

# Real Unity and Representation in Hobbes, Schmitt, and Barth

---

**Sarita Zaffini**, University of Chicago

Recent Hobbes scholarship argues that legal rationalism is the key to understanding his concept of representation; the commonwealth entails the sum total of the individual wills who compact to create it. But as jurist Carl Schmitt recognized, certain aspects of Hobbes's famous *Leviathan* narrative transcend this rationality. He points out that the commonwealth, according to Hobbes, constitutes a "real unity" of the multitude in one Sovereign head rather than a simple aggregation of individuals, suggesting that something supernatural, in addition to legal rationality, undergirds Hobbes's concept of representation. This article argues that Thomas Hobbes was invoking an alternative, theological notion of representation along with that of legal authorization. The prototype of this theological representation is the relationship of Jesus Christ to the members of his church-body, a familiar image to seventeenth-century English Christians. The work of twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth helps to explain this concept in detail, and, with Schmitt, reveals the continued significance of theological representation for modern politics as well as for religion.

Keywords: representation, political unity, individualism, theology, ontology, body politics

The twentieth-century German jurist Carl Schmitt tirelessly distinguished between two types of political representation. One type was the familiar deputyship model associated with liberal and parliamentary democracies, in which individuals formally contract with their appointed agent. Schmitt described this relationship as materialistic and artificial, denigrating it as a merely "technical" representation in contrast with the "true" representation found in theologically legitimated institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> This second type

---

I sincerely thank the anonymous reviewers at *Polity*, as well as the participants of several conferences: the Graduate Conference in Political Theory, Duke University, February 2016, the Conference on Representation, University of Minho, Portugal, January 2016, and the Political Thought and Intellectual History Graduate Conference, University of Cambridge, May 2016, for their helpful suggestions and comments on this paper.

1. See Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996), 18–26; and Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992), 16–17, 97–98 n5.

Published online December 17, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1086/706987>

*Polity*, volume 52, number 1 (January 2020), pp. 35–63. 0032-3497/2020/5201-0003\$10.00.

© 2019 Northeastern Political Science Association. All rights reserved.

was characterized by personal authority rather than impersonal exchange, and it was capable of creating a genuine, organic unity of all participating members in a manner that was impossible by formal consent alone. Schmitt praised Thomas Hobbes for adopting this “personalistic” type of representation, for retaining the old-world office of “sole sovereign,” and for elevating “his state, the Leviathan, into an immense person and thus point-blank into mythology.”<sup>2</sup>

Schmitt’s categorization of Hobbes might seem mistaken to those accustomed to reading his concept of representation as a fundamentally proto-liberal exchange among contracting individuals. But Schmitt’s appraisal of Hobbes’s representation deserves consideration, if for no other reason than that demanded by the frequency and urgency of Hobbes’s own rhetorical references to the “mortal god” of the “body politic.”<sup>3</sup> These metaphors belie Hobbes’s alleged legal rationalism and suggest that he availed himself of the metaphysics—and the raw emotional and aesthetic power—of what Schmitt called “true” representation. In this sense, his commonwealth exhibits a deep, social cohesion rather than a thin, legal alliance, or, as he put it in Chapter 17 of *Leviathan*, a “real unity of them all in one and the same person,” which is quite a bit “more than consent and concord.”<sup>4</sup> The expression “real unity” that Hobbes employs in this passage is not familiar to most modern political theorists, even though it was a popular theological term in England during the seventeenth century that described the relationship between Jesus Christ and all the members of his church “body.” This profound connection of believers with Christ derives from his unique role as divine representative of them all before God the Father, an important theological dogma that was (and still is) held by both Catholics and Protestants.

Karl Barth, a Protestant theologian who was a contemporary of Carl Schmitt, wrote extensively on this doctrinal subject, and his analysis on the precise nature of Christ’s representation helps to explain in clear, modern language why and how Christ’s embodied representation might have proven so useful to Hobbes

---

2. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 47.

3. For “mortal god,” see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668 [1651]*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), XVII.13; and for a protracted exposition of the claim that “the kingdom of God is a civil kingdom . . . which God by his lieutenants or vicars, who deliver his commandments to the people, [does] exercise on earth” (XXXV.13), see Books III–IV, entire; for “body politic,” see *Leviathan’s* Introduction, XVIII.18, XXI.21, XXIX.15, and Review and Conclusion, along with countless references in his other works, one of which (*De Corpore Politico*) is entitled simply “On the Body Politic.”

4. *Ibid.*, XVII.13.

and Schmitt for their political theories. Barth describes the church as “an event” rather than an institution: a miraculous and divine “gathering together” by faith of alienated souls in and because of the salvific, representative figure of Christ.<sup>5</sup> In this way the church is spontaneously created through Christ and depends for its very existence and health forever afterwards upon him. It is this specific theological doctrine—the indispensability of Christ’s person and work for the life of the community—that resonates strongly in Hobbes’s and Schmitt’s work on political representation. Both theorists conceived of a social sphere created and sustained by one quasi-divine figure, a unique feature that does not appear in the familiar classical trope of “body politic” but does hold a prominent place in the Christian theology of Christ’s church-body. This feature of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, combined with the work’s pervasive religious imagery and rhetoric, makes Schmitt’s allegation about Hobbes’s substantively “personalistic” representation plausible. Indeed, this article argues that any interpretation of Hobbes’s concept of *political* representation must confront and consider the debt that this concept owes to the doctrine of *Christological* representation.

Throughout the article, I treat Karl Barth as a hostile witness. Barth strongly disapproved of absolutist politics and thought even less of efforts to analogize Christ’s person or work to human offices or institutions. He explicitly criticized Hobbes for setting up an “earthly God” amongst men in *Leviathan* that mimicked the “very different God-man” of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> But because he was a professional theologian (and despite his distaste for Christologically inflected politics), Barth is able to explicate with greater clarity and precision than both Hobbes and Schmitt the salient features of the theological doctrine that proved so significant for their respective political theories. Unlike Barth, I make no presumption in this article about the religious sincerity or status of either Hobbes or Schmitt. In attempting to describe a complicated and extraordinary aspect of political life, I argue that both theorists relied upon images and allusions that were familiar to them and would be easily understood by their readers. For Hobbes, it was the seventeenth-century theological discourse on Christ’s “real unity” and “public personhood,” and in Schmitt’s case, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Roman Catholic tradition of Christ’s priestly mediation. Whether or not Hobbes and Schmitt actually believed these doctrines is beside the point. I argue that the correlation that they established between these religious concepts and certain political understandings illustrates the extent

---

5. Karl Barth, *God Here and Now* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 77, 82–83, 90.

6. Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics, vol. IV, part 4: Lecture Fragments* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), sec. 78, pp. 220–21.

to which religion can be marshalled for political ends, a perennial concern for those who live in a world where religion and politics continue to co-exist and interact.

This article investigates a specific Christian doctrine—that of Christ’s representation—and shows how two important political theorists applied that doctrine in order to further absolutist ends. Schmitt was very transparent about this move in his work, but Hobbes was less so. His frustration with the clergy of his day, and particularly with the republican, anti-monarchical use they made of scripture, led him to foreground formal rationality, rather than belief, in his political philosophy. But Hobbes also recognized that scripture was at least as amenable to anti-republican, monarchical thought as it was to republican ideology, and in nearly every one of his books he included extensive biblical proofs of his political theories.<sup>7</sup> The manner in which he presents his concept of representation is an excellent example of this methodology, insofar as he grounds the concept in legal rationality but, and this is crucial, he by no means limits himself to those rationalist arguments or premises.

The first part of this article explores Hobbes’s iteration of political representation in Chapter 16 of *Leviathan* and indicates the ways in which legal rationalism only accomplishes so much for the author, necessitating extra-rational assistance from religion and theology. The second part briefly examines the usage of “real unity” in England during the seventeenth century and distinguishes the “real unity” of Christianity from the “real unity” of the classical motif of “body politic,” characteristic of the ancient world. The third part presents Schmitt’s gloss on this maneuver, along with Barth’s insights on the outstanding features of Christological representation. In the final pages, I analyze the rhetorical motivations and effects of Schmitt’s and Hobbes’s political theologies, and I suggest that a more alert appreciation of the religious undercurrents in Hobbes’s philosophy may make us more sensitive to the subtle interplay of religion and politics in our own world.

### Hobbes and His Concept of Political Representation

Chapter 16 of *Leviathan* makes it clear that “representation” for Hobbes is primarily a *legal* matter. He briefly discusses a theatrical understanding of the concept, by which “a *person* is the same that an *actor* is, both on stage in and in conversation; and to *personate* is to *act*, or *represent*, himself or another.”<sup>8</sup> But

---

7. All of Hobbes’s works of political philosophy begin with a systematically logical and scientific discourse and methodology; most of them end with extended arguments drawn from divine revelation.

8. *Leviathan*, XVI.3; emphasis in the original (see note 3 above).

Hobbes abandons the theatrical allusion after this point, and thereafter prefers to explain representation in terms of formal, public, and legal “authorization.”<sup>9</sup> According to this familiar dynamic, the *author* of any words or action may allow another party to dispatch those words or deeds in his name. The agreement between them takes the form of a “commission or license,” otherwise known as a “covenant” or contract, the terms of which determine the scope and extent of their arrangement.<sup>10</sup> Whether the working relationship between them is limited (giving the actor authority only in certain specific actions) or unlimited (giving the actor “authority without stint”), both parties agree to legally “own” the authorized actions, whether performed by author or actor. The rubric is straightforward—so much so in fact that many scholars have chosen to focus almost exclusively on the abstract legality of political representation in Hobbes’s thought, and perhaps inadvertently given the impression that it is the only facet of his concept.<sup>11</sup>

But Hobbes’s curious handling of representative *unity* sits uncomfortably with this rationalist interpretation and suggests that he may have had a more metaphysically complex understanding of political representation. In Chapter 16, he famously states,

A multitude of men, are made one person, when they are by one man, or one person, represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of the multitude in particular. For it is the unity of the representer, not the unity of the represented, that maketh the person one.<sup>12</sup>

Hobbes is arguing that a disparate multitude can be considered as one “person,” but only because every consenting principal has chosen the same individual to be

---

9. Quentin Skinner argues that even the theatrical usage should be considered an extension of the legal; see Skinner, “Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State,” in *Hobbes and Civil Science*, 5th ed., vol. 3, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 177–208, at 193–94.

10. *Leviathan*, XVI.4–5 (see note 3 above).

11. For rationalist-centered analyses of Hobbes’s representation, see Skinner, “Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State” (see note 9 above), and Skinner, “Hobbes on Persons, Authors and Representatives,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 157–80; David Runciman, “Hobbes and the Person of the Commonwealth,” in his *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6–33; Ian Shapiro, “Hobbes’s Theory of Representation: Anti-Democratic or Proto-Democratic?,” in *Political Representation*, ed. Shapiro et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15–34; and Bryan Garsten, “Religion and Representation in Hobbes” in *Leviathan, or, The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 519–46.

12. *Leviathan*, XVII.13 (see note 3 above).

his representative. In other words, the unity that the multitude enjoys is merely formal and legal. Hobbes reiterates this in the next paragraph: “And because the multitude naturally is not *one*, but *many*; they cannot be understood for one; but many Authors, of every thing their representative saith, or doth in their name.”<sup>13</sup> Despite their common representative and the fear by which he threatens them all, the individuals who make up the multitude remain isolated from each other. No amount of legal maneuvering can alter their fundamentally detached natures or create a “people” in any other sense than merely notional.

If Hobbes’s only interest had been social order and security, then this legal and dictatorial solution may have proved sufficient. There is, however, reason to believe that social *unity* was his ultimate concern, if only because security and order could not be achieved on any other basis. His pointed distinction between “multitude” and “people” demonstrated that unity was the sole prerequisite for lasting civil security and peace, and that the thin, momentary agreement of individuals in the state of nature—either to observe general rules of decorum *or* to better their prospects by setting up a supreme power over them—was not enough to ensure order and peace. Hobbes insisted that a “contract” was nothing more than a verbal promise,<sup>14</sup> and implied in many places that the sovereign himself would have to positively “gather together,” “compel,” “reduce them,” “conform their wills,” and “frame the will of them all to unity and concord amongst themselves.”<sup>15</sup> These terms suggest that formal and legal consent merely initiates a more involved process of social transformation that is indispensable for the maintaining of security and order. While legal representation could create *formal* unity, and certainly necessitated some kind of transient, coordinated agreement between individuals, it couldn’t grant genuine unity without changing the very nature of man: essentially fearful, competitive, and proud.<sup>16</sup> Channeling that nature without changing it—by, for instance, exchanging “fear of all” with fear of a single armed individual—might create a safer space for unity, but it could not guarantee, foster, or empower it. Moreover, the safe space might not be all that safe because, according to Hobbes, the natural qualities of pride and ambition often neutralize the other natural quality, fear. For instance,

---

13. *Ibid.*, XVI.13–14.

14. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1991 [1641]), XIV.2; he calls it a “covenant” in *Leviathan*, XIV.11,18, 31 (see note 3 above).

15. See Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1640; 1650]), XIX.7; Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1640; 1650]), XXI.10; Hobbes, *De Cive*, V.8, VI.1, 7 (see previous note); and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVII.13 (see note 3 above).

16. *Ibid.*, XIII.6–7.

“vain-glorious men” tend to brush off risk in their pursuit of power and status, invariably stirring up “trouble and sedition” in their wake.<sup>17</sup> And where the sword no longer terrifies (for whatever reason), legal arrangements are meaningless.<sup>18</sup>

Hobbes had promised a definitive way out of his state of nature,<sup>19</sup> but neither “law” nor “fear” seems able to achieve it. Those who disregarded their legal obligations, Hobbes threatened with force; those who disparaged force, he confronted with legal obligation. The circularity in this reasoning only emphasizes the intrinsic inadequacy of both mechanisms, and Hobbes’s opponents, who had read from Aristotle that man is a political animal, assumed that the political community already enjoyed some measure of order and unity *before* the introduction of terror and formal consent and were thus unlikely to be impressed by Hobbes’s failure to establish social harmony even *after* the fact. In this context and oriented toward these concerns, Hobbes presented his Chapter 17 “generation of a commonwealth” narrative:

The only way to erect such a common power to defend [individuals] . . . is to appoint one man or assembly of men to bear their person, and every one to own and acknowledge himself to be the author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person shall act . . . and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment. This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity 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 *Mortal God* to which we owe, under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defense.<sup>20</sup>

Instead of the flat, fiduciary figure implied in his Chapter 16 discourse on legal representation, Hobbes called the political agent a mortal god, in whose shadow his human authorizers reverently cower, and in whose body they are knit together, not merely by consent or concord, but in “real unity. The moment seems pregnant and transformative: antagonistic individualism immediately becomes a bad memory of the past and in its place springs a legitimate (albeit fragile) corporate harmony. Mankind decisively escapes the State of Nature, but only after legal representation

---

17. *Ibid.*, XI.4.

18. *Ibid.*, XV.22, XXVII.17–20, and especially Review/Conclusion, 2, 16. For Hobbes on rebellion (despite the sword), see *ibid.*, XXVIII.23, XXIX.14, and XXX.29. For his anxiety about the way religion makes people impervious to fear of the sword, see *ibid.*, XLIII.2, as well as XXIX.15 and XLII.11–2, 102.

19. *Ibid.*, XIII.13

20. *Ibid.*, XVII.13 (emphasis in the original).

becomes magical representation and the fear of the sword becomes fear of a “mortal god,” suggesting that Hobbes needed another kind of representation and another kind of fear to truly rescue mankind from itself.

Many scholars deny this, however. They reasonably point out that since Hobbes never gives up his emphasis on legal authorization and terror of the sword, this Chapter 17 panegyric to a “mortal god” must simply be rhetorical. Quentin Skinner argues, for instance, that Hobbes evoked this religious fear merely in order to remind us of the power of Commonwealth—a power founded by law and enforced by the sword.<sup>21</sup> But “mortal god” obviously reminds the reader of God, not law or sword, and Hobbes’s frank acknowledgement that “fear of powers invisible”<sup>22</sup> is a stronger fear than that of men<sup>23</sup> reinforces this sense. Hobbes no doubt intended to arouse just this kind of fear by his mantra in Books III–IV that all political sovereigns are God’s “lieutenants” on earth.<sup>24</sup> So while religious fear by no means invalidates either fear of the sword or legal obligation (in Hobbes’s opinion, it positively *endorses* both of them), it seems likely from the rest of *Leviathan* that reverence to that “mortal god” is something independent of law and sword and of greater significance than mere rhetoric.<sup>25</sup>

It is even more likely that “real unity” should be taken at face value. Unlike “mortal god,” the expression “real unity” does not read as if it were obviously a metaphor. Hobbes always uses the word “real” in its literal sense throughout *Leviathan*,<sup>26</sup> and the line in which it appears has a straightforward, conceptual precision that seems to discourage a metaphorical gloss. Even if Hobbes did use this phrase

21. Skinner, “Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State,” 203–04 (see note 9 above).

22. *Leviathan*, VI.36, XI.26, XII (see note 3 above).

23. *Ibid.*, XI.27, XIV.31–33, XXVII.20.

24. *Ibid.*, XVIII.3, XXXV.7, XXXVII.13. The titular allusion to “Leviathan” from the book of Job augments the overarching sense of religious power, along with the reverent fear that should attend it. For a brief commentary on Job’s confrontation of God’s sovereignty, see *De Cive*, XV.6 (see note 14 above).

25. For Hobbes, there is a sense in which the civil law of a commonwealth is closely intertwined with divine law from its very inception, insofar as “the law of nature . . . is undoubtedly God’s law”; see *Leviathan*, XXVI.41; see also XV.41, XXX.30, XXXI.7, XLIII.5, 23 (see note 3 above). In another sense, the legal authorization of a sovereign representative, while grounded on natural law, is distinct from it.

26. For “real” vs. “imagining, dreaming” and a “fiction” see XXVII.1; for “real” vs. “seeming,” see XXXIV.25; for “real” vs. “metaphorical,” see XXXV.11; for “real” vs. “the act of a tongue or pen,” see XXXVII.13; for “real” vs. “phantasms of the brain” and “human fancy,” see XLIV.3; for “real” vs. “figment of the mind,” see XLVI.16; for “real” vs. “specter,” see Latin Appendix, I.4; for “real” vs. “name,” see Latin Appendix.1.65; and for “real” vs. “supernatural phantasm,” see Latin Appendix.III.15; all citations are to *Leviathan* (see note 3 above).



in a metaphorical or rhetorical manner, his relationship with rhetoric and metaphor was strictly oriented towards the greater facilitation and illumination of truth. The most important question is not whether “real unity” or “mortal god” should be considered rhetorical or metaphorical, but rather why and how these two expressions help Hobbes to make a larger, substantive claim. We know, for instance, that Hobbes desperately wanted subjects to own their sovereign representative’s actions,<sup>27</sup> and the apparatus of authorization that Hobbes outlines in Chapter 16 established a clear legal bond of legitimacy and responsibility between author and agent. But the depth of moral alienation that Hobbes was demanding of subjects to their sovereign taxed this legal bond to the breaking point.<sup>28</sup>

Ultimately the real unity of a mortal god accomplished for Hobbes what pure legality could not. By augmenting fear of man with fear of God and appealing to an organic interconnection between them all, Hobbes gave subjects two powerful new incentives for docility and obedience toward their sovereign. Eager to preserve social harmony and to honor God, they might more willingly reconcile themselves to an otherwise excessive power structure—but *only if they really believed that there was indeed a social harmony to be had through their sovereign, quasi-divine representative*. The narrative of social transformation and conversion announced by Hobbes in his “real unity” passage essentially assures his readers of precisely this scenario, and therefore however rhetorical, metaphorical, or mysterious the expression might seem, it has to refer to something the average seventeenth-century English reader would regard as objectively *real* and *true*.<sup>29</sup>

---

27. Ibid., XVIII.6–7, XVIII.3, XIX, XXI.7, and XXII.9; see also VIII.8, Review/Conclusion. 1–4. Skinner has himself argued that Hobbes’s rhetoric ought to be taken in this way; see Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). And in regard to the “real unity” reference in Chapter 17 of *Leviathan*, Skinner has stated that “Hobbes is concerned not merely with the importance of joining disparate forces together, but with the need for a much stronger political bond”; see Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 196–97.

28. For skepticism on precisely this point, see Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 264; and Katrin Flikschuh, “Elusive Unity: The General Will in Hobbes and Kant,” *Hobbes Studies* 25 (2012): 21–42, at 22: “Under no conditions does it seem either rational or plausible voluntarily to subject oneself whilst retaining responsibility for the actions of one’s superior.”

29. Garsten insists upon the exclusively “artificial” quality of Hobbes’s representation and claims that Hobbes intended for subjects to “keep a certain psychological distance from the sovereign”; see Garsten, “Religion and Representation in Hobbes,” 539 (see note 11 above). But Hobbes is famous for fostering in citizens precisely the opposite mentality: one of complete identification with their sovereign. A concomitant suggestion from Hobbes that they should “keep psychological distance” from their sovereign would contradict his stated aims and be counterproductive to them.

Philip Pettit has observed that this passage has strong resonances to the Roman Catholic miracle of Eucharistic transubstantiation, in which the bread and wine of the sacrament are ontologically transformed into the body and blood of Christ. The very expression “real unity” has obvious similarities with the Roman Catholic term “real presence,” which refers to the special quality of Christ’s involvement in the sacrament. But it would be odd for Hobbes to positively allude to transubstantiation in this passage or in any other, given his explicit antipathy for the concept,<sup>30</sup> and Pettit suggests as much in his brief assessment of Hobbes’s “real unity” passage as “ironic, even wicked.”<sup>31</sup> But what if the mystical allusion in this passage is not wicked or ironic? Does it refer to transubstantiation at all? What is “real unity,” and what did it mean to Hobbes’s generation? An investigation is in order.

### “Real Unity” in Seventeenth-Century England

The expression “real unity” had a specific, precise meaning during the seventeenth century in England. In the available (and digitized) print literature from that period, “real unity” or “real union” occurs in over 400 books, tracts, or sermons. In the overwhelming majority of these texts, the expression has a deeply theological meaning: about 60 of the passages in question refer either to the Trinity (a union of persons within the Godhead) or to Jesus Christ’s unique identity (a union of human and divine natures), and well over 300 of the passages refer to the relationship between Christ and believers.<sup>32</sup> A sparse handful of passages refer to the physiological synergy of body parts in a living creature, but this particular category deserves consideration

---

30. *Leviathan*, XXXVII.13, XLIV.11, and XLVI.18 (see note 3 above).

31. Philip Pettit, *Made with Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 75. Many other scholars have followed Pettit both in making this transubstantiation connection and in rejecting or dismissing the allusion as ironic and rhetorical. See Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 35–37; Mónica Brito Vieira, *The Elements of Representation in Hobbes: Aesthetics, Theatre, Law, and Theology in the Construction of Hobbes’s Theory of the State*, Studies in the History of Political Thought, vol. 2 (Boston: Brill, 2009), 165–66; and Garsten, “Religion and Representation in Hobbes” (see note 11 above).

32. These numbers come from author’s study of 419 works published in England from 1600 to 1700; most of them were discovered through the Early English Books Online database ([www.eebo.chadwyck.com](http://www.eebo.chadwyck.com)), although some were found through archival research. Numerous references within one work were counted as one unless they did not have the same meaning. Of the 419 works, 304 refer to the relationship between Christ and believers (the church), 38 of them refer to Christ’s identity, 25 refer to the Trinity, 14 refer to the “real presence” of the Eucharist, 22 refer to miscellaneous non-religious scenarios, 11 refer to miscellaneous religious scenarios, and 5 refer to the physiological union of parts within a living body. Details of this study are available from the author upon request.

before the others, if only for its obvious resonance with Hobbes's "body politic" metaphor.

According to certain metaphysical arguments made during the seventeenth century, the organs and parts of an animate body could be said to cohere by "real unity," in that their interrelation makes up one integral whole rather than a loose, divisible aggregate.<sup>33</sup> From ancient times, this scientific principle was frequently extended to human political associations: Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and medieval classicist John of Salisbury<sup>34</sup> (among many others) argued that the political community should be regarded as a "body" by analogy, in which all members, functions, and roles seamlessly knit together in order to promote the greater life and health of the whole.<sup>35</sup> Nor did they think this image was *merely* metaphorical. Salisbury praised the ancients for their consensus that the "body politic . . . should imitate nature,"<sup>36</sup> and for maintaining this position regardless of whether their respective methodologies were normative or descriptive. The classical theorists, whether idealists like Plato or empiricists like Aristotle and Cicero, agreed not only that human beings *should* mimic the order of creation but that in fact they *do*, most of the time.<sup>37</sup> The term "body politic" was a metaphor and an aspirational aim, but it was also an observation about typical (or natural) human behavior.

Hobbes, however, heatedly denied this claim. He ridiculed Aristotle's allusion to bees and ants while pointedly distinguishing the kind of unity proper to "sociable" insects versus human beings: "The agreement of these creatures is natural;

33. These arguments are made in treatises by Anne Conway (1692) and Francis Gastrell (1696), among others, which are available at Early English Books Online ([www.eebo.chadwyck.com](http://www.eebo.chadwyck.com)).

34. See Plato, *Republic*, II.368d-369a, IV.434d-e (see note 34 above); Aristotle, *Politics*, sections 1254a, 1281b, 1290b; John Salisbury, *Policraticus* V (entire), in *The Statesman's Book*, trans. John Dickinson (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963); and Cicero, *Offices*, III.v-vi, in *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

35. It is true that Aristotle criticizes Plato's *Republic* for turning the state into "an individual person" (at *Politics* 1261a), but he later does the very same himself: "On their joining together, the multitude, with its many feet and hands and having many senses, becomes like a single human being" (1281b4-6). Aristotle's initial statement had more to do with a concern about potential uniformity, rather than organic coherence; he was rejecting the former, but not necessarily the latter. See the previous note for sources.

36. Salisbury, *Policraticus*, V.xxi (see note 34 above).

37. Plato's pervasive use of parable and metaphor, as well as his deep concern about the objects of our thoughtless imitation at his *Republic*, III.395ff, X.596ff, should illustrate this point sufficiently, but see also his *Republic*, III.400d-403c. In Aristotle, Cicero, and Salisbury, the examples are too numerous to cite, but for a sampling, see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b, 1253a, 1256b; Cicero, *Offices*, I.vi, I.xvi-xvii, I.xliv; and Salisbury, *Policraticus* V (entire) (see note 34 above for these sources).

that of men, is by covenant only, which is artificial.”<sup>38</sup> Human beings cannot cohere the way ants or bees do because, by nature, “man to man is an arrant wolf”<sup>39</sup>—every interaction between them constitutes some version of war, motivated either by competition or fear.<sup>40</sup> The only cooperative truce they can manage is one in which they continue to interact with each other in fear, not of each other, but of a common power who will punish them for overt violence.<sup>41</sup> This arrangement enables a certain degree of tense but safe, social collaboration. What it does not and *cannot* create, however, is a genuine unity amongst those terror-stricken individuals—let alone the kind of organic cohesion implied in analogies to bees, ants, and physiological bodies. The mystery, therefore, is how Hobbes ends up with just that: a commonwealth made up of individuals with such close association that they live, think, speak, and move as one corporate personality. This secondary political ontology in *Leviathan* certainly resonates with the ancient and classical image of the body politic, but how Hobbes arrived there, especially considering his initial rejection of that principle, is unclear.

However murky this metamorphosis, it obviously occurs in, by, and through a personal representative: “a multitude of men are made *one* person, when they are by one man, or one person, represented.”<sup>42</sup> Hobbes is even clearer about this in his Chapter 42 refutation of Cardinal Bellarmine’s Aristotelian arguments: “It is true that [the members of a commonwealth] cohere together; but they depend only on the sovereign which is the soul of the commonwealth. Which failing, the commonwealth is dissolved into a civil war, no man so much as cohering to another, for want of a common dependence on a known sovereign, just as the members of the natural body dissolve into earth, for want of a soul to hold them together.”<sup>43</sup> This is yet another aspect in which Hobbes’s body politic diverges from the ancient/classical model. According to Aristotle, Cicero, and Salisbury, the organic unity of the polis derived from human nature itself, not from any authoritative figure. Cicero in fact argued that political leaders who dared to attack this “universal society” of the commonwealth should be removed: “Just as we cut off those members of the body which have got no longer either blood or spirits in them, and serve but to infect and corrupt the rest; so should those monsters . . . be cut off, as

---

38. *Leviathan*, XVII.6–12 (see note 3 above).

39. Thomas Hobbes, *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*, 11 vols., in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (London: John Bohn, 1841), vol. 2, ii.

40. *Leviathan*, XIII.4–9 (see note 3 above).

41. *Ibid.*, XIII.10 and XIV.4–5.

42. *Ibid.*, XVI.13.

43. *Ibid.*, XLII.125.

it were, and separated from the body and society of mankind.”<sup>44</sup> Cohesion in the classical “body politic” relied far less upon the guiding head than upon natural harmony of all the other members involved, and sometimes even decapitation was necessary in order to preserve this intrinsic unity. The body politic depicted by Hobbes in *Leviathan*, however, cannot be regarded a *body* at all, apart from its ruling head. This commonwealth is created, sustained, and maintained by one person—there is no cooperation, no unity, no security, no movement, no action, no life, no *being* without the representative of the commonwealth. In this sense, the representative is not only the *sine qua non* of the commonwealth, the representative *is* the commonwealth (and vice versa).

In short, the physiological understanding of “real unity,” popular amongst the ancients, clashes with Hobbes’s narrative at least as often as it enlightens. And if it were the only possible context from which he could have drawn that pregnant expression, we would be forced to conclude that this is yet another case in which Thomas Hobbes borrowed, and then unceremoniously dismantled, a traditional belief for his own ends. But the overwhelming usage of “real unity” during the seventeenth century did not even refer to this ancient physiological context; it referred to Jesus Christ’s unique relationship to the members of his church body, and it is almost impossible that Hobbes would not have known this. When Oliver Cromwell famously appealed to the real unity enjoyed by all believers who were members of Christ’s “body,”<sup>45</sup> he was merely echoing familiar theological concepts and terminology at the time. As early as 1597, eminent clergyman Richard Hooker wrote extensively on the believer’s “actual incorporation into that society which hath [Christ] for their Head, and doth make together with him one Body.” He assured his readers that even if all those individuals “be in number as the stars of heaven” and divided by time and place, they are “notwithstanding, coupled every one to Christ their Head, and all unto every particular person amongst themselves, inasmuch as

---

44. Cicero, *Offices, Essays, and Letters*, trans. Thomas Cockman (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1930), III.vi (p. 125).

45. The letter (dated September 14, 1645) was addressed to Parliament: “All that believe have the real unity, which is most glorious; because inward, and spiritual, in the Body, and to the Head.” Several treatises mention or analyze this widely publicized letter of Cromwell’s. See Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648), 250–54, available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A57980.0001.001?view=toC>; Edward Bowles, *Manifest Truth* (London, 1646), 70, available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A28914.0001.001?view=toC>; Abraham Babington, *An Answer to a Discourse Entitled, Truth It’s Manifest, &c.* (1648?), 145–56, available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A76572.0001.001?view=toC>; and Nicholas Lockyer, *A Little Stone out of the Mountain Church-Order Briefly Opened* (Leith, 1652), 148, available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo2;idno=A66932.0001.001>.

the Spirit . . . doth so formalize, unite and actuate his whole race, as if both he and they were so many limbs compacted into one body, by being quickened all with one and the same soul.”<sup>46</sup> This theological language simultaneously alludes to the classical physiological tradition of the body politic *and also* emphasizes the crucial role of the “head” for this social corporation.

The ecclesiological image of Christ’s body figured prominently in theological treatises of the period and ultimately made its way into formal pronouncements of the Westminster Assembly (1643–53), a special commission of Parliament tasked to investigate and develop doctrinal and liturgical reforms for the Church of England. The 1647 Westminster Catechism (two years before Cromwell’s letter, four years before the first edition of *Leviathan*) plainly asserted that Jesus Christ was “anointed” by God the Father to be both “mediator” and “public person” on behalf of all believers. This legal status is consummated in a “real” connection between Christ and his people: “The *union* which the elect have with Christ is the work of God’s grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet *really* and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband.”<sup>47</sup> And by ontological, physiological necessity, this vital relationship of “union and communion . . . mutual love and fellowship” is also shared amongst those who have Christ as their “public person,” for they are all “members of the same mystical body.”<sup>48</sup> All the high points of Thomas Hobbes’s commonwealth representation are present in this terse theological confession: the legality, the creator-“head,” the ontological identification, the metaphorical body, and the “real unity.” The telltale references in *Leviathan* to a “mortal god,” to a corporate body, to reverence and awe, to profound social unity, and to the indispensability of a salvific central figure, all suggest that Christ’s representation was an important prototype for Hobbes’s political representation—rationalist underpinnings notwithstanding.

But before we undertake a more sustained examination of Christological representation and its political counterpart (with help from Schmitt and Barth), something needs to be said about Hobbes’s admittedly complicated treatment of Christ’s persona throughout his books. Hobbes struggled to explain Jesus Christ’s deliberately pacifist, apolitical tenure on earth, and throughout his works, he was much more likely to recommend the religious figures of Moses or other Israelite chiefs and judges than Christ as prototypes for his civil sovereign. He generally portrayed Christ’s New

---

46. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, vol. V, Everyman’s Library 202 (New York: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1954), 228, 233.

47. Westminster Larger Catechism (1647), Question 66, emphasis added; available at [https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Larger\\_Catechism.pdf](https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Larger_Catechism.pdf).

48. *Ibid.*, Question 168.

Testament administration as an unusual and completely temporary departure from the ideal political model presented in Israel's earlier theocratic period.<sup>49</sup> This tendency in Hobbes to contextualize Christ's political significance by relegating it to some future eschatological realm might seem to invalidate the allegation of this article that Hobbes's concept of representation is heavily Christological in form and tone. But I argue that despite Hobbes's skepticism about Christ—and *because* of it—his civil sovereign is an impressively Christological instantiation in the secular realm, not least because the Israelite prophets, priests, kings, and judges that he prefers over Christ are generally considered to be messianic pre-figures already.<sup>50</sup> In shaping his civil sovereign as an exalted prophet, priest, and king in the tradition of Israel's ecclesiastical tradition, he was inadvertently envisioning a messianic—or in Christianity's terms, a *Christological*—office. That he pointedly questioned Christ's own Christological credentials in this matter is ironic,<sup>51</sup> but it does not nullify the paradigmatically Christological cast of political sovereignty in his thought.

Moreover, Hobbes seemed less troubled by Christ's actual behavior or role than by the anti-political applications that could be (and were) drawn from them, often in the way of denying ecclesiastical and political authorities certain authoritative or mediatorial functions in order to uphold the prerogative of Christ in those particulars.<sup>52</sup> Hobbes was eager to correct these misapplications by either dismissing Christ's contributions as purely spiritual and therefore politically irrelevant, or (more powerfully) by humanizing and relativizing them to recognizable socio-political roles. His notorious iteration of the Trinity, for instance, demoted Christ to the same level as Moses,<sup>53</sup> and in several places he emphatically insisted that Christ's representative office, "to

---

49. Hobbes carefully distinguishes Christ's "kingdom of heaven" from the earthly kingdoms of prophets, priests, and kings of all eras. See Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, XXV.7 and XXXXVI.4, 9 (see note 14 above); Hobbes, *De Cive*, XVII.4–6 (see note 14 above); and *Leviathan*, XXXV.11–3 (see note 3 above). For a well-known analysis of Hobbes's eschatology, see J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in his *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 148–201.

50. Hobbes says that ". . . by Christ is understood that same king, who was promised from God by Moses and the prophets for to be the king and Savior of the world . . .," in *De Cive*, XVII.11 (see note 14 above).

51. Hobbes does his best to emphasize the "kingly" aspects of Christ's character, but cannot avoid or deny his deliberate abdication of earthly rule; see *De Cive*, XVII.1–3, 6 (see note 14 above); and also XLII.6 (see note 3 above).

52. *Leviathan*, XLVII.4.

53. *Ibid.*, XVI.12, XLI.9, XLII.3. For a more sustained treatment of Hobbes's doctrine of the Trinity and its significance for his concept of representation, see Brito Vieira, *The Elements of Representation in Hobbes*, 209–34 (see note 31 above).



speak properly, was not that of a king, but of a viceroy, such as Moses's kingdom was.<sup>54</sup> But this reduction of Christ's rank from unapproachable divinity to honored human prophet should not necessarily be viewed as a rejection so much as an affirmation of Christ's role as an exemplar for civil sovereignty. Hobbes was very interested in the relevance of Christ's unique persona and office as long as they could be converted from the subjective, spiritual realm into an objective, political form. He affirmed the existence of Christ's so-called "mystical body," for instance, and had no problem referring to Christ as the "head of his body the Church."<sup>55</sup> But unless that headship could receive concrete, political expression on earth, the title was only valid *in potentia*, awaiting the judgement day and Christ's return on earth.<sup>56</sup> In the interim, Hobbes extended Christ's appellation to all human sovereigns, declaring that "there are as many catholic churches as there are heads of churches. And there as many heads as there are Christian kingdoms and republics."<sup>57</sup>

Hobbes liberally plundered biblical and patristic history for personages who exemplified the qualities and attributes of civil sovereignty as he understood it, from Abraham to Constantine. And although he often showed a marked preference for the legacy of those who wielded the sword, Hobbes could not ignore or avoid the powerful images associated with Jesus Christ, and, in particular, the renowned Pauline metaphor of Christ's headship of his church-body.<sup>58</sup> This organicist analogy haunts the pages of Hobbes's works and profoundly influences his portrayals of civil sovereignty. The "real unity" of his commonwealth is yet another instance of the debt Hobbes owes to this Christological formula, and it reveals the extent to which the theological structure of Hobbes's sovereign is uniquely *Christian* rather

---

54. *De Cive*, XVII.4; see also *De Corpore Politico*, XXVI.7 (see note 14 above for both sources). In *Leviathan*, XLI.3,7, he writes: "For he was Messiah, that is, the Christ, that is, the Anointed Priest, and the Sovereign Prophet of God; that is to say, he was to have all the power that was in Moses the Prophet, in the High Priests that succeeded Moses, and in the Kings that succeeded the Priests" (see note 3 above).

55. *Leviathan*, Latin Appendix II.22: "Since the number of those elected by God, scattered over the whole of the earth and having as head in heaven Jesus Christ himself, is called, and is, the true church, unique and most catholic, it is also that in which we profess to believe in the creed of the faith" (see note 3 above).

56. *De Cive*, XVII.22 (see note 14 above).

57. *Leviathan*, Latin Appendix II.22 (see note 3 above).

58. For Paul's original statements, see Romans 12:4; I Corinthians 11:13, 12:12–14; Ephesians 4:3–4, 15–6, 5:22–32; and Colossians 1:24, 2:9–10, 19, 3:15. Hobbes says in one place that his sovereign should be regarded as the "soul" of the commonwealth, rather than the "head" in *De Cive*, VI); also see *Leviathan*, Introduction, XXI.21, XXIX.23, XLII.125. However, he often refers to his sovereign as head anyway, especially in religious contexts in *De Cive*, XVII.28 (see note 14 above); and *Leviathan*, XXXVII.13, XLII.116, Latin Appendix II.22 (see note 3 above).



than simply Mosaic or Constantinian. The representation of Christ has a mystical, profoundly ontological aspect to it that transcends other human representations—even those in the religious sphere, and certainly those in the political or economic sphere. It is a legitimate representation, yes, but it is qualitatively different from the usual legal-rationalist types. Let us call it *theological representation*.

### Theological Representation in Schmitt and Barth

If Hanna Pitkin's comprehensive research work is any indication, the meaning and importance of theological representation has been categorically neglected. In her book *The Concept of Representation*, Pitkin briefly mentions in an appendix on etymology that the term representation was used by ecclesiastical clerics in the high Middle Ages to mean "a kind of mystical embodiment," but that shortly thereafter, this esoteric usage converted back into a traditional "symbolic" understanding, depending for its power and authority upon the "nonrational belief of the audience."<sup>59</sup> In reducing theological representation to symbolic representation, Pitkin may have missed a brilliant Wittgensteinian opportunity to investigate an unfamiliar cultural context (the religious and doctrinal) for a potentially unique meaning and usage. The "mystical" understanding of representation, as she called it, cannot be fully collapsed into either "symbolic" or "legal" categories, although it shares characteristics with both contexts. Theological representation has its own special meaning and intellectual evolution: the notion of Christ as representative appeared at least as early as the third-century patristic period,<sup>60</sup> gained momentum during the medieval era,<sup>61</sup> came into its own with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century "federal theology,"<sup>62</sup> and

---

59. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 105, 241–42.

60. See Mónica Brito Vieira and David Runciman, *Representation* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2008), 9–10, for a brief description of Tertullian's third-century contribution.

61. For research on how this theological understanding shaped medieval politics, see Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Francis Oakley, *The Mortgage of the Past: Reshaping the Ancient Political Inheritance (1050–1300)* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012), 138–84.

62. There are a few broad studies on the connection between "federal theology" and political federalism, such as Charles S. McCoy, J. Wayne Baker, and Heinrich Bullinger, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); and Daniel Judah Elazar and John Kincaid, eds., *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2000). However, David A. Weir, in *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1990), takes a more in-depth look at the doctrinal principles. The best sources for "federal theology" are often little-known theological treatises that do not advertise themselves

developed dramatic, existential appeal in the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup> The context for theological representation is very much alive.

But many modern theorists of “representation” continue to pass over it. Even Carl Schmitt, with his well-known theological interests, failed to completely or unequivocally explicate the Christological significance in his own analysis of representation in *Leviathan*, although he made an oblique reference to the martyrdom of Hobbes’s great monster due to “traditional Jewish interpretations” that seems to suggest Schmitt’s awareness of the parallel.<sup>64</sup> What he *did* recognize was that Hobbes’s representation bore very little resemblance to the usual rationalist/legal model made popular by political liberalism. First of all, Hobbes had only asserted individualism in order to expose its horrors and then “deny and negate” it.<sup>65</sup> Terrified by fear in the state of nature, “anguished individuals” in *Leviathan* do indeed gather and voluntarily agree one with another to end their untenable isolation, but, according to Schmitt, their rationalistic consensus cannot even begin to achieve the “condition of unity and peace” they all desire. Instead, as if in answer to their unanimous realization, “suddenly there stands in front of them a new god. Who is this god who brings peace and security . . . who transforms wolves into citizens and through this miracle proves himself to be a god?” He is a “sovereign *person* brought about by representation,” and this “sovereign-representative person is much more than the sum total of all the participating wills. . . . The new god is transcendent vis-à-vis all contractual partners of the covenant and vis-à-vis the sum total.” In this sense, the unity that this god is able to create amongst them in himself—“the state”—is “something more than and something different from a covenant concluded by individuals.”<sup>66</sup>

According to Schmitt, the climactic liberation from the state of nature in *Leviathan* marks the limitation and death of rationalist individualism, not its triumph; atomism was the original crisis, and thus atomism can hardly be the solution. A legal contract between rationalist individuals formally expresses their unanimous agreement that they *need* a new nature, but it has no power to actually

---

as comprehensive treatments of the subject, such as Andrew Murray, *The Two Covenants* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1898); of specific relevance to this article is his chapter X, “Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant,” at 88–96.

63. See Jeannine Michele Graham, *Representation and Substitution in the Atonement Theologies of Dorothee Sölle, John Macquarrie, and Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2005).

64. See Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 82.

65. *Ibid.*, 68.

66. *Ibid.*, 31–34.

grant them that nature. As Schmitt often emphasized in his indefatigable struggle against liberalism, a starkly legal, impersonal, economic representation produced by consenting individuals does not accomplish much, particularly when a drastic ontological transformation is needed.<sup>67</sup> Although Schmitt struggled to properly name or define the representation that can convert human nature, he was adamant that such a representation exists (in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, no less), and he described it as "juristic" rather than merely "legal," by which he meant that it is grounded upon legality but cannot be reduced to legality. According to Schmitt, this juristic representation is deeply personal, totalizing, and even miraculous. He famously praised the Roman Catholic Church for exhibiting precisely this type of representation,<sup>68</sup> and in his analysis on both church and state – and Hobbes's *Leviathan* – Schmitt tirelessly drew attention to instances of "juristic" (which is to say, both "rational" and "personal") representation. According to this type of representation, there is always a central human figure who has transformative capabilities with regard to his subjects: he alone is able to do for them what they could not naturally do for themselves by actively converting each of them into a cohesive whole.

As discussed previously, and in defense of Schmitt's interpretation, Hobbes does state that the Sovereign Representative himself deliberately and personally "reduces their wills, by plurality of voices unto one will," rather than this being a default, automatic result of rationalistic consensus.<sup>69</sup> And his suggestive appellation "mortal god" implies that this representation conveys at least the spirit (if not the presence) of supernatural power. Schmitt's contemporary, twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth, had this same impression of Hobbes's narrative, although he was considerably less pleased about it than Schmitt. In a passage lamenting the "so-called totalitarian states or dictatorships of our own century," Barth accused Hobbes of being the progenitor of this "political absolutism" by setting up an "earthly God" amongst men, adding darkly that "along the lines of the polemic which was the purpose of his book" Hobbes might easily have called his Sovereign Representative "the true God-man," directly mimicking that "very different God-man" of Christianity.<sup>70</sup> This latter figure is, of course, Jesus Christ,<sup>71</sup> and although Barth does

---

67. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, 18–19, 21, 25–26 (see note 1 above).

68. *Ibid.*, 14–15, 21.

69. *Leviathan*, XVII.13 (see note 14 above).

70. Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics, IV.4; Lecture Fragments*, sec. 78, pp. 220–21 (see note 4 above).

71. Barth often refers to Christ as the "God-man." See Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley, 1st English ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), secs. 5–6, 17 (pp. 90, 139–42, 162–63, 429); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. I, part 1, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1936), sec. 13 (p. 24);

not explicitly develop or elaborate upon the evocative Christological significance of Hobbes's Sovereign, Barth's own rigorous theological work on the "God-man" – and particularly his treatment of "Christ the Representative" – goes a long way toward filling in the details of this claim.

The representation of Jesus Christ, according to Barth, is more "radical and universal" than any other representation, although it contains aspects from more familiar iterations of the concept. The theme of *legality*, for instance, figures prominently: Christ is "commissioned and empowered" by God the Father as the "guarantor" for mankind, "to be and act in their place and as their representative."<sup>72</sup> He is also recognized and consented to by all those who formally choose Christ as their representative.<sup>73</sup> For these individuals, Christ acts "in [their] cause and interest" in such a comprehensive fashion that they "cannot add to anything that He does there." Barth writes,

Christ is Judge. . . . He knows and judges and decides at the very point where we regard it as our business to do this. . . . What we want to do for ourselves has been taken out of our hands in Him. . . . We are removed from the judge's seat.<sup>74</sup>

The alienation of all rights to either judge or decide is also a relentless leitmotif for Schmitt and Hobbes, both of whom argued that this irrevocable transfer is one of the most essential elements of legitimate political representation. Schmitt maintained that "the essence of the state's sovereignty" consists in "the monopoly to decide,"<sup>75</sup> and Hobbes frequently asserted the same sentiment about his own

---

and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. I, part 2, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1956), sec. 5 (p. 128).

72. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, part 2, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1957); and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Creation* vol. III, part 2, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 1960), sec. 45 (p. 222).

73. Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. I, part 2 (see note 71 above); and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 3.1, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1961), sec. 69 (p. 12).

74. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 1, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1956), sec. 59, at 230, 232.

75. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, for a similar argument, this time explicitly in reference to "Jesus Christ the Judge," at 33 (see note 1 above).

Sovereign Representative,<sup>76</sup> at one point erupting in rhetorical frustration, “Who shall judge? Shall a private man judge?”<sup>77</sup> The representative agent described by Hobbes, Schmitt, and Barth has supreme and exclusive legal authority to judge and act on behalf of his principals.

And unlike in most other legal arrangements, this agent is neither detached nor mechanistic. Barth wrote of Christ’s representation, “He does not stand in some far-off neutral state. He is not *for us* in such a way that we hardly see Him, that we can let His work be done for us as spectators of an alien work which is indeed done in our favor but which hardly affects us because it is done for us, that we do not have to let it take place to us in the true sense.”<sup>78</sup> This relationship is not merely legal—it is not, as Schmitt would say, a product of “economic rationalism”—and Christ (or any other legitimate political or religious representative) is “not simply a ‘deputy,’”<sup>79</sup> as in liberal democracy.<sup>80</sup> This representation directly and profoundly affects its participants, and with this feature, we drive to the very heart of theological representation, definitively departing from the realm of legal rationalism. Schmitt describes the dynamic as “personification” and “embodiment,”<sup>81</sup> and Barth is even more precise, emphasizing that theological representation forges a “necessary and intimate connection” between two beings, such that they constitute “an indissoluble whole.”<sup>82</sup> For example, “Jesus Christ and His church constitute an inter-related totality, so that He can represent His community and it can represent Him”—not in the sense that their roles are equal or reversible, but in the sense that they together make up *one organic entity*. Barth clarifies that the church community “does not now take first place and Jesus the second. . . . Jesus is still the ruling Head and the Church His ministering body.”<sup>83</sup> Because Christ is the original representative of each individual, the aggregate is made “a part of Him,” rather than vice versa.<sup>84</sup>

---

76. *Leviathan*, V.3, XVIII.8–11, XXI.8, XIII.8 (see note 3 above).

77. *Ibid.*, XLIII.22.

78. Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, IV.1., sec. 59, at 241 (see note 74 above).

79. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, 14–15, 21 (see note 75 above).

80. Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 18–19, 33–34 (see note 1 above).

81. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, 21 (see note 75 above).

82. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, II.2. sec. 32, at 55 (see note 72 above); and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 2, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1958), sec. 68, at 824.

83. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 3.1, sec. 69, at 207 (see note 73 above).

84. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 2, sec. 64, at 60 (see note 82 above).

It would be impossible, in fact, for Christ to be made a part of the church, for there literally is no church without Christ: it “exists in and in virtue of [Christ’s] existence . . . Nor for a single moment or in any respect can it be His body without Him, its Head. Indeed, it cannot be at all without Him. It does not exist apart from Him. It exists only as the body which serves Him the Head.”<sup>85</sup> The church owes its existence and sustenance to Christ and thus in no sense stands as a separate entity from him.<sup>86</sup> Hobbes says almost exactly the same about his commonwealth: at no time either before, during, or after their founding do the people form a body independent of the Sovereign.<sup>87</sup> If he falls or is removed, the commonwealth immediately dissolves.<sup>88</sup> As Barth put it about Christ, the community “derives from Him,” therefore “what He is and does . . . determines their being and action.”<sup>89</sup> This is a radical kind of representation that entails a deep, ontological identification between representative and represented, rather than a merely distant, formal obligation. And in marked contrast to the functionalist, parliamentary language of any legal/rationalist account, the description of this representation—in Hobbes, Barth, and Schmitt—takes on supernatural energy: a miraculous “generation”<sup>90</sup> instantly sends life coursing throughout the body,<sup>91</sup> awakening in it a freshly “intensified kind of being.”<sup>92</sup>

This corporate body, for all three theorists, is made up of many members, but the origin point, importantly, is individualist. The representative has a “particular” relationship with each of his respective principals, like individual spokes shooting out from a central hub.<sup>93</sup> There does not have to be any substantive unity amongst

---

85. *Ibid.*, sec. 64 (pp. 59–60).

86. See Acts 17:28 for Paul’s famous claim, “In him we live, and move, and have our being.”

87. See *Leviathan*, XVI.13–14, XVII.13: “And in him consisteth the *essence* of the Commonwealth . . .”, and XVIII.4,18, XXIX.9,23 (see note 3 above).

88. *Ibid.*, XXX.3.

89. Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, part 2, sec. 32, at 53 (see note 75 above); and Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 2, sec. 68, at 824 (see note 84 above).

90. *Leviathan*, XVII.13 (see note 3 above).

91. Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. I, part 2, sec. 20, at 588 (see note 71 above); and Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, part 2, sec. 38, at 693 (see note 75 above).

92. John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 187, quoting Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslhre* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 210.

93. *Leviathan*, XVI.13–14 (see note 3 above). Hobbes sometimes speaks of a mutual contract between all the pre-political individuals, usually to combat the notion that the sovereign is somehow accountable to an original contract, but he more often refers to a commitment and agreement between each individual and their sovereign, and always makes it clear that

the various contractual partners themselves, especially if the connection they all have with their common representative is merely legal. But theological representation makes coherent, organic unity of them all a necessity, both mathematically and logically: if principal A enjoys an ontological unity with agent X, and principal B is related to X in the same way, then A and B are conjoined as well, in and through the symbiotic relationship they each have with X. The famous individualism of Hobbes's state of nature (that could and would persist under a merely legal representation) can be truly "denied and negated"<sup>94</sup> in theological representation, just as it is overturned in the Christian drama of redemption. Barth said, "There is no question of the individual as such ever being the final end."<sup>95</sup> Christ's "purpose in relation to the individual was not just to set him in a kind of unidimensional relationship to Himself. It was to unite him both with Himself and also . . . with the other individuals" likewise represented.<sup>96</sup> Individualism was only the beginning. "Real unity" was the end, and theological representation, the means.

### The Rhetoric of Theological Representation

The broad lines of this doctrinal understanding tend to provoke a series of understandable conclusions and objections, at least one of which deserves to be clarified: "theological representation" is not a *fusion*, although the language of altered ontology certainly implies that. Barth, for example, forcefully pushes back against the claim that humanity is divinized in Christ, or that the church reaches an ultimate state of indistinction with Christ and thus *becomes* Christ.<sup>97</sup> This Christological confusion could arise, first, from the process of substitutionary representation in the atonement: if God the Father recognizes the righteousness of Christ in place of the *unrighteousness* of sinners, then in some (legal?) sense, it seems that those sinners *are* Christ before God, not themselves. The second troublesome scenario has to do with the spiritual and symbiotic relationship of believers with Christ: if they are *in* Christ and *part* of him, then it seems they *are* also Christ. The very concept of theological representation seems to suggest conclusions such as these by claiming ontological equivalence between otherwise independent beings.

---

social unity is the consequence of this latter relationship, not the former one. *De Cive* VI.20 gives a helpful description of the "double obligation" of citizens (see note 14 above).

94. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, 68 (see note 64 above).

95. Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, part 2, sec. 33, at 142 (see note 75 above).

96. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 3.2, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1961), sec. 72, at 681–82.

97. *Ibid.*, IV.2. sec. 64, at 69–70.



But although complicated, theological representation seems to create between beings an ontological equivalence in one crucial dimension, while preserving their ontological independence in another.<sup>98</sup> The relationship of married persons is an intuitive analogy for this postulate, because in one sense the two become one and in another they each maintain their own separate psychological, physical, and emotional existence.<sup>99</sup> Barth calls this “the dialectic of difference and affinity, of real dualism and equally real unity, of utter self-recollection and utter transport beyond the bounds of self into union with another.”<sup>100</sup> The same dynamic also appears prominently in Hegel and Buber,<sup>101</sup> and in each of these accounts, “the concept of freedom dominates the discourse: the true freedom of individuality-in-union versus the false freedom (Barth calls it “sinful and fatal isolation”<sup>102</sup>) of naked individualism. The key to understanding the difference between them is the ability, first, to distinguish between freedoms proper to individuals and freedom proper to collectivities, and secondly, knowing how to reconcile the two without collapsing one of them, mixing them beyond recognition, or divorcing them as if they were incompatible.

Hobbes spends an entire chapter in *Leviathan* engaged in just this task, carefully defining the freedom of the commonwealth against the freedom of subjects, arguing that the two are consistent and compatible.<sup>103</sup> And to some extent, the entire book could be seen as Hobbes’s project to balance those two freedoms intact without destroying one or the other or *both* in the process.<sup>104</sup> The difficulty, as Barth nicely

---

98. Since this concept has to do with the very essence of being, it runs the risk of logical contradiction: an entity cannot “be” and “not be” in the same sense and same relationship. But theological representation is not claiming identity in the same sense or same relationship, therefore technically it falls just this side of the law of non-contradiction.

99. See Ephesians 5:22–32 for St. Paul’s rich “body” language with regard to the marital relationship, one that he claims directly mimics the relationship of Christ and his church.

100. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III, part 4, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1961), sec. 54, at 120; emphasis added. See also Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, part 2, secs. 33, 35, 38, at pp. 179, 311, 716, respectively (see note 75 above); and Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Reconciliation, IV.2*, sec. 67, at 635: “It is a union in freedom, in which the individual does not cease to be this particular individual, united in his particularity with every other man in his” (see note 82 above).

101. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 2000); and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. Alan White (Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Publishing, 2002), especially secs. 13–33, 142–49, 158–69.

102. Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. III, part 2, sec. 35, at 316 (see note 72 above).

103. *Leviathan*, XXI (see note 14 above).

104. This is a possible interpretation of his Dedicatory objective to “pass unwounded” between the sharp points of “too great liberty” on one side, and “too much authority” on the other; see *ibid.*, Letter Dedicatory, p. 4.



put it, is in discerning “the limit within which there can be a real plurality” concurrent with an “equally real unity.”<sup>105</sup> Dismayed and devastated by social chaos in their own respective milieus, Hobbes and Schmitt aggressively delimited the sphere for plurality and dissent. (Schmitt even upbraided Hobbes for not being vigilant enough in the policing of plurality, suggesting in a few places that he should have tried to abolish individual “freedom of thought.”<sup>106</sup>) Oliver Cromwell’s letter, on the other hand, is an example of the reverse inclination: tolerating of substantial conflict so long as “real unity” continues to be acknowledged and upheld—and he was excoriated by some of his compatriots for maintaining that that was possible.<sup>107</sup>

Despite their vigorous disagreements, however, all parties in this debate share an undivided commitment to the concept of real unity, and they tend to express their concerns about threats to that unity in vivid, rhetorical exhortations to their readers. The Apostle Paul’s original metaphor of the church as a body (upon which the entire theological tradition is based) occurs in an anxious epistle to a congregation nearly destroyed by factionalism.<sup>108</sup> With much the same motivation, Hobbes, Schmitt, and Barth labored to persuasively remind their respective audiences that deep, abiding unity was essential to the “preservation and renewal”<sup>109</sup> of the community—often by impressing upon them the horrifying consequences of jeopardizing or losing that harmonious peace. Hobbes’s tactics are legendary, with his “nasty, brutish, and short” alternatives and his meticulous litany of the various sicknesses and ailments that weaken or disable the “body politic.”<sup>110</sup> In much the same tenor, Barth bluntly referred to any “divided congregation” as a “dead congregation,” insisting that existential security depends entirely upon unity.<sup>111</sup> And Schmitt echoed the warning: “Security exists only in the state. *Extra civitatem nulla securitas.*”<sup>112</sup>

These statements may seem melodramatic, but given the assumptions of these thinkers about human nature, they are fairly reasonable. If peace and order and unity are *unnatural* developments in the life-history of the human race, and if

---

105. Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV, part 1, sec. 62, at 668 (see note 78 above).

106. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, 55–63, 74 (see note 64 above).

107. Babington, *Answer to a Discourse*; and Rutherford, *Spiritual Antichrist* (see note 45 for both sources).

108. I Corinthians 12; see also 1:11–13 and 3:1–4.

109. Karl Barth, *God Here and Now*, 92 (see note 5 above).

110. *Leviathan*, XXIX (see note 3 above).

111. Barth, *God Here and Now*, 83, 91 (see note 5 above).

112. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, 48 (see note 14 above).

primeval urges, passions, and inclinations lurk latent in the social and subjective subconsciousness, then it is not neurotic to distrust humanity and to treat every harmonious moment as if it were the last, it is not delusional to ceaselessly remind one's self and others of the ominous "outer" darkness,<sup>113</sup> and it is not childish to frequently retell the narrative of human "salvation," existentially reliving it, if at all possible.<sup>114</sup> Karl Barth thought that this last practice was absolutely crucial to the vital preservation of the community: the essence of the body consists in "the event" of its creation, and "should this event come to a standstill," should the community try to be a community "other than in the happening of this event . . . then its unity must be lost immediately."<sup>115</sup> For Barth, Hobbes, and Schmitt, the great event of constitution and incorporation must inspire and animate the body long past its actual historical occurrence. And if in fact it ever failed to inspire or animate—if the people were to forget how they originally became a people—then society would disintegrate.

Any allegation by scholars, therefore, that this conversion narrative is merely rhetorical should be weighed against the political stakes of believing and participating in it. Rhetoric can be used to undermine and sabotage or it can be used to illuminate and persuade.<sup>116</sup> Hobbes, Schmitt, and Barth had every reason to indulge in rhetoric for the latter purpose, but it is not clear why they would for the former. For instance, even if Hobbes had meant for "real unity" to be taken as a joke about Catholic transubstantiation, as Philip Pettit suggests, and thus could be said to be subtly undermining that doctrine, does it also follow that he meant to disparage the very concept of a unity that is "more than consent and concord"? For many of the reasons suggested in this article, Hobbes probably needed a greater unity from his political philosophy than that available through legality or fear. Perhaps he saw a way to appropriate the unique unity of doctrinal transubstantiation for his political purposes while continuing to condemn the specifics of that Catholic iteration. Or perhaps, as this article argues, the theological referent of the expression "real unity"

---

113. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, part 2, sec. 33, at 123 (see note 75 above).

114. Hobbes's numerous appeals to personal experience and his introductory invitation for his audience to "read Man-kind" in themselves suggest that he expected his arguments to strike an existential chord; see *Leviathan*, Introduction, 18–20 (see note 14 above).

115. Barth, *God Here and Now*, 90 (see note 5 above).

116. Hobbes himself made this distinction. His disgust about the "hot air" of rhetoric (*Leviathan*, XXV.15), used "thereby to deceive others" (IV.4), has been well documented. But less appreciated is his interest in rhetoric for occasions in which "the understanding have need to be opened by some apt similitude. . . . Then there is so much use of fancy" (VIII.3–8) (see note 3 above).

is not transubstantiation but Christ's relationship to his church-body, a doctrine nowhere condemned by Hobbes and fervently believed by virtually all English Christians at the time, Protestant or not. In this case, the chances would be even better that Hobbes utilized the theological concept of real unity as part of a rhetorical strategy to *persuade*, not to deceive or undermine. He would have been applying and appealing to an established religious principle in order to explain and legitimize his political model. Whether Hobbes himself sincerely believed in the concrete reality of God, Christ, or Christianity is not important. There is a truth embedded in myths (religious or otherwise) that retains its power and significance even when known to be empirically or historically false, as Hobbes's own famous "state of nature" construct ably demonstrates.

Theorists and philosophers who believe that politics has a metaphysical dimension often have difficulty explaining it rationally, even to themselves. Each era has its idiomatic expressions, analogies, and metaphors that aid in this task, although they usually seem odd and inchoate to those outside the given historical or cultural context, only accentuating the fantastic quality of what is described. When Rousseau attempted to explain the metaphysical difference between what he called "people" and "multitude," he spoke of a "general will," which was nothing less than a change in human nature: a transformation of each individual "who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole into part of a large whole from which that individual would as it were receive his life and his being."<sup>117</sup> A century later, Karl Marx appealed to this very passage, frustrated by liberalism's tendency to glorify and enable the private individual. A society that perpetuates and reinforces individualism cannot in truth be called a society, he insisted, especially if it encourages its citizens to make a psychological separation between their political and non-political identities. The "non-political man" is then easily understood to be "the *true* and *authentic* man," while the "political man" is demoted to an "abstract, artificial" existence.<sup>118</sup> The issue here is one of *realness*, and Marx cited Rousseau in order to help him explain how and why *political* identity must become just as real in society as non-political identity. But rather than using Rousseau's early-modern, French expression "general will,"<sup>119</sup> Marx used his own modern, German

---

117. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), II.7[3]: ". . . of substituting a . . . moral existence for the independent and physical existence we have received from nature."

118. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 26–52, 42–43, 46.

119. For the philosophic and linguistic origins of "general will," see Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine Into the Civic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

idiom to speak of a “human emancipation” and a societal conversion to *Gattungswesen* (“species-being”).<sup>120</sup>

If unity for Hobbes is merely legal and rationalist, then he would have retained in his commonwealth the fundamental individualism of humanity he introduced in his state of nature. And if this is true, then expression of real unity in Chapter 17 of *Leviathan* must be taken as an instance of high rhetoric—which is to say, as a *knowing* falsehood—or possibly as a mistake. In actuality, there would be no real unity in the scenario envisioned, only “consent and concord,” despite Hobbes’s blatant statement to the contrary.<sup>121</sup> Interpreting the passage in this way solves some problems, but it creates others. As this article has shown, rationalist individualism has its limitations, and many commentators have argued that *Leviathan* is a philosophic failure because Hobbes could not ultimately extricate himself from those limitations. Recently Jean Hampton wrote a book that explored the inadequacies of *Leviathan*’s allegedly rationalist premise and offered several suggestions for how Hobbes could have solved them. One of those suggestions entailed “a device that would change people physiologically so that they could reason *only* using the sovereign’s standard of rationality.” Hampton presented this possibility as the last resort and also the only way to definitively liberate and keep individuals out of the state of nature. She quickly admitted that this suggestion was ridiculous and had more to do with science fiction than political theory.<sup>122</sup>

Science fiction aside, Hampton’s insight—about a whole-scale conversion being the most conclusive solution to individualist anarchy—is important. This goal often requires the willingness to use force or otherwise to demand drastic social re-education and thus to be regarded anti-liberal or absolutist, but such tactics can

---

University Press, 1986). The expression appeared prominently in the works of Frenchmen Blaise Pascal and Nicolas Malebranche before Rousseau used it in his *Social Contract*.

120. Marx writes, “Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power,” in “On the Jewish Question,” at 46 (see note 118 above).

121. Patricia Springborg recently called “real unity” a “paradox,” but Deborah Baumgold criticized Springborg for using this term and suggested that she actually meant “contradiction.” Baumgold’s own interpretation is that Hobbes made a mistake. See Patricia Springborg, “The Paradoxical Hobbes: A Critical Response to the Hobbes Symposium,” *Political Theory* 36 (2008),” *Political Theory* 37 (2009): 676–88, at 683–84; and Deborah Baumgold, “UnParadoxical Hobbes: In Reply to Springborg,” *Political Theory* 37 (2009): 689–93, at 691–92.

122. Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, 218–19 (see note 28 above).

be justified on the basis of alternatives that are considered far worse.<sup>123</sup> Rousseau and Marx were profoundly dismayed by the collective attitudes and habits exhibited by humans in their respective societies—so much so that they harbored hope for politics only insofar as humanity could acquire and achieve another nature altogether. This article argues that Hobbes (and Schmitt and Barth) should be included with them in this mentality. For all of these thinkers, legal rationalism was not enough.<sup>124</sup> They all insisted upon a politics of *transformation*, and because of their respective historical, cultural, and philosophic environments, each of them explained and expressed this transformation differently. While it would indeed be anachronistic for Hobbes to describe his conversion event as if it were science fiction, it is entirely reasonable, given his time period, that he would evoke religion. The theological doctrine of Christ’s representation, a powerful trope from the culture around him, gave Hobbes the resources by which to imagine and create a new political reality. An awareness of this strategy in the work of a thinker who has always had a reputation for *anti-religiosity* may make us more sensitive to the quiet influence of religion in unexpected political spaces.

Karl Barth once said that “the Church exists by *happening*,” that it is not so much an institution or an organization or social association, but an event. He adds, “it belongs to the very essence of the Church (and nothing with which we have to do in the Church, properly, may be understood apart from this) that the Church is the ‘event of a gathering together’ and in this sense a ‘living congregation.’”<sup>125</sup> Perhaps in the end there is no better way to understand political representation in *Leviathan*. For Thomas Hobbes, the state is far less an institution than an *event*—and a theological one at that.

**Sarita Zaffini** is a postdoctoral fellow at University of Chicago. Her research examines the relationship between politics and religion, with an emphasis on the seventeenth century. She can be reached at [zaffini@uchicago.edu](mailto:zaffini@uchicago.edu).

---

123. Schmitt points out that “compared to a democracy that is direct, not only in the technical sense but also *in a vital sense*, parliament appears an artificial machinery, produced by liberal reasoning, while dictatorial and Caesaristic methods not only can produce the acclamation of the people but can also be a direct expression of democratic substance and power,” in his *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 16–17, emphasis added (see note 1 above).

124. Schmitt also points out that “the general will as Rousseau constructs it is in truth homogeneity. That is a really consequential democracy. According to the *Contrat social*, the state therefore rests not on a contract but essentially on homogeneity, in spite of its title and in spite of the dominant contract theory. The democratic identity of governed and governing arises from that”; at *ibid.*, 13–14.

125. Barth, *God Here and Now*, 77, 82–83 (see note 5 above).