Thus establishing the criterion of "democratic representation" for legitimacy did not designate or exclude any disputant in a struggle for power, and did not even indisputably favour majority over minority rule; the argument could still be made that the majority were not yet emancipated from a subjugated

⁶⁸ *Political Theology*, 65-66

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Only Italian Fascism seems to place no value on being 'democratic.' With that exception one must say that until now the democratic principle has been universally accepted without contradiction." *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 30

mentality and as such could not function as a true democracy. The identity of the people not being a neutral given fact, there is no clear designation of the proper person or persons who represent or share in that identity and as such have legitimate claims to power. As Schmitt writes, "All of these identities [on which democratic arguments rest] are not palpable reality, but rest on a recognition of the identity. It is not a matter of something actually equal legally, politically or sociologically, but rather of identifications."⁷¹

Thus the holders of power can legitimize their position "democratically" after the fact, by educating the public to recognize the salient identity by which the rulers' power is also the peoples' power. Reflecting on the familiar (at the time) practice of post-revolutionary "peoples' education", Schmitt writes:

The people can be brought to recognize and express their own will correctly through the right education. This means nothing else but that the educator identifies his will at least provisionally with that of the people... The consequence of this educational theory is a dictatorship that suspends democracy in the name of a true democracy that is still to be created. Theoretically, this does not destroy democracy, but it is important to pay attention to it because it shows that dictatorship is not antithetical to democracy.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid., 26-7

⁷² Ibid., 28

Such endorsement of stark public manipulation shocks the conscience of not only liberals but any ethical person who feels the Kantian call to respect the autonomy of other persons. Richard Wolin charges that "Schmitt studiously avoids taking democracy seriously in the etymological sense", that "Schmitt's commitment to democracy is a pseudo-commitment", and that "[w]ith the highly tendentious separation of democracy from its supporting liberal institutions ... he has succeeded in rendering all modern historical incarnations of the term meaningless - precisely his object."⁷³ Schmitt certainly stares into the void of democratic cynicism, positioning himself in a chain of thinkers with little regard for democracy as the liberal tradition understands it. But to dismiss his anti-liberal view of democracy by claiming democracy is meaningless without liberalism is to perform precisely the kind of identification-cum-legitimization move that is being described.

On Schmitt's critique, liberalism is poorly suited to address questions of democratic legitimacy because it cannot draw the friend-enemy distinction, and so cannot identify the people to be represented, let alone the people who ought to represent them (except for a legal criterion stipulating correct electoral procedure and bureaucratic divisions of responsibility). As Schmitt notes extensively in the work of Sorel and other radicals, the identity of the people has always and (per these thinkers) must always be a mythologized identity, and the popular will is invented rather than discerned by polls or plebiscites (though these are technical tools of no small utility in bolstering the claims to democratic legitimacy of a sitting power, provided they produce the correct results).

⁷³ Wolin, "Carl Schmitt, Political Existentialism, and the Total State", 402

For Schmitt's contemporaries and immediate fore-runners on the left, the meaning of political institutions and movements is not given by a legal structure or by a rational model of governance, but rather by an irrational, psycho-spiritually engaging myth, often of a final and absolute victory over history. In the words of Sorel, "Les mythes révolutionnaires actuels sont presque purs; ils permettent de comprendre l'activité, les sentiments et les idées des masses populaires se préparant à entrer dans une lutte décisive; ce ne sont pas des descriptions de choses, mais des expressions de volontés."⁷⁴ As much as Schmitt draws on Sorel for his notion of politics exceeding the rational, there are important differences to be noted. Denis Tierweiler points to subtle differences between political theology and political mythology, arguing that, while both suppose that a purely rational foundation of political order is insufficient, the former is cognitive and interpretative, the latter emotional and psychological.⁷⁵ I would add to that an esoteric/exoteric distinction, as political theology tends to be circulated among the "political clergy" of the state (no doubt, *Political Theology* was feverishly circulated among Washington's political clergy for the past couple of decades), whereas political mythology tends to be more suited to a mass audience, as least as political mythology is portrayed by Sorel.⁷⁶ For Schmitt, both political theology and political mythology are important to his project; Tierweiler argues that Schmitt constantly balances between the

⁷⁴ Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence*, 25

⁷⁵ Tierweiler, "Georges Sorel et Carl Schmitt", 22

⁷⁶ "[L]es hommes qui participent aux grands mouvements sociaux, se représentent leur action prochaine sous forme d'images de batailles assurant le triomphe de leur cause. Je proposais de nommer *mythes* ces constructions dont la connaissance offre tant d'importance pour l'historien. ...je voulais montrer qu'il ne faut pas chercher à analyser de tels systèmes d'images, comme on décompose une chose en ses éléments, qu'il faut les prendre en bloc comme des forces historiques, et qu'il faut surtout se garder de comparer les faits accomplis avec les représentations qui avaient été acceptées avant l'action." Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence*, 19-20

two, siding with theology as a jurist, and siding with mythology as a theorist of state, knowing that the foundation of political order must use images and symbols which only mythology can furnish.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ "Georges Sorel et Carl Schmitt", 22-23

Chapter 3

In the preceding two chapters I have illustrated certain facets of a tradition in Western political thought, these being questions of the nature and identity of sovereignty, the limits and conditions of legitimacy, and the role of extra-factual and extra-rational modes of thought and discourse in conceptualizing political ideas. These extra-factual and extra-rational modes are political theology and political mythology, and I will first attempt to distinguish them from each other before articulating my own understanding of the latter.

Political theology, in the sense articulated by Schmitt as the conception of political sovereignty and authority in secularized theological terms, is quite clearly Hobbes' trade in *Leviathan*, although Hobbes does not use a purely secular approach; in the pseudo-theology of the state, the sovereign is above the law, but in the literally theological scheme of political morality the sovereign is accountable to God. Schmitt's explicit critique of the theological patterns of thought and argument represent a turn in the tradition, by which these conceptual schemata laid upon political questions become themselves the objects of theorization and analysis. This turn does not mark the end of the practice of political theology in political theory, of course, but rather the beginning of self-consciously theological argument about political essentials. Thus theological political conceptions cease to be implicitly normative grounds, as in Hobbes, and become explicitly descriptive of the ontology of political thought, at least within a certain tradition of political concerns. Schmitt represents this new reflective theological approach, setting a theologically inspired political framework as the logical rather than

moral constraint of political theory. I do not mean by this that a theological substance grounds Schmittian politics, such as in his early argument in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* according to which Catholicism permits the politically originary identification of friend and enemy to be made.⁷⁸ Rather, I mean that, as in Hobbes' parallels between divine and civil obedience, theological models of sovereignty illustrate the innate limits of how sovereignty must function.

Schmitt also touches on political mythology, as distinct from theology, particularly as it emerged as a political force in the early 20th century in mass movements such as socialism. Whereas political theology's treatment of the sovereign mirrors the monotheistic theological treatment of a unitary and absolute God, political mythology (per Schmitt) is essentially pagan⁷⁹. This shift parallels the change from a Hobbesian tradition defined by theories of singular authority which presuppose a monarchical sovereign, towards a modern tradition in which sovereignty is diffusely located in the people, united and exercised through law. To the extent that the people is itself conceived as a unitary entity which may be identified with a singular will, it remains within the field of political theology. But the linkage between this unitary identity and the disparate empirical people ("multitude" as opposed to "person") is, I claim, political mythology, neither purely historical nor purely abstract. Political mythology can also be contrasted with political theology in its inherent dynamism as opposed to theology's stasis. This stasis on the part of theology comes from the eternity and unity of the singular God which

78 McCormick, "Political Theory and Political Theology", 831-832

79 "The theory of myth is the most powerful symptom of the decline of the relative rationalism of parliamentary thought. [...] The last remnants of solidarity and a feeling of belonging together will be destroyed in the pluralism of an unforeseeable number of myths. For political theology that is polytheism, just as every myth is polytheistic." *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 76

defines the theological view (in monotheistic traditions of course), whereas the dynamism and multiplicity of mythology reflects a mythic engagement with more worldly questions of origin, development and change, inviting a multiplicity of responses. The power of theology is its engagement with abstract and eternal constancy, while the power of myth is its adaptability (as Bottici writes, “political myth [...] must remain open to the possibility of being renegotiated according to new experiences and needs. To put it bluntly, a political myth expresses itself through variants...”⁸⁰).

Under this conception of theology vs. mythology, the subject matter of the former is the absolute, the eternal and unconditional, whereas the subject matter of the latter is the historical (as opposed to ahistorical but not to prehistorical) and thus subject to worldly principles of generation and conditioning. Thus the nature of sovereign power and the qualities of an absolute sovereign are of concern to political theology, whereas the connection of these concepts to identifiable entities and histories within the world are mythological questions. Mythology does not supplant theology but rather tries to connect to theological objects, humanizing the divine and sacralizing the human in turns.

Hobbes' treatment of monarchical sovereign right attempted, among other things, to show that the sovereign's absolute right was proper both to reason and justice, not merely secured by power. The identity of the sovereign's mandate with God's is a theological, ahistorical move (though the mandate itself is of course applied by the sovereign in historical time). But Hobbes also engaged in political mythology by creating a narrative which identified the public will with the sovereign's, and the myth (an exceedingly successful and enduring one) is that of the social contract. The narrative of

80 Bottici, “Philosophies of Political Myth, a Comparative Look Backwards”, 370-371

the social contract is pseudo-historical, tracing a causal chain of worldly, human conditions and reactions from a pre-social state towards a contemporary order which, under this pseudo-historical view, is just and rational. The narrative is not wholly historical, because it does not cite a discreet event in time where such a contract was agreed, but rather explains how such a contractual relation emerges as a stage of social historical logic. Nor is it wholly fictional, as it grounds relations and rights which are concretely manifest in the social and legal life of the state. The *comme si* to *comme ça* turn which makes myth a real political force is clearly illustrated; narratively, sovereign right is explained as if there were some contractual founding event, but practically, the right is exercised as fully real.

The fact that there is no actual contract in this case is not an impediment because myth presents the speculative and the fictive as true. If, however, there had been an original contract forged between concrete persons, and this was cited as the ground of sovereign right, there might be another challenge against the legitimacy of that right. To wit, it may be argued that despite the contracting of obedience for protection by particular persons at a particular moment in history, this right expires along with the signatories. But this challenge is met by another aspect of political mythology, which is its power to make present, in the temporal and phenomenological senses, what is physically removed. This power to invest the historically remote (or even never-existent) with a presence treated as concrete is accomplished through identification, and these identifications are the ground for legitimacy in succession. The myth of creation stories identifies a living institution or people with a pre-historical event, or a pre-historical past with a materially

evident history; the myth of heroic national character identifies a whole people with exemplary individuals (themselves fictional or not); the myth of The People identifies a disparate population of individuals with a unitary public self.

If, therefore, an actual contract were the basis of sovereign right, the mythic identifications of predecessors with successors can extend the contract's legitimacy beyond the actual signatories, retroactively characterizing this historical compact as the manifestation of essential relations; the People, instantiated by particular persons, are one party to the agreement, and the Sovereign, instantiated by a particular legal or natural person, is the other. Myth is not immediately necessary to explain such transfer of contractual rights and obligations from original signatory parties to inheritors; justifications for such transferability can be offered on legal or institutional historical grounds. But such justifications, while perhaps satisfactory as a practical public argument, ultimately lack legitimizing force if these legal and institutional bonds do not themselves rest upon mythic identifications of the creators and bearers of legal and institutional roles. Thus myth remains necessary in principle to ground the legitimacy of such inherited rights and obligations, even if it is never publicly invoked as a ground of justification.

In the case of a monarchical arrangement like that defended (with some provisos) by Hobbes, the need to engage in mythic identifications like these is most obvious. To a democratic mindset, it is clear that where there is claimed a right for a single person to author decisions in the name of a people and hold power over them, when that person is not elected by nor accountable to that people (barring a unilateral dissolution of the

contract), such right *must* be grounded outside of a people's publicly evident, sociologically manifest consent to be subject. Without mechanisms to show empirically the grounds of sovereign right, such as elections or other consultative means, the identity of ruler and ruled seems *prima facie* baseless.

Are these myths of identity no longer required in a democratic state, then, if systems are in place to consult an electorate and respond to the expressed desires of the represented? I would argue that they remain necessary in principle, despite an empirical narrowing of the gap between the sovereign and the subjects. Mechanisms of representation, consultation and accountability which typify (but arguably do not guarantee) a democratic politics make it less obvious that there is a lack of identity between the person of the sovereign and the person of the people represented. But the gap remains, and can never be eliminated, unless each person is to be a sovereign unto him or herself; even then, there is the problem of self-identity over time. Any politics wherein a collective identity is used to describe the will, interests or authority of a community of individuals united will create a gap between actual identities of the constituents of the polity and the characterizations which the community presents to itself.

Where the actions and decisions of state (or, even more so, where there is no state but simply a political community) are effected through deeply participatory and structurally devolved mechanisms, this identity gap may be no more than a mundane fact of language; just as we may assume that the physical universe is not Newtonian but still describe it in such terms for the sake of convenience. The gap remains in principle and in fact wherever there is a self-recognition by the actors as a people, and wherever a

conception of sovereignty is at work, but it can shrink into inconspicuousness where divisions of ruler and ruled are so narrow that legitimacy is never problematized. But where societies are marked by thick layers of representation and hierarchical concentration, and legitimacy is still regarded as resting upon a contact between the two sides of representational and subsumptive relationships, the credibility of fictions of identity remains crucial to claims of political right.

As noted in the last chapter, the era of mass politics and decapitation (figuratively and literally) of absolutist political structures introduced a new uncertainty into popular and sovereign identifications. Multiple conceptions of democracy competed for legitimacy on multiple conceptions of popular identity, and a key variable in these conceptions is the degree to which “the people” was defined in narrow or broad temporal bounds. A simple representational definition of democracy might argue that “the people” are constituted by the sum of the present population, and that the will of “the people” may be ascertained by plebiscite, meetings, and other forms of direct consultation. But another view, powerfully advanced in revolutionary France and Russia and later under postcolonial circumstances, held that “the people” should be defined with a strong weighting towards the future. The true character of “the people” could only emerge after some liberating measures were enacted to free the present populace from a deluded self-characterization, described in terms of slave morality, colonial identity, etc. And so the democratically legitimate bearers of sovereign authority were not those who represented a present consensus, but rather a minority whose will was identical with the will that

would be shared by “the people” after it had been adequately re-identified with itself.⁸¹

This temporal broadness of popular identity also reaches back in time, permitting a reactionary minority to claim that the present instantiation of “the people” is itself a deviate minority, linking democratic legitimacy to an identification with antecedent generations.

There are of course many pernicious uses of the myth in this sense, and the opportunities for such abuse grows in times of change, where it becomes apparent that the collective character of a people is set to shift, and the definitive elements of its identity are no longer clear. But these hazards are unavoidable so long as the state, or something like it, continues to recognize itself within a historical past and future. The further ahead into the future that a state's decisions may reach, the greater the need to extend relations of identities. Without some fiction of an identity of the present with the future, the legitimacy of a sovereign authority to decide for the inhabitants of that future world is without a democratic grounding. A sovereign *may* disavow a political representation of the future, claiming that the impact present decisions have upon the future is inevitable and merely imposes a moral burden of care, but not of representation. But such a minimization of relations to the future would, I think, only suffice when the question of how to face the future is strictly ethical; when the issue takes on existential tones, as in questions of physical and cultural survival, legitimacy calls for deeper grounds than simply conscientious negotiation of responsibilities. To simply decide upon the conditions under which future inhabitants will live, by acting in a manner which is expected to have significant and enduring effects in that future, but without identifying

⁸¹ See, for instance, Schmitt's discussion of Jacobinism in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 26-28.

the present people and sovereign with those future peoples and sovereigns, is to relate to the future in a colonial fashion, as noted in the preceding chapter. It is of course possible, because the inhabitants of the future have no recourse against present decisions. But to restrict the legitimacy of sovereign authority to an identification with the present constitution of the people is to weaken that legitimacy.

First, such a presentist self-isolation of sovereignty from the future (or from the past) severs relations of succession. By disregarding the will of temporally removed instantiations of a people, a present sovereign dis-identifies itself with the future sovereign; the reason for this being that the future sovereign in question will, assuming that it claims for itself a democratic ground of legitimacy, be identified with and thus legitimized by that future people. A temporally particular instantiation of sovereign authority thereby removes itself from the succession of sovereignty, by restricting its popular identification to its contemporary population, and places itself in competition with other sovereign identifications. It should be noted that this is true of Hobbesian and democratic standards of sovereignty, though Schmitt's decisionistic criterion of sovereignty requires no such link in legitimate succession. If the sovereign is truly following a contemporaneous popular mandate to disregard identifications with the future, the whole popular sovereignty loses a claim to (democratic) legitimacy in exercising any authority beyond its own immediate present.

Second, a claim to legitimacy which is laid on the narrow ground of identification with only the present constitution of the people faces strong challenges from competing claims to legitimacy which are grounded in broader identifications, such as those

minority groups mentioned earlier who would take upon themselves the mantle of ancestry or posterity. Practically speaking, a narrow identification with the present allows state decisions solely benefiting the present people to be made without hypocrisy, and reap the electoral rewards of political clientelism. But such “transactional” relations of governance are not political in an existentially compelling sense, and may become irrelevant in crises where the substantively moral or existential bases of legitimacy supersede. For instance, a politics of ecological responsibility which turns on procedural rules of risk assessment and due compensation for damages may suffice in a normal period, where the resources and attached interests protected by such measures are thought to be harmed by degrees but not threatened in their very existence. When such latter threats are perceived, the politics of mitigation and compensation, with its assumptions of fungible values, may fall under demands for an absolutist protection on grounds of moral or existential necessity.

The identification of a given impersonation of sovereignty with a sovereignty which persists over time, rather than a succession of generationally parochial self-same identities, is central to the very concept of sovereignty. My own essential definition of sovereignty, inspired by but not identical to Hobbes' and Schmitt's, is an unconditionality of choice. This self-exemption from restricting conditions is, I believe, the essence of both Hobbes' and Schmitt's conception of the sovereign being beyond the law. In the case of Hobbes' absolutism, this extra-legality could simply be the normal case for the sovereign. In Schmitt's more democratic context, however, this exemption from law is reserved for exceptional cases and while normal conditions obtain the sovereign is

subject to constitutional limits.⁸² Beyond a simply legal exemption, a particular sovereign's unification with a persisting sovereign identity removes him/her/them from other temporally particular conditions of decision, such as popular sentiment or appeals to technical and economic expediency. This is not to say that the sovereign is totally insulated from these conditions, but rather that the sovereign's legitimacy already rests partly outside of the reciprocal or curatorial relations with a present people, and this not merely presentist basis of legitimacy can be emphasized to justify decisions to which a present people may not consent. I am thinking here not of near future regarding decisions, such as deficit-cutting that benefits the state's people a few decades hence, and thus can be justified by appeal to the future interests of those same persons present at the time of decision; this particular unconditionality granted by a cross-temporal sovereign identity really becomes conspicuous in cases where the people whom decisions regard are inaccessibly remote, either far in the future or even in the past.⁸³

I have so far discussed the use of myths of identity to establish representative legitimacy. But there is another use of myth in politics that I wish to explore here, which is the sharpening of future-regarding responsibilities in democracies. The mythical mode of discourse, as I understand it, is the presentation of the speculative and unrealized as concrete and present. This does not necessarily mean that what plainly does not exist is

82 Of course, Schmitt defines the sovereign by the power to identify precisely such exceptional cases, and the Hobbesian sovereign is well-advised to conduct himself in a lawful manner when the exercise of an overriding absolutism is unnecessary and antagonistic to civil peace; in practice the sovereigns of these two thinkers may be less different than would be suggested in theory.

83 An example of a past-regarding decision would be the construction of a memorial promised to a group who had served the people long ago. Assume the people to be so recognized are so remote that the present advocacy of their dessert by living descendants is not a factor, and there exists no direct beneficiaries of their contribution to push for their recognition. Even in such absence of a mandate from the present, the sitting sovereign can still legitimize the decision to sacrifice present resources in honour of these past persons by identifying itself with the historical sovereign which incurred the debt.

claimed to plainly exist, but rather that what is not yet present is discussed in terms of certainty and immediacy. Such a mythic mode can be used to vividly represent the past, in the sense of making again present what has become temporally remote; and this past can be faithful to history or deliberately revisionist (other possibilities exist beyond these two, and unreflective revisionism is probably the most common approach).

It is the making-present and making-concrete of the future which concerns me in the application of political myth, as these myths of the future are what shape the present anticipatory politics. Few if any states and polities are agnostic about the future, and the opacity of the future does not inhibit the serious and concrete imagination and discussing of it. By presenting the circumstances and challenges of the future in a mode which is concrete (rather than speculative and probabilistic), and imminently present, the mythic mode allows the future to be existentially and phenomenologically experienced in a manner similar to the experience of the temporally and spatially present. This gives to considerations of the future a gravity and reality which may bear on political decision rather than simply serving as the object of prediction and estimation. Bear in mind the scale of futurity I intend here is sufficiently large to outstrip the psychological power of self-regarding or near-and-dear-regarding anticipations of the future, and so identifications with the future must be in some sense invented rather than natural.

This gravity and concreteness invested in mythic presentations of the future is important to the sovereign's claim to legitimacy in making decisions regarding the future, especially when future considerations compete with present ones. I take ecological stewardship to be paradigmatic of such a tension, with some provisos. First, a somewhat

idealized case of exploitation vs. stewardship must be supposed, as actual ecological exploitation is often not even of net benefit to all those affected and so is not a clear example of reaping present benefits from future costs. Second, the question of remediability of damage throws a wrench into calculations of cost and benefit; if some level of degradation can be undone, then there may be an intergenerationally just level of destructive exploitation, whereas irretrievable losses seem far harder to justify. As noted in much of the literature on intergenerational justice⁸⁴ (with echoes of Sorel's "Letter to Daniel Halevy" prefacing *Reflections on Violence*), we may identify two camps of thought on the question of the damage done by progress to posterity, the first optimistic and the second pessimistic. The first assumes that continued technical progress will permit damage to be undone in the future, and so a responsibility to the well-being of future peoples is met by ensuring that they inherit the products and means of further progress. The second assumes that progress, even when aimed at redressing past damage, will likely have a negative net impact, and therefore the duty to defend the well-being of future peoples entails a duty of restraint. The first stance avoids a political dispute over the balancing of present and future well-being by presupposing the correctness and beneficence of current behaviour, whereas the second contains an injunction to sacrifice present interests to future ones.

Because the relatively short history of industrial progress' impacts on ecological posterity shows a clear negative trend, and the magnitude and scope of the impact grows along with technical and economic advances, the optimist vs. pessimist question is not

84 See for instance Dieter Birnbacher, "Responsibility for Future Generations – Scope and Limits" in *Handbook of Intergenerational Justice*, Ed. Joerg Chet Tremmel, 26-29

idle. But to take a stand on it requires a move beyond fact into speculative fiction, and to act upon such conceptions of the future moves beyond what can be democratically mandated or scientifically demonstrated.

The myth of progress and the myth of disaster compete for a dominant role in framing the expectations of the future, those expectations which will inform sovereign decisions and popular support thereof. In both visions there is a promise to be fulfilled, and a threat to be avoided. In the optimistic case, the promise is that of increased and expanded prosperity compatible with a resolution of problems created by prior stages of progress; the threat is a regress which condemns people as-yet unsaved by progress.

In the pessimistic view the promise is a mitigation or halting of damage done to future peoples, while the threat is a worsening impact thereon. Add to such an opposition of view the existentially dire character of some imagined consequences, and these myths can draw the lines of a fierce battle; perhaps these myths will be constitutive of two politics of technology such as Schmitt suggested.

In the optimist view, the means of serving present interests and future interest is the same (continued progress and development), but the pessimist view argues for an incompatibility between a continued exercise of the means by which present prosperity is served and responsible care for future peoples' well-being, even future survival in particularly negative projections. The sovereign authority overseeing decisions which bear upon both present and future conditions of life (again, ecological exploitation being the paradigmatic example here) is therefore pulled in two directions. As the preceding discussion of identifications makes clear, the sovereign is both immediately identified

with him/her/itself and also, by a mythical unity, with the sovereign whose immediate responsibility is the care of future peoples who bear the consequences of present decisions. By discussing a vision of the future as concrete and historically imminent (even if it will occur far in the future), the sovereign and other political actors can effectively include a future in the present and disrupt a purely presentist scheme of thought and justification. A strong mythic sense of the truth of some future circumstance aids the sovereign in legitimizing decisions which favour the care of future peoples over the express desire of present constituents, such as may be thought necessary under a pessimistic view of the effects of present development.

As Chiara Bottici notes⁸⁵, in this future-regarding mythic discourse takes on the character of prophecy, and certain manipulations of myth seek to make these prophecies self-fulfilling. To expand this notion, I would add that the creators of myth-as-prophecy in this respect need not attempt to realize the prophecy itself, but to make real the conditions and responses which would emerge from the manifestation of that myth. Thus it is not the event itself which they seek to realize, but rather the reaction. It is a manipulative move to produce a desired reaction to something not yet manifest, and particularly apt to crafting consent for pre-emptive measures which must be enacted before the need for such measures is shown to be necessary (where a mandate from scientific evidence is lacking) or generally accepted (where a mandate from public will is lacking).

The manipulative and anti-democratic (in the sense of over-riding majority will in

⁸⁵ "The aim of a political myth is to become a prophecy. A political myth cannot be falsified because it is not (only) a scientific theory about the constitution of the world, but also (and foremost) the expression of a determination to act within it." Bottici, *Philosophies of Political Myth*", 366

the interests of future persons not-yet-constitutive of the politically represented people) character of using mythic grounds for decision are *prima facie* reasons to challenge its ethical permissibility. In addressing this problem I would like to clarify the relationship between myth and lying. The creation and circulation of mythic narratives is not necessarily a form of lying, for several reasons. First, mythic discourse need not always seek to manipulate people towards a particular end; it may simply be used to foster imaginative thinking or address a desire for collective narrative self-representation. Where myth *is* used to manipulate (and this is the case in the applications which are of interest to this thesis), such manipulation need not be effected by the deliberate misrepresentation or occlusion of evident facts; myth does not compete with evident truth when it speaks to matters about which no facts are available. As a discursive mode of performatively presenting the fictive as factual, myth may be characterized as lying if we expand the notion of a lie to include such modal shifts, in addition to the more conventional sense of constative presentations of known falsehoods as truths. To fully deserve the label of dishonest manipulation, however, myth must be deliberately deceptive in ways not apparent to its audience. This deception is not a necessary condition for myth to propagate and to be effective, as its adoption and efficacy does not depend on a straightforward pretence to constative truth. Myth *can* be internalized and re-circulated by an audience which is fully aware of the disconnect between myth's fictive content and its concrete presentation. Such an ideal case is, however, likely rare in practice.

In defence of the admittedly manipulative political applications of myth I advance

the empirical claim that presentist bias in the conduct of democratic politics (though not only democratic politics) interferes with a fair balance of present and future considerations represented in decision-making. This assumption of presentism is important to the argument, and calls for more justification. Dennis Thompson, in an article entitled "Representing Future Generations" discusses the existence and the causes of presentist bias. He notes that it is not an entirely negative trait, as it provides a measure of defence against zealotry and ideological excesses which have in the past demanded great sacrifice from present persons in order to reach some (often historically remote) goal; however, presentism is vicious in its effects of discounting the interests of future persons.⁸⁶ He lists four main reasons for presentism in representative politics: 1) a bias against deferring rewards; 2) demands that governments be responsive to their constituents; 3) temporal limits on governmental authority, which encourage the favouring of short-term results; and 4) a preference for the interests of older living citizens against those of younger ones in the decisions of government.⁸⁷

John S. Dryzek, in a chapter entitled "Democracy vs. Economic Rationality"⁸⁸, discusses public choice theories, modelled on the individual instrumental rationality supposed in market capitalism, and the distorting effects such rationality has on democratic culture. His claim is that a reliance on the individual pursuit of self-interest in politics, rather than aggregating into a rational and effective politics, rather breaks down into "sub-optimal" competitions of clumped private interests.⁸⁹ Dryzek's response to this

⁸⁶ Thompson, "Representing Future Generations", 17.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 18-20.

⁸⁸ Dryzek, *Democracy in Capitalist Times*, 92-115.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 101.

individual and factional idiocy in politics is to move away from a purely instrumental, atomism-enforcing individual rationality, to the “activation and institutionalization of communicative rationality, and the associated conception of democracy as public deliberation rather than preference aggregation.”⁹⁰ The presentism which I am discussing can be fairly characterized as a kind of naturally given interest aggregation (those with interests in using resources at time t are already aggregated at such time), and the mythical engagement with future communities permits at least a frame of discourse where a communicative mode can be practised. Even though communication with the future is not possible, addressing oneself (a public self) to an other in the form of a fictively fleshed-out future can alter present identification and hopefully counter tendencies to isolationism and irresponsibility across time.

These are all plausible explanations of what causes decisions to be biased towards present interests against future (especially distant future) interests, but do not establish the fact of presentist bias. There is of course a great difficulty in conclusively proving the existence of psychological causes within decision making, especially collective decision making; I think the fact of presentist bias is obvious enough to be employed without explicit demonstration (if such demonstration is in fact possible). A manifest, if not psychologically evident, bias can be equated with an observed disparity in the costs and benefits of present decisions across generations, and this I believe is abundantly apparent. To take a few North American examples, chronic deficit spending, infrastructure underfunding, and deferral of education and health reform all exhibit a (at least manifest) bias against long-term interests in favour of present stability of

90 Ibid., 115.

expectations. The psychological fact of selfishness and epistemological tendency to focus on the most immediately observable information, and the social dynamics of solicitation and exhortation, all contribute to a psycho-social basis of government which is strongly susceptible to presentist tendencies. Beyond these conjectural arguments and appeals to the intuitive and the obvious, I cannot provide a more solid case for the existence of presentist bias in representative government. But I trust my assertion in this matter is not overly tenuous.

The use of myth is simply a means of allowing future generations of a people, even if only in the form an imagined fiction, to impose a more affecting presence upon the conscience of decision makers. In this respect the use of myth to present future generations of a people concretely does not introduce any new competition to the presently constituted people's monopoly on power, but simply makes the reasonably presupposed existence of future generations more conspicuous. The democratic rights of the present are already abrogated, at least morally, by a duty to posterity, and vividly illustrating the objects of that duty should not be objectionable.

But it is not so benign as that. The sovereign representative has a duty to protect the posterity of the people and this duty, on a strong conception of sovereign authority, implies a power to over-ride the expressed will of a particular temporal impersonation of the people. In times of natural disaster or war, "exceptional circumstances", the unconditionality of sovereign power allows great latitude in making decisions without regard for consultation or expressed consent of the represented people. If a disastrous future is presented as presently and actually imminent (the necessary consequent of some

action or omission), it may be employed as a pretext for the invocation of exceptional measures in the present. The potential for abuse for such pre-emptive declarations of exception is glaring, but this should not discourage a serious engagement with the question of whether such invocations are ever legitimate.

Because of the scale and scope of natural transformation effected by relatively recently development powers, states (and their subject entities such as corporations) have the power to drastically alter the conditions of future life before the consequences, and reversibility of such, are apparent. Other kinds of stewardship of the goods to be inherited by the future, such as public institutions, financial wealth, laws and infrastructure, are constructed physically or conventionally by people. As such, they are in a fundamental sense fungible and modifiable by future generations who also inherit the means by which this heritage was created. But the ecological heritage was not man-made, and there is therefore no guarantee that future generations will be able to remedy toxic alterations of their natural inheritance the way that they may reform bad law or abandon failed currency. And the consequences of an irretrievably corrupted natural inheritance may be a matter of survival or extinction. This makes the defence of ecological posterity existentially important in a way that other kinds of posterity, while essential to identity, are not. If present sovereign decisions are made with no consideration for future people who will bear the consequences of those decisions, and no concomitant means for recourse, this would seem to be a violation of basic democratic principles; those ruled by the decisions (in the sense of inescapably having their lives conditioned by the effects of those decisions) are not represented in the making of the decisions. This imposes a

colonial relationship onto the future constituents of a people, wherein their remoteness makes political exclusion possible.⁹¹ The present sovereign authority has two options to retain democratic legitimacy in this scenario; either “decolonize” the future people by curtailing those projects which likely or certainly have inescapable consequences for them, or bring the future into the commonwealth by treating its inhabitants as real in the discourse of sovereign decision-making. A mythic presentation of the future world as concrete and actual, not only for discussion by representatives but also for circulation in public discourse, is, I believe, a means of closing the democratic gap between the present and the not-yet-present, and adding a certain porosity to each generation's isolation in time.

91 Note that while the present sovereign is, as discussed earlier in this chapter, mythically identified with the future sovereign who would rule over the impacted future, the disregard for future interests weakens the identity with the future popular will by which such sovereignty is legitimized. For a democratically legitimized sovereign, authority over the future is bound to care for the future.

Conclusion

I hope to have given a useful picture of political myth as it has been addressed in some corners of Western thought since Hobbes' early modernity, and to have made a plausible and persuasive, if not convincing, case for the integral place of mythic thinking in political action and reflection. As I noted in the introduction, I save till now my discussion of the moral defensibility of political mythologizing. This is partly to keep things less complicated, as the preceding three chapters already contain normative issues aplenty. But it is also because my own assessment of this question is itself quite unsettled.

The chief moral problematic of mythical discourse is its power to manipulate, not only the thinking of "masses" and theoreticians alike, but of the public store of facts upon which this thinking is grounded. Myth is therefore a powerful tool in the hands of deceivers and educators, and the moral question is whether the risks of embracing such a double-edged tool are outweighed by the benefits. On a pessimistic view of popular rationality, the world can be improved by simply convincing the bulk of a people of the "right" (true or merely felicitous) ideas, first by reason and then with whatever supplement is needed to win conviction. Ellul's *Propaganda* is characterized by a resignation to this kind of moral calculus; the masses will be manipulated, the truth is constructed anyway, the good people of the world may as well apply their skill and effort to winning ideological contests rather than sitting on the sidelines for fear of offending some Enlightenment ideal of noble Reason. He rejects as useless and impossible attempts for governments to follow public opinion because there is no such identifiable thing to be found natively, and besides it is too incoherent and uninformed to provide a mandate for

responsible decision.⁹²

It is too easy, for those inclined to a pessimism about public rationality, to simply take such a defeatist stance (defeatist from the standpoint of seeking a more rational community to come) and resign themselves to a benevolent paternalist state. Some hope must be held out, and defended, for a truly transformative shift in democracy which escapes the monolithic binary relations of mass and state. Public rationality, though obstructed and constrained by the political and social conditions of our somewhat archaic contemporary democracies, still has the potential to outstrip its lacklustre record and definitively refute arguments that it is better to simply embrace virtuous myths of state.

This argues for seeing myth as at best benign, as providing a coherence and continuity that escapes fractured public reason, and at worst instrumental to obstructing the emergence of more fully developed public rationality. But the tension between top-down vs. bottom-up enlightenment is not always the defining moral question for a polity. The emergence of crises imposes exigencies on decision and assent that are more constraining than a hope for the “to-come”. The task of gathering support for necessary measures (a judgement call often opaque to objective evaluation- how great is the danger of X? How long *can* a decision be delayed before the imminent arrives?) may pit the desiderata of liberty and security against each other. The *efficacy* of belief makes mythic manipulation a tool whose employment cannot be precluded in times of crisis without a competing argument.

This discussion of the ethical limits to rational and doxastic unconditionality could continue ad infinitum, but the knot is cut by the existential quality of the most

92 Ellul, *Propaganda*, 124-125.

compelling of mythic discourses, the apocalyptic horizon. My own interest in myth is rooted in its political orientation towards the total disaster, and the supervenient power such an orientation has on debates which occur within the territory under existential threat. If the averting of ecological mass disaster or permanent civilizational collapse engendered by such disaster is the aim and the content of a political myth, the “teleological suspension of the ethical” moots discussions of permissibility of fictive public discourse and due respect to public reason. Still, the application of these principles is remote from my agenda; as with theology, the goal is increased clarity, not agency.

This is said not so much as justification or argument, but rather a confession of the entanglements which loom behind my treatment of myth and politics. The trajectory of the work I have done thus far leads towards a future study of ecological spirituality and ecological partisanship as motive forces and identities in politics, and I anticipate these to be no less ethically ambiguous, and no more philosophically delineated, than the work which here concludes.

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