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## Hobbes Against the Fool – Creation Versus Tohu and Bohu<sup>1</sup>

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### *Summary*

In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes voices concern over the squandering of the prospects of human prosperity. This paper argues that the remedy he proposes is the political replication of scripture's idea of creation; the acknowledgment of an originator, a first cause of indisputable order. Hobbes's nemesis, the Fool, is an agent of scripture's antithetical tohu and bohu (the disarray that preceded creation), who misguidedly believes he can work disarray to his advantage. For Hobbes this is folly, because the volatility of disarray is beyond human mastery. Nevertheless, steadfastness and prosperity remain at hand, by replicating the order of a 'higher power' that is fortunately echoed in all creation. This paper is made in the image of Hobbes's 'replication methodology', that in turn is modelled after scripture's original depiction of the act of creation "in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). The paper identifies the biblical Nabal as the 'original Fool', and reflects on how the original resonates in Hobbes's iteration.

*Keywords:* Hobbes, The Fool, Tohu and Bohu, Creation, Causation, Prosperity

### **Introduction**

Characterizations of the Fool in Hobbes-literature vary, often with a view towards maintaining the coherence of the argument that the Fool voices, and the counter-argument that Hobbes seemingly wishes to promote. The foolishness of the Fool has been attributed to an intellectual deficiency; a misjudgment of the full scope of actions and counteractions, leading to a skewed perception of the benefits horizon. Alternatively, it has been attributed to a moral deficiency. One that stems from an

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented at the Third Biennial Conference of the European Hobbes Society, Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik 18-20th November 2021.

unfortunate disconnect with the virtues of the laws of nature.<sup>2</sup> How the Fool might correct himself, depends on the stance one takes in the above divide, however, it also hangs on whether one credits Hobbes with the sincere intention of seeking the eradication of foolishness.

This paper challenges Patricia Springborg's argument (2011) that Hobbes's play on Psalms is ironic, if not outright Machiavellian. It puts forward that he is acting on the sincere conviction that the acknowledgement of a single authoritative truth is key to human prosperity, and that the Fool is an agent of scripture's tohu and bohu (the disarray that preceded creation).<sup>3</sup> The Fool, who I will argue is related to the "sons of Belial" (1 Samuel 10:27), is acting in defiance of the act of creation, defined in the book of Genesis as the ordering of the world with a view towards the well-being of humankind. Hobbes's quest to discover the order of things (science), relies on the stipulation of a single author (authority) that instilled a systemic order in his creation. I wish to demonstrate that this stipulation blurs the divide between acting rationally and acting morally. Moreover, I will argue that the term (or name in Hobbesian terms) Fool evokes in the reader's mind not only Psalms explicitly, but implicitly also a biblical tale that indeed blurs the divide between the rational and the moral. I refer to the tale of Nabal in 1 Samuel 25, which names Nabal as the proto-Fool: "for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (1 Samuel 25:25).<sup>4</sup> Hobbes's iteration of the Fool is to my mind a reflection of the original Nabal, following his own dictum (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 28, Ch. 4) that "a man that seeketh precise *truth*, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly; or else he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twigs; the more he struggles, the more belimed".

### **Hobbes 'Belimed'**

In "Hobbes's Fool the 'Insipiens', and the Tyrant-King", Springborg accuses Hobbes of willfully getting entangled in words, with the intention of generating an intellectual and political spin. She argues that he is dissembling. He has no genuine aspiration to eradicate foolishness by educating the foolish on its detriment to the liberal self. Instead, he is set on manipulating the fools' demons, with a view towards furthering the interests of the demon-free wise (with whom he himself identifies). By falsely accusing the foolish (insipiens) of mad or insane behaviour, the wise trick

<sup>2</sup> This has been framed by Alex John London as a debate between the readings of David Gauthier and of David Boonin-Vail, see: London, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> I have opted for disarray rather than chaos as a synonym for scripture's tohu and bohu, since chaos theory has taught us that chaos exhibits discernible patterns.

<sup>4</sup> The excerpts from scripture found in this paper are from the online version of the King James Bible (<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>).

them into adhering to covenants, so that they themselves may free-ride on the benefits; namely, on public order in general, if not a tailor-made order that requires little to no sacrifice on their part. Thus the intuition of mistrust between self-centred individuals is objectively well advised, and the fool is only a fool in the sense that he is made fool of, by the Orwellian wise.<sup>5</sup> Springborg's argument pairs well with the portrayal of Hobbes as a fear-monger, and indeed she goes on to point out how he constructs a bogeyman infused by his talent for creating 'picture-words', a selection of biblical beasts and a curated iconography. In the shadow of the demons that threaten prosperity, if not life itself, one is drawn to wilfully consenting to the bitter pill of tyranny. No less ingeniously than ironically, the Hobbesian science-based tyranny dethrones the tradition-based one, by denouncing the abstract fear of the *unknown*, only to reintroduce it in a concrete invincible guise; fear of what is scientifically demonstrated to be unequivocally *known*.

Hobbes is thus reduced to an apologist for tyranny, that reinvents its justification in face of the modern challenges to its traditional grip. He is at best an ideological champion of absolutism in face of its modern challengers, and at worst a prototype of a contemporary political-strategist (spin doctor) that is intent on justifying the once and for all transfer of the reigns of power to the party of his personal preference. This demonic portrayal of Hobbes is not unsubstantiated; however, it makes him out to be a grandmaster of smoke screens and confusion; the 'great deceiver' if you like. He is 'all in' on hypocrisy, he misrepresents his motivation as a seeker of order, heavily disguises his contempt for scripture, and has no qualms about falsely dressing up his method as scientific. He makes belief that he is engaging in education, but actually connives to trap his reader in an entirely falsified logical construction. One might say that he takes pleasure in making a fool of his reader, all the time keeping one step of deception ahead. Yet, as Jon Parkin notes, even Hobbes's fiercest contemporary critics weren't so bold as to demonize him so. Hobbes was not confronted with the accusation of duplicity or hypocrisy, but rather his work and the oddness of his argumentation were received with a sense of unease and frustration about how he 'played the game'. As Parkin most eloquently puts it: "in swallowing down the argument one internalizes a set of Hobbesian relationships. Like a virus, Hobbes's theory alters the DNA of the host discourse in such a way as to reconstitute a new creature altogether, the Leviathan itself" (Parkin, 2007, p. 444).

Now, I would argue that Hobbes may have taken pleasure in outwitting the reader, but that it does not follow that he had a mind to disingenuously lead the reader on, with no purpose save the exaltation of tyranny. I would like you to consider the antithetical alternative; namely, that he is sincerely convinced that the acknow-

<sup>5</sup> An obvious anachronism, and yet one that I find irresistible.

ledgment of a single authoritative truth is key to the realization of human prosperity. His conviction leads him on a quest to solve the puzzle of well-being.<sup>6</sup> It is by method a scientific quest that employs reason or wisdom, however, his empiricism demands that he reconstruct, or piece together, the authority of the ‘original’ truth, from its reverberations that are dispersed throughout creation. Indeed, to my mind he thinks of our impression-based senses as an epistemological echo of “a body without us... commonly called an Object” (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 13, Ch. 1). In other words, the world is made in such a way so as to leave humanity a discernable breadcrumb trail to an objective truth. It is from the unique singularity of the original, that Hobbes deduces the singularity of truth. The originator (author of creation) is also the origin of wisdom, including the wisdom found in unadulterated scripture; presumably penned by the creator himself. Hobbes appears to manifest the words of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 1:2-10:

Who can number the sand of the sea, and the drops of rain, and the days of eternity? Who can find out the height of heaven, and the breadth of the earth, and the deep, and wisdom? Wisdom hath been created before all things, and the understanding of prudence from everlasting. The word of God most high is the fountain of wisdom; and her ways are everlasting commandments. To whom hath the root of wisdom been revealed? or who hath known her wise counsels? Unto whom hath the knowledge of wisdom been made manifest? and who hath understood her great experience? There is one wise and greatly to be feared, the Lord sitting upon his throne. He created her, and saw her, and numbered her, and poured her out upon all his works. She is with all flesh according to his gift, and he hath given her to them that love him.

Science is tasked with the artificial replication of the wisdom of nature (‘her’); it is the worship of the original, or as Hobbes puts it: “NATURE (the Art whereby God hath made and governs the World) is by the Art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal” (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 9, Introduction). Artificial is not posited as antithetical to natural (as is commonly expressed in contemporary food labelling), but rather, the former is thought to be an expression of the latter. The artificial version may very well pale in comparison to the original (natural) one, however, it bridges the gap to an original that is epistemologically out of our grasp.

Now, A.P. Martinich has argued that Hobbes breaks with the tradition of medieval thinkers that “God made man in his own image and the original has more real-

<sup>6</sup> On this point I seem to be in agreement with Springborg: “Following the master [Epicurus], Hobbes believed that philosophy like science was therapeutic, concerned to solve puzzles with which humans are daily confronted and which the sage, in his wisdom, could teach” (Springborg, 2011, p. 13).

ity than an image” (Martinich, 2003, p. 10); consequently desisting from the study of God and turning his attention to man. To my mind, what he breaks with instead is the convention that we (or rather the clergy) are somehow capable of retrieving an authentic and complete idea (signifying a “philosophical truth”) of the original (God).<sup>7</sup> One that is not marred by the projection of human attributes onto the actuality of the original.<sup>8</sup> This is the aspect of Martinich’s “inverting or reversing medieval priorities”, that Hobbes subscribes to. Therefore, when he mimics “God’s method of creating the world” in the creation of the commonwealth, and models the salvation that the commonwealth provides in this life on “The biblical and medieval idea of salvation that comes after death”, he is not necessarily transforming “religious concepts into secular concepts”. Instead, he can be said to be using the idea of creation ‘in the image of’ (the method of mimicking) to legitimise seemingly secular concepts; he brands them ‘kosher’ if you like. Hobbes may very well have been the proto-humanist that Martinich makes him out to be. Yet, he may also be studying the creator (the inaccessible God), by proxy of the study of his creation (inclusive of mankind). As Martinich himself states (*ibid.*), “None of these reversals or transformations is evidence that Hobbes was nonreligious or antireligious. To the contrary, they indicate how important he thought these religious concepts were, not merely for some remote or invisible spiritual life but here and now.”

### The Makings of a Fool

For Springborg (2011, p. 8), Hobbes’s Fool is the insipient of the Vulgate translation of Psalms, harking back to the ‘dark’ original Hebrew term Nabal. She cites commentary by Edwin Curley (in Hobbes, 1994, p. 90) that it connotes a moral rather than intellectual deficiency: “a person lacking in sense of honor and decency”, adding to it a psychological perspective of her own that connotes a state of disconnect with context, if not with reality altogether (insanity). A 17th century sermon held at St. John Cathedral by Hobbes’s contemporary John Harris seemingly lends support to Curley: “Fool (i. e. the Wicked Man, for so the word Nabal often signifies, and is so here to be understood) ’Tis he that hath said in his heart there is no God. ’Tis such an one as is a Fool by his own fault; one stupified and dull’d by Vice and Lust, as he sufficiently explains it afterwards; one that is corrupt and become filthy, and that hath done abominable works. So the Apostle St. Paul supposes, that those Men will have in them an evil heart of unbelief, who do depart from the living God, and live without him in the world” (Harris, 1697, p. 3).

<sup>7</sup> “... for in the attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of philosophical truth; but the signification of pious intention” (Hobbes and Molesworth, 1839, p. 354).

<sup>8</sup> Not to be confused with the legitimate metaphorical projection employed by scripture, that Hobbes discusses in the example of the attribution of human speech to God, *Leviathan*, Ch. 36.

Later in the same sermon Harris castigates the same fools:

... they begin to be at Liberty; now they can pursue their vicious Inclinations without controul of their Consciences, or the Conviction of God's holy Word, and are got above the Childish Fears of Eternal Misery. By this time, the true and through Calenture of Mind begins; they grow now deliriously enamoured with the feign'd Products of their own Fancies; and these Notions appear to them now, adorned with such bright and radiant Colours, and so beautiful and glorious, that they will rush headlong into this Fools Paradise, though Eternal Destruction be at the bottom; for now they stick at nothing; They Retrench the Deity of all his Attributes, absolutely deny his Presidence over the Affairs of the World, and make him nothing but a kind of necessary and blind Cause of things, Nature, the Soul of the World, or some such word, which they have happened to meet with in the Ancient Heathen Writers.

This indictment groups together pantheism (alluding perhaps to the thought of 17th century Baruch Spinoza) and absent-God creationism of the variety that A.D. Bell argues (Bell, 2009, p. 199) was prevalent among educated French of the same period. Yet Hobbes not only differentiated between the two positions, but found them to be at odds "... that those Philosophers, who sayd the World, or the Soule of the World was God, spake unworthily of him; and denied his Existence: For by God, is understood the cause of the World; and to say the World is God, is to say there is no cause of it, that is, no God" (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 250, Ch. 31).

I would argue that Hobbes accuses the Fool of disputing the first cause and consequently devastating the prospect of human prosperity. Hobbes's Fool has gone rogue, he has gone off-script, or more accurately 'off-scripture'. He spews nonsensical 'jargon' with regard to the unattainability of justice, and in so doing, becomes an agent of the *tohu* and *bohu*, which on scripture's account of creation in Genesis, succumbs to the ordering of the creator.<sup>9</sup> He is not merely acting on an imprudent miscalculation of tit-for-tat consequences. His denial of justice goes beyond mere shortsightedness, delving in particular instances and circumstances that blind him to the general rule (see also Lloyd, 2009, p. 303). Foolishness is 'against reason' in an even broader sense, of being against science as the study of creation, and ultimately against the idea of creation itself. By challenging the idea of artificial authority that upholds justice, it challenges the empirical idea that we have the capacity to

<sup>9</sup> Hobbes makes use of the term *tohu* and *bohu* several times, connoting nonsense (jargon), chaos, confusion and emptiness: "jargon, or that (if he better like it) which the Scripture in first chaos calleth *Tohu* and *Bohu*"; [of a preceding argument] "This is nothing but *Tohu* and *Bohu*"; and, "And as things were in the beginning before the Spirit of God was moved upon the abyss, *tohu* and *bohu*, that is to say confusion and emptiness" (Hobbes and Molesworth, 1839, pp. 63, 301, 20).

artificially reconstruct the natural phenomena of the “first of all causes” (God) and the “continual chaine” of causes that proceeds thereof (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 146, Ch. 21). Foolishness is a threat to progress, because it denies our capacity to mimic the order of creation, and thereby our ability to generate the additional well-being (commonwealth) of a civilised existence exemplified in industry, culture of the earth, navigation, import of commodities, commodious building, instruments of great manual force, knowledge of the face of the earth, account of time, arts and letters (*ibid.*, p. 89, Ch. 13). This can be seen as a precursor to the economic idea that seemingly finite natural resources are counterbalanced by human ingenuity; or, in Hobbes’s words, “The passions that incline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their own Industry to obtain them” (*ibid.*, p. 90). On Hobbes’s account, this additional well-being does not spring ‘naturally’ out of thin air, rather it is ‘cultured’ by the artificial iteration of the original creator. Furthermore, it sits well with Hobbesian determinism that we would be ill advised to go against the grain of creation, which has innately predisposed humanity to seek out orderliness. We were created, according to Hobbes, with the passion of an “Anxiety for the future time” and a corollary capacity for reason with the desire of curiosity (“love of knowledge of causes”) (*ibid.*, p. 74, Ch. 11).

The folly of a clash with ‘the laws of nature’ is that it is delusional to challenge the insurmountable power of the first cause, and consequently is an imprudent act that is detrimental to our well-being. Furthermore, it goes against the structure of our own being; it disrupts the causal link between our innate passions (“Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living”) and the aforementioned ‘industry’, that they arise in us. ‘Brutishly’ turning his back on order, the Fool turns his back not only on the impact of the original creator on his creation, but on the Fool’s own part in the ‘chain of productivity’. He becomes socially worthless, denying himself as well as his counterparts of the realisation of the social potential of the commonwealth. Foolishness, if left unchecked, not only eats away at the added-value or collective goods provided by society, it has the potential to devastate it; to regress it into a state of nature. This foolish regress reflects an intellectual deficiency as well as a moral one. Intellectually, it is a failure to acknowledge the evidence of the natural order of our surroundings, and consequently the imprudence and miscalculation of the self-serving benefits of paying respect to orderliness. Morally, disrespect for orderliness disengages oneself from one’s essence as an integral part of creation, misappropriating one’s potential contribution to the ‘continual chain’. These deficiencies, intellectual and moral, stem from a single failure to recognize creation as the first cause. Hence the means for their correction is one and the same – the demonstration of the existence of order in the world – the practice of science.



### The Fool as Belial and the Tale of Nabal

The Fool's refusal to succumb to authority is curiously similar to the questioning of king Saul's authority by the minority 'sons of Belial': "How shall this man save us?" (1 Samuel 10:27). Now, in *De Cive* Hobbes cites this verse to reinforce his argument that in the institution of government "either all consent, or be esteemed enemies" (Hobbes, 1998 [1656, 1642], pp. 237-238). To my mind, in so doing he is implicitly linking the terms Fool and Belial. The language of the declaration by the Parliament in 1645 (Nelson *et al.*, 1891, p. 300) attests that it was not uncommon to group these derogatory terms together: "We see how ready men are in our days to brand one another with names of incendiaries, covenant-breakers [fools in Hobbesian terms], children of Belial, and fighters against the Kingdom of God..." Moreover, the above linkage as well as the corresponding dichotomy between those who stand with order (creation) and those who stand against it, is reinforced by the correlation Joanna Picciotto finds in John Milton's contemporary treatment of Belial, chaos and the state of nature: "It is through Belial that we are first exposed to Chaos as a psychological and intellectual state: a fall into Hobbesian 'meer nature', and disincorporated privacy [foolishness]" (Picciotto, 2010, p. 453).

The etymology of the term Belial is uncertain, and continually debated (Botterweck, Ringgren and Fabry, 1974, p. 131). St. Jerome apparently accepted the ancient rabbinic interpretation that held it to refer to "those who throw off the yoke of God" (*ibid.*, p. 132). This interpretation lent itself to the Christian personification of the term, and its association with a similarly personified Antichrist or Devil (Ainsworth, 1644, p. 29). Later interpretations claim the term to be related to 'worthlessness', or rather to those incapable of generating worth. A third, more obscure interpretation, presumes it to be linguistically of Arabic origin, and consequently relates it to those who would spread confusion. As for Hobbes, he was no doubt aware of the term Belial, but save the citation referenced above, refrains from using it, or even so much as commenting on it. Hence access to his own idea of Belial must remain speculative. Yet, interestingly, choosing between the above interpretations might be inconsequential, as all three are reflected in the 'makings of the fool' as detailed above, and reinforce the inferred connection between the Fool and Belial.

As I have argued elsewhere (Sokolowski, 2018), Hobbes may have had a propensity, be it intentionally or subconsciously, to hide biblical 'easter eggs' in his writings. To my mind, in this instance connecting the dots between these easter eggs leads us to the tale of Abigail and Nabal.<sup>10</sup> Note that the original Hebrew text

<sup>10</sup> In recent conversation, Adrian Blau urged me to substantiate my understanding of 'how the dots connect' with direct evidence that Hobbes took direction from the particular tale of Nabal and Abigail, or risk it being deemed speculative. Yet access to conclusive proof may be tricky in



does not employ capitals and therefore names and terms are indistinguishable. In Hebrew נבל (Nabal) the name is also the term, which on multiple occurrences in the English versions of the Old Testament is translated into the Fool. Moreover, as the tale progresses Nabal's wife Abigail attests that "Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (in Hebrew it reads: Fool is his name and folly is with him) (1 Samuel 25:25). Nabal may therefore be considered the archetype of fools; certainly for Hobbes, for whom "a man that seeketh precise truth, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for" (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 28, Ch. 4). Although Hobbes does not refer to the tale, I would argue that his own laws of nature are immersed in it. Not merely by the borrowing of terms from scripture, but rather following in its footsteps and synthetically reiterating in modern political-science guise the Truth found within it.

In order to demonstrate this, prior to refreshing your mind with regard to the biblical tale, let's recount (in a concise form) the laws of nature as expressed in *Leviathan*, Ch. 14-15: 1st, and fundamental one: 'To seek peace'; and consequently, 2nd: To contract with others 'in way of peace'; i.e. be open to relinquish one's natural right to all, if others are equally so disposed; and consequently, 3rd: To 'perform [actuate] covenants made' with others; with the prerequisite of an existing self-reinforcing tradition of, 4th: 'gratitude' towards benevolent gestures ('gifts'); as well as, a list of moderation preconditions, 5th: curbing individuality by accommodating oneself 'to the rest'; and, 6th: giving 'pardon' to the past (not holding grudges); and consequently, 7th: applying a 'future good' outlook to revenge, rather than keeping tabs on the past; and, 8th: refraining from committing oneself by way of harsh language ('contumely') to hatred of others; as well as, a list of fair-play preconditions, 9th: regard for others as by nature one's equal; and, 10th: equity in reserving natural rights; and, 11th: regard for impartiality in judgment; and, 12th: equity in the division of dividable common goods; and, 13th and 14th: adherence to tradition (natural or artificial) regarding indivisible common goods, i.e. first-come-first serve or finders-keepers; and, 15th: sanctuary for peace moderators; and, 16th and 17th: submission to a (third-party) impartial arbitration; and, 18th: regard for necessity and finality of judgement – "for else the question is left undecided, and left to force..."

Now, keep these in mind as we refresh our memory on the details of the biblical tale. The tale begins with an account of Nabal's affluence (in sheep and goats). It continues with the seemingly odd counterpoising of Nabal as "churlish and evil

this case. Easter eggs are, by their very nature, a subtle form of inference. Moreover, if they were consciously 'hidden in plain view', Hobbes would not have wished to openly advertise them; and if they were placed subconsciously, he would not have known to do so. Methodologically, I locate myself in the empiricist tradition; I identify a discernible pattern (breadcrumb trail) and try to make sense of it. As the parallels that I point to amount, I submit that quantity becomes quality.

in his doings” and his wife Abigail as “a woman of understanding, and of a beautiful countenance”. We will come back to aesthetics later, but it would appear that from the perspective of scripture intellectual ‘understanding’ stands in contrast to the moral ‘evil’ (see also Mulzac, 2003). Let us however continue; come in, future king David, whose men (warriors) had previously provided unsolicited security to Nabal’s shearers as the latter performed their task in an area that, scripture states, was at a distance from Nabal’s place of actual residence (influence). Although the text does not specify the context, these are the days of the decline of king Saul, and consequently the waning of authority and security within his kingdom. But let’s return to the text; David sends his men with the expectation that his own good deed (already performed), that to his mind enabled Nabal’s ‘liveth in prosperity’ and ‘peace’ (terms that the text implies are synonymous), be rewarded in kind.<sup>11</sup> In turn, Nabal plays dumb, denying (in harsh and condescending language) his obligation to reward some rogue with whom he had no dealings and his slaves (harsh demeaning language). Luckily, one of the shearers alerts Abigail to the breach of tradition, as well as the clear and present danger ‘the condition of war’ presents to their common well-being. His rationale for turning to her, rather than to his master being: “for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him” (1 Samuel 25:17). Thus the text equates being a son of Belial with being unreasonable and irrational, reiterating my earlier point about counterposing evil (Nabal) and understanding (Abigail), and blurring the lines between the moral and the rational. Meanwhile, David can’t help harboring a grudge, setting out to take the law into his own hands and eliminate he who “hath requited me evil for good”, as well as anything and anyone that “pertain to him” (1 Samuel 25:21). Bloodshed is however prevented by Abigail who hastily rides out to meet him on the road. The text will later reveal that she carried with her gifts of appeasement, yet these are mentioned in passing, and only after David concedes the rationale of Abigail’s arguments. It is her appeal to his capacity to be swayed by rational argumentation (in contrast to Nabal’s lack thereof, as attested earlier) that does so: “upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid” (1 Samuel 25:24).

From the onset, Abigail is staged as the voice of reason and her argumentation the route to sustainable (civilized) prosperity, as opposed to the unsustainable (uncivilized) prosperity of Nabal himself.<sup>12</sup> To show this, let’s unpack her argument.

<sup>11</sup> “And thus shall ye say to him [Nabal] that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel” (1 Samuel 25:6-7).

<sup>12</sup> As Jon D. Levenson puts it: “Samuel 25 is a story of how this fool and his property came to be parted” (1978, p. 15).

She argues against “avenging thyself with thine own hand” both from the moral perspective of not bringing “grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless”, but also from the prudent perspective of distancing David’s actions from those of “thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal” (1 Samuel 25:26,31). Her point being that a hot-blooded response associates David with the incivility if not lawlessness, that he himself has been a victim of. Moreover, it threatens to detract from his legitimacy to restore civility once he is officially upon the throne.<sup>13</sup> But subsequently she seemingly combines morality and prudence, making the argument that refraining from taking the law into his own hand binds his soul “in bundle of life with the LORD thy God”; as opposed to being slung out like the “souls of thine enemies” (1 Samuel 25:29). So, it would appear that listening to reason (David) brings about peace and prosperity in the spirit of the imitation of creation. By contrast those who act against peace (Nabal) are characterized as churlish and evil-doing; because, I would argue, they threaten to break with the cycle of creation and thereby regress into the disarray of tohu and bohu. Abigail stands against the tohu and bohu, she is the ordering voice of creation that mediates between Nabal’s true interests (including his responsibility for the peace and prosperity of herself and his employees) and David’s own interests. David has a sensible foundation, namely he has regard for the fair-play preconditions of peace (laws of nature nine through eighteen), respects the sanctuary of the peace moderator Abigail (law of nature fifteen) and is open to rational persuasion. Nevertheless, he cannot rely on his own good nature. Rather, he requires Abigail to remind him that it is in his own (future) interest to put aside the momentary satisfaction of revenge and conduct himself instead in line with preconditions of moderation (laws of nature five through eight), which will bring about the peace and prosperity that his future rule can and should stand for. By contrast, Nabal is irredeemable because he mocks fair-play, contradicts moderation, and is so dogmatically confrontational that “a man cannot speak to him”.

Finally, the tale goes on to purge from existence the type of unsustainable prosperity represented by Nabal (his property as well as his wife will eventually become David’s). He dies a symbolic death: “his heart died within him, and he became as a stone” (1 Samuel 25:37), related to his gluttony and arrogance which is represented by a feast, “like the feast of a king” (1 Samuel 25:36), that he holds to celebrate himself and his prosperity. Nabal pays the price for siding with disorder, and moreover, for being so arrogant as to think he can work the tohu and bohu to his advantage. It follows that, as opposed to the original creator, the ‘commoners’ and even the sovereign-to-be (David) are susceptible to the tohu and bohu. However, if the sovereign

<sup>13</sup> “... when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel” (1 Samuel 25:30).

follows the guidance of wisdom (the voice of Abigail) and we, by the threat of his sword, are made to keep to her wisdom (keep the peace), then there is hope for the blessing of creation – a sustainable prosperity.

## Conclusion

I hope that I have made apparent the parallel between the original fool (Nabal) and Hobbes's iteration of the fool, and have provided good reason to think that Hobbes, be it intentionally or subconsciously, reproduces the tale of Nabal and Abigail in his laws of nature. Furthermore, along the lines of Oscar Wilde's dictum that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness", there may be grounds for thinking that Hobbes is also engaged in the establishment of a metaphysical hierarchy between the greatness of natural creation (including scripture) and the ultimate mediocrity of our own efforts to artificially reproduce it. Nonetheless, for him a scientific (artificial) existence is 'as good as it gets'. The best of possible political worlds, in face of the alternative reign of a sham claim to unmediated and exclusive (often hereditary) access to "the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World" (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 9, Introduction). Our lives are an ongoing empirical experiment, that are best run by submitting ourselves to the reign of a master empiricist. Someone who shows us an admirable command of the makings of the world (creation) and a competence at artificially governing us by the imitation of how it was made to work.

Now, the conventional reading of the opening of the book of Genesis is that God had sovereignty over the world because he made it,<sup>14</sup> and I was tempted to infer that the *mortal God* (made in the image of the original) is sovereign of the *artificial world* because he too is the author of its existence – its artificial creator. However, conversation with Luc Foisneau, as well as the consequent rereading of A.P. Martinich's contribution, and his ultimate conclusion (Martinich, 2021, pp. 198-199) that "Hobbes's view contrasts three of the standard accounts of God's sovereignty, each of which he rejects"; namely, either (a) because he is good, or (b) because he made the world, or (c) because he owns the world, cannot be left unanswered. Both Foisneau and Martinich direct attention to the potential conflict between my position and a passage in *Leviathan* that appears to attribute the dominion of God over the world not to his making of it (as Creator), but rather to his irresistible power (as Omnipotent): "To those, therefore, whose Power is irresistible, the dominion of all men adhaereth naturally by their excellence of power; and consequently it is from that Power that the Kingdome over men, and the Right of Afflicting men at

<sup>14</sup> See Martinich, 'Natural sovereignty and omnipotence in Hobbes's *Leviathan*', in van Apeldoorn and Douglass, 2018, p. 34.

his pleasure, belongeth naturally to God Almighty; not as Creator, and Gracious; but as Omnipotent” (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 246, Ch. 31). Closer examination of the passage reveals that it differentiates between a natural right to ‘the Kingdome over men’ (sovereignty) that ‘belongeth Naturally to God almighty’ by way of his omnipotence (overshadowing limited human potency), as opposed to an artificial right of the mortal God that, in lieu of his own *natural* power irresistible, must rely on common consent by his subjects that affords him an *artificial* omnipotence.<sup>15</sup>

I concede that for Hobbes power (and even more so supreme power – omnipotence), be it natural or artificial, is a necessary condition for sovereignty. Indeed, Hobbes specifies that it is *awe* of omnipotence, rather than *gratitude* to the graciousness of the creator, that generates the futility (foolishness) of dissent and hence the ‘irresistible’ obligation to submit. Nevertheless, I reject Martinich’s suggestion that “Hobbes may have conflated the arguments from ownership [creation] and gratitude”, as I find Martinich to be reading the conjunction between ‘Creator, and Gracious’ out of context. He reads it (Martinich, 2021, p. 199, n. 26) as a proposition that in general “these amounted to the same thing”, whereas I read it in the particular; namely, as shorthand for the crucial differentiation in the beginning of the same passage (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], p. 246, Ch. 31) between the significance of one’s obligation to the creator, as opposed to one’s obligation to one’s peers: “The Right of Nature, whereby God reigneth over men... not from his Creating them as if he required obedience, as of Gratitude for his benefits.” It is good measure (pronounced in the laws of nature) to be obliged (in the sense of being thankful) to one’s peers, and reciprocate by treating them ‘in kind’. Yet, for Hobbes the relationship between sovereign and subject is by no means reciprocal. While the subject may be justly thankful to the sovereign for the benefits provided by his reign, the sovereign’s reign is independent of the gratitude of his subjects. The point he is trying to make in Chapter 31 is therefore that the subjects are obliged in this instance not in the sense of being thankful, but rather in the sense of being bound to the sovereign’s omnipotence (be it naturally occurring or artificially concocted). That is not to say that natural and artificial sovereignty are one and the same. Natural sovereignty relies on the natural omnipotence of the ultimate creator; the original *first cause* that can be preceded by no causes whatsoever. By contrast, artificial sovereignty derives

<sup>15</sup> Michael Byron insists that Hobbes distinguished between “God’s causal control over the universe and his political governance of his subjects”; the former being the product of his ‘right’ to dominate by nature of his omnipotence, and the latter being the product of the consent of his subjects. Yet the existence of ‘God’s enemies’ (those that have not credited him with sovereignty) does not necessarily preclude the independence of his sovereignty (by omnipotence), rather, it is merely a testament to his entertainment of their foolish, and ultimately unsustainable, denial of it (Byron, 2015, p. 55).

its omnipotence from the preceding *first cause* of consent. So, from a causation perspective, it would appear that by virtue of being the first cause, the subjects are more akin to the original creator than the sovereign.

I concede that the subjects emulate the first cause aspect of the original creator, and moreover, the giving of their word to one another exhibits a symbolic connection to the description of the original act of creation as the ‘wording’ of the world. Yet, despite these similarities there is also a crucial difference and barrier between them and the original; they lack a single voice, and therefore are inherently in conflict with one another (a state of war). The solution, I would argue, is to imagine a moment of consent to an artificial (‘as if’) *first cause* to stand in for the original one. So, consent becomes part of an imaginary causal construct (thought experiment), wherein, an *as if* moment of consent generates an *as if* omnipotence that uncannily produces a *real* sovereign. One that acts both in our stead and in the likeness of the original creator, as the exclusive maker and owner of order (the rules that govern civilized conduct), and thereby also as facilitator of prosperity. An echo of this sentiment of ‘owning’ what we make is found in John Locke’s definition of property as well as his intrinsically connected idea of moral accountability. To my mind, both in Hobbes and in Locke, this generates a special kind of self-reinforcing hierarchy; a recursive one. To be clear, I mean recursion in the sense it is used in computer programming and mathematics, i.e. defining a problem (or the solution to a problem) in terms of (a simpler version of) itself. A famous example of recursion is Benoit Mandelbrot’s concept of fractals (Mandelbrot, 2014), in which the echo of the original ‘simple rule’ generates a ‘rich structure’ that is visually discernible by human perception as ordered, as well as aesthetically pleasing; much like the description of Abigail in scripture.

I leave you with yet another image. Bring to your mind the famous frontispiece of *Leviathan* by the French artist Abraham Bosse. In it, the sovereign’s body is literally composed of a multitude of the faces of his subjects that are gazing at the face of the sovereign. Traditionally this composition has been thought to represent a precursor of a mechanistic and liberal (individualistic) idea about the legitimacy of the sovereign and his power.<sup>16</sup> However, there is a risk of misunderstanding this as a nod to the atomistic idea that the parts that compose a mechanism are, at least implicitly, directing its motion (see also Höffe and Walker, 2015, pp. 67-69). This is clearly not Hobbes’s intention, nor is it depicted in Bosse’s drawing. The subjects in the drawing are gazing at the sovereign for his direction. Their motion is an emulation of his motion, rather than his motion being an aggregate of theirs. If things were reversed, i.e. “Every and Each Atome were of Living Substance, and had

<sup>16</sup> See also David Hyed Lecture, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2015, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2LUcehqZU>

Equal Power, Life and Knowledge and Consequently a Free-will and Liberty, and so Each and Every one were as Absolute as an other”, the reign of “Alterations and Confusions of Worlds” (tohu and bohu if you like), would, as Hobbes’s contemporary Margaret Cavendish argues (Cavendish in Battigelli, 1998, p. 62), prevail over government. Superficially it may look as if the sovereign body is being manipulated or under the control of the subjects, however, in reality what groups the subjects together is the contract between them to receive direction from the sovereign. It is they that come under his influence, not the other way round. As Jean Hampton has pointed out, even in elected representative government, “Our elected ‘representatives’ don’t represent us in any literal sense – as if we were doing the ruling ‘through them’... They rule and we don’t” (Hampton, 1997, p. 106).

The idea being that if we are all made, by the threat of the sword, ‘to cause those laws into execution’ to follow a set of basic restrictions (the laws of nature), the synchronization between our actions will generate social benefits (a commonwealth) that outweigh the restrictions (Hobbes, 1991 [1651], pp. 147-148, Ch. 21). This should not however be confused with the sentiment towards coordination through the ongoing self-reinforcing convention that David Gauthier, Russell Hardin, and to a lesser extent also Jean Hampton, have chosen to highlight in Hobbes. In the interpretation of Hobbes I have presented here, there is a clear-cut divide between the stature of the creator (original) and that of his creation (imitation), whereas Gauthier, Hampton and Hardin appear to share the position of David Lewis (1969) that a single creator is superfluous to the ordering of creation, be it linguistic or political. Lewis argues that the components of creation, rather than falling into the disarray of ‘alterations and confusions’, are bound to self-organize into one of a subset of alternate equilibriums. This is achieved by a stream of social interactions that originate a random, yet sustainable, subset of order. The components, or players, are regarded as naturally rational creatures that coexist and prosper without recourse to the artificial means of a *visible hand* (the state), as opposed to an *invisible* one (say, the market), to direct them. By contrast, in this paper I have argued that for Hobbes the singularity of the original creator assures the singularity of the one true order, enabling the pursuit of sustainable prosperity through the systemic study of the remnants of the creator within creation. It is a recursive process whereby the proper order of creation (a peaceful and prosperous existence) is artificially enabled by the proper (scientific) implementation (or emulation) of the same order. A hierarchy of order that is sustainable, as long as it is forever repeated. Yet, for a champion of modern science such as Hobbes, ironically it hangs on a myth – ‘it’s turtles all the way down’!



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