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Mosaic Leviathan

Religion and Rhetoric in Hobbes's Political Thought

Alison McQueen

> …the interpretation of a verse in the Hebrew, Greek, or Latine Bible, is oftentimes the cause of Civill Warre, and the deposing and assassinating [of] Gods anointed… It is not the Right of the Soveraigne, though granted to him by every mans expresse consent, that can enable him to do his Office, it is the obedience of the subject which must do that. For what good is it to promise allegiance, and by and by to cry out (as some Ministers did in the pulpit) to your tents O Israell.[1]

There were virtually no Jews in mid-seventeenth-century England.[2] Yet the history of biblical Israel was at the heart of the charged political and religious debates of the English Civil War (1642–50) (see Figure 7.1). This fact was not lost on Thomas Hobbes. Looking back from the comparative calm of the Restoration, Hobbes implicated both the learning of Hebrew and the history of biblical Israel in England's recent political upheavals. There is a small but growing literature on the 'Hebraic Hobbes' which seeks to understand and interpret his references to the Old Testament within his political and religious writings.[3] However, there are few sustained attempts to read Hobbes's

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[1] B, p. 302.

[2] Jews were expelled from England in 1290. While some Jews remained in England after this, their numbers were likely small. Oliver Cromwell tacitly readmitted Jews in 1656. The readmission was de facto, not de jure.

[3] See, for instance: Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Frank M. Coleman, 'Thomas Hobbes and the Hebreic Bible', *History of Political Thought* 25.4 (2004), 642–69; Daniel J. Elazar, 'Hobbes Confronts Scripture', *Jewish Political Studies* 4.2 (1992), 3–24; Meirav Jones, '"My Highest Priority Was to Absolve the

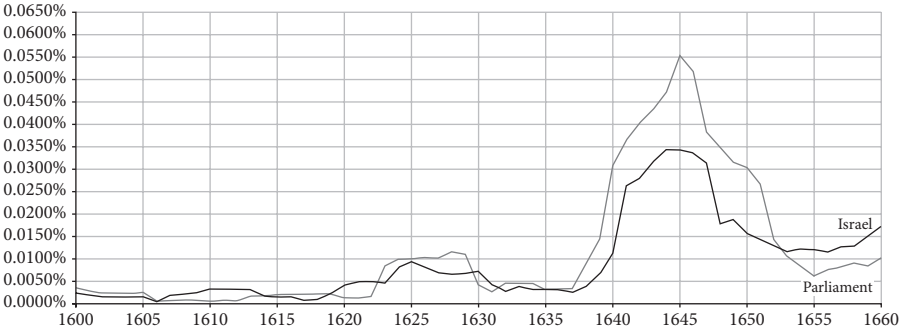

Figure 7.1 Frequency of 'Israel' (black line) in British English texts published between 1600 and 1660 (measured as a percentage of all unigrams, or single words, contained in Google's sample of books from this period). Note the steep increase during the first half of the English Civil War. To put this information in context, I have also included the frequency of 'Parliament' (grey line) during the same period. Google Books Ngram Viewer.

discussions of the figures and narratives of biblical Israel as polemical interventions in the political debates of his day.[4]

Hobbes's engagements with the Old Testament became more pronounced in the early 1640s. While only 16 per cent of the scriptural citations in *Elements of Law* are drawn from the Old Testament, this proportion increases to 52 per cent in *De Cive* and declines only somewhat to 44 per cent in *Leviathan*. As the civil war raged on, Hobbes came to focus on the early history of the Mosaic polity in the book of Exodus and substantial portions of *Leviathan* deal with this period.[5] This focus coincides with his elevation of Moses as the scriptural exemplar of a Leviathan sovereign.

My aim in this chapter is to defend three connected claims. In the first section, I argue that biblical Israel occupied a central place in the political and religious debates of seventeenth-century England. The polity of the Israelites came to be seen as an authoritative expression of God's political preferences and therefore as a model for England. Defenders of monarchical power and royal supremacy over the church looked

Divine Laws": The Theory and Politics of Hobbes' *Leviathan* in a War of Religion', *Political Studies* 65.1 (2017), 248–63; Joshua Mitchell, 'Luther and Hobbes on the Question: Who Was Moses, Who Was Christ?', *The Journal of Politics* 53.3 (1991), 676–700; Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Joel Schwartz, 'Hobbes and the Two Kingdoms of God', *Polity* 18.1 (1985), 7–24; J. P. Sommerville, 'Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews', in *Hobbes and History*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Tom Sorell (London: Routledge, 2000), 160–88.

[4] An important recent exception is Jones, 'My Highest Priority'.

[5] While the top three books of the Old Testament cited in *De Cive* are to Proverbs, Deuteronomy, and Genesis (which make up 14, 12, and 10 percent of total citations to the Old Testament, respectively), the top three books cited in *Leviathan* are Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Genesis (which make up 14, 12, and 11 percent of total citations to the Old Testament, respectively). These figures are based on a count that comprises those citations included by Hobbes as well as the biblical passages that Hobbes quotes directly (even if he doesn't provide a citation).

to the period of the Davidic kings to ground their claims. However, as the political and religious conflict of the seventeenth century intensified, parliamentarians and republicans would increasingly turn to the polity of the Israelites under Moses for enticing alternatives to a powerful monarchy. While many interpreters of Hobbes have used these parliamentarian and republican discourses to contextualize his philosophical arguments, there has been comparatively less attention paid to the political theological dimensions of these discourses.[6]

In the second section, I argue that when read against these developments in the English political and rhetorical context, Hobbes's interest in the Mosaic polity and his attempt to position Moses as a Leviathan sovereign is puzzling. It is puzzling as a contextual matter because appeals to the Davidic kings had been used to ground arguments for monarchical authority and civil supremacy over the church for some time. They would have presented Hobbes with a ready store of scriptural narratives and images to support his political arguments. As a textual matter, Hobbes's own accounts of the Mosaic polity and the period of Davidic kingship suggest that the latter fit much better with his philosophical account of the basis of sovereign authority.

I argue in the third section that Hobbes's use of Moses is best seen as a rhetorical and polemical move that appropriates the images and narratives of parliamentarians and republicans and subversively redirects them in the service of absolutism. I suggest that this is both an interpretively radical and politically risky strategy. It is radical because it demands a thoroughgoing (and perhaps implausible) reinterpretation of the locus, basis, and scope of political authority in the Mosaic polity. It is a politically risky strategy because the powerful arguments, narratives, and imagery that result from it are themselves subject to redirection by those with more reformist or revolutionary aims. In part for these reasons, the strategy opened Hobbes's argument to criticisms that it might otherwise have been able to avoid from those who might otherwise have been allies. I present suggestive textual evidence that these risks made Hobbes somewhat uneasy.

7.1 God's Pattern, England's Politics

The roots of seventeenth-century England's Hebraic politics lie in Reformation theology and the political and religious changes wrought by the country's break from Rome. A Protestant culture of scriptural reading and translation encouraged literate believers to read the Old Testament for themselves. Instruction in biblical Hebrew blossomed in England, as it did in other Protestant states. Hebrew grammars became more readily available and the study of the language became part of the humanist curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge.[7] The Reformation also prompted a shift in the way in which

[6] Important exceptions include Jeffrey Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jones, 'My Highest Priority'; Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 23–56.

[7] G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 180–220.

the figures and narratives of the Old Testament were read and interpreted. The church fathers and medieval Catholic interpreters tended to read the figures and events of the Old Testament typologically, as shadowy prefigurations of the fuller reality of Christ.[8] On this interpretive approach, the Old Testament had been superseded and 'hence made "old" by the New Testament or Gospel'.[9] While the Reformation did not do away with typological interpretations,[10] it did transform them. Suspicious of Catholic allegorizing, reformers read the narratives of the Old Testament as a historical record of an actual people—a people uncorrupted by the ceremonies and doctrines of a fallen church. Eager to make sense of their own collective identity, reformers also read the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the contemporary Protestant experience—the experience of a chosen people battling persistent challenges to their faith and to their obedience to God.[11]

The Reformation also raised urgent questions of political and ecclesiastical legitimacy. After England's break from Rome in 1534 and Elizabeth I's excommunication in 1570, these questions became particularly pressing. Many of the efforts to answer them approached the Old Testament not only as a prefiguration of the challenges faced by contemporary Protestants but also as an authoritative statement of God's political preferences. But what were these preferences? The biblical Israelites had a long and complex history during which they adopted or endured a variety of institutional arrangements. They had been ruled more or less directly by God, by priests and judges, by kings, and by conquerors. Which among these alternatives did God prefer?

For those seeking to defend royal authority and supremacy, these answers were clear. In order to ground their case for obedience to monarchical authority, many thinkers turned to the moment in the Old Testament when the Israelites ask Samuel to 'make us a king to judge us like all the nations'.[12] As Eric Nelson has shown, this passage proved central to early modern debates about the best regime.[13] God instructs Samuel to heed the Israelites' request but also to issue a warning to 'shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them'.[14] The warning Samuel conveys is harrowing and worth quoting at length:

> This will be the manner [מִשְׁפַּט] of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen . . . And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he

[8] For instance, Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of a whale prefigure Christ's 'three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' (Matthew 12:40).

[9] Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

[10] Cf. Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 13–14.

[11] Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[12] 1 Samuel 8:5. Unless otherwise noted, all citations to the Old Testament are from the King James Version.

[13] Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 23–56.

[14] 1 Samuel 8:9.

will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.[15]

John Calvin had argued that this speech was a warning to the Israelites that they must not resist even bad rulers. Translating מִשְׁפַּ֣ט in the opening line of the passage as 'right', rather than 'manner', Calvin notes that the kings could not behave in these ways by virtue of a *legal* right since 'the law trained them to all restraint'.[16] However, 'it was called a right in relation to the people, for they had to obey it and were not allowed to resist'.[17] This reading was later adopted and deployed by others seeking to make a case for non-resistance, including Hugo Grotius and Charles I's Chaplain Extraordinary Henry Ferne.[18] James I offers a similar reading, interpreting the speech as a warning meant to 'prepare their hearts … [for] the due obedience of that King, which God was to give unto them'.[19] That God consents to this arrangement is proof that he embraces a doctrine of non-resistance. That the Israelites consent to it is evidence that they have forever renounced their rights against their kings. As Robert Filmer would later put it after citing James's interpretation with approval, the Israelites 'never shrank at these conditions proposed by Samuel, but accepted of them as such as all other nations were bound unto'.[20] James concludes that since this 'Kingdom and Monarchy of the Jews' was 'founded by God himself', it 'ought to be a pattern for all Christian and well founded Monarchies'. And, if this is the case, 'what liberty can broiling spirits, and rebellious minds claim justly to against any Christian Monarchy[?]'.[21]

Similarly, in his defence of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement and royal supremacy over the church, Richard Hooker invokes the example of the Israelite kings as a pattern for England. 'It was not thought fit', he writes, 'in the Jews' Commonwealth that the exercise of Supremacy Ecclesiastical should be denied unto him, to whom the exercise of Chiefty Civil did appertain, and therefore their kings were invested with both.' It was precisely because the Davidic kings enjoyed not only civil but also ecclesiastical authority that they were able to rightly make 'those laws and orders,

[15] 1 Samuel 8:11–18. [16] Calvin refers here to Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

[17] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), ii, 1514.

[18] Hugo Grotius, *De Imperio Summarum Potestatum Circa Sacra*, trans. Harm-Jan Van Dam (Leiden: Brill, 2001), i, 213–15; Henry Ferne, *A Reply unto Severall Treatises Pleading for the Armes Now Taken up by Subjects in the Pretended Defence of Religion and Liberty* (Oxford, 1643), 56.

[19] James VI and I, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. J. P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67.

[20] Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha,* in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. J. P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37.

[21] James VI and I, *Trew Law*, 70.

which the Sacred History speaketh of concerning the matter of mere religion, the affairs of the Temple and Service of God'.[22] For Hooker, as for James I, the fact that such an arrangement prevailed among 'God's chosen people' and persisted with 'approbation from heaven' lends it divine authority and makes it an exemplary model for England.[23] Because the Elizabethan settlement is itself 'according to the pattern of God's own ancient elect people', it has a powerful and divinely sanctioned legitimacy that should protect it against arguments for the independence or separation of civil and ecclesiastical authority.[24]

However, these associations of England with Israel and English monarchs with the Davidic kings extended far beyond the realm of intellectual argument. Both political and popular representations of monarchical power repeatedly affirmed these Hebraic connections. During a visit to Norwich as part of Elizabeth I's 1578 royal progress through the English countryside, the city's mayor spoke of the people's great joy in receiving their Queen: 'the spirit and lively blood tickle in our arteries and small veins, in beholding thee the light of this Realm (as David was in Israel)'.[25] After the failed invasion of England by the Spanish Armada in 1588, James VI of Scotland (shortly to become James I of England) compared the 'defeat' to David's triumph over the Philistines. This proved an apt Hebraic connection for James, who would eventually cast himself as a modern-day Solomon—David's successor, who ruled over a peaceful, united kingdom and built the first Temple.[26] Many others would affirm this association both during James's life and after his death. Bishop John Williams's sermon at the king's funeral, *Great Britains Salomon*, imagined James interred in Solomon's 'glorious tomb', along with the other great kings of Judah.[27] Less than a decade later, at the beginning of England's civil war, Charles I ordered the publication of a series of devotions drawn from 'King David's Psalms' and selected to console and encourage the king's supporters.[28] As parliamentarians and radicals were fanning the flames of war and revolution, these devotions 'represented Charles as David, who had also faced the rebellion of his subjects. The analogy asserted Charles's sacred authority. It also implied that the kingdom was not at the point of dissolution, despite appearances.[29] England's monarchs understood themselves and were understood by many of their people in Davidic terms.

While challengers of royal supremacy and absolute sovereignty also saw the Old Testament as an authoritative statement of God's political preferences, they resisted the monarchist interpretation of these preferences. For example, in the midst of the religious and ecclesiastical debates of the English Civil War, Presbyterian theologian

[22] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 128–9.

[23] Ibid., 153. [24] Ibid., 138.

[25] John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (London: John Nichols and Son, 1823), ii, 140.

[26] Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, 33–55.

[27] John Williams, *Great Britains Salomon* (London, 1625), 7.

[28] [Anon.], *Mercurius Davidicus, or A Patterne of Loyall Devotion* (Oxford, 1643), 1.

[29] Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, 124.

George Gillespie wrote a pamphlet that staged a dialogue between a 'civilian' and a 'divine' about the proper relationship between church and state. He uses the example of biblical Israel to counter an argument not only for royal but for *civil* supremacy over the church. The civilian notes that he has 'heard it asserted by some learned men, that among the Jews, there was no government nor discipline in the Church distinct from the government of the State . . . but that the Jewish Church was the Jewish State, and the Jewish State the Jewish Church.' Echoing Gillespie's own views, the divine resists this conclusion. First, he notes, while 'the Jewish Church and Commonwealth were for the most part not different materially, the same men being members of both', they were nonetheless still distinct as a matter of institutional design and ordinary practice. Second, he observes that the government of the polity changed over time. The Israelites adopted or endured different political and constitutional arrangements 'under the Judges, under the Kings, and after the captivity: shall we therefore say the Church was altered and new moulded, as oft as the Civil government was changed[?]'[30] As the divine ultimately concludes, the association of political and ecclesiastical authority is historically contingent and variable. An appeal to the example of the biblical Israelites cannot therefore ground an argument for civil supremacy.

In the midst of these debates about church and state, English parliamentarians were turning to the Old Testament to resist Charles I and to make the case for war. After a series of successful ad hoc Fast Day sermons beginning in 1640, the House of Commons began a regular programme of them in 1641 and printed those of which it particularly approved. These sermons are marked by their Hebraic preoccupations.[31] Many Parliamentary preachers drew their audience's attention to the less savory kings in the Davidic line. Preaching in 1643, Arthur Salwey spoke of Ahab, king of Israel and husband to the foreign Jezebel. Ahab, Salwey argued, had urged his people into the idolatrous service of Baal, likely at Jezebel's behest. The implicit political parallels would have been clear to Salwey's audience—the 'popish' ceremonialism of the Church of England under Archbishop Laud was akin to serving Baal. Ahab 'was Charles, seduced to idolatry by his Catholic wife, Henrietta Maria'.[32] Salwey urged the parliamentarians to play the zealous prophet Elijah to Charles's idolatrous Ahab—'down with Baal's altars, down with Baal's priests'.[33] These Hebraic parallels would have been ominous ones for Charles's royalist supporters. Both Ahab and Jezebel met

[30] George Gillespie, *A Late Dialogue Betwixt a Civilian and a Divine Concerning the Present Condition of the Church of England* (London, 1644), 18–19. See also Charles W. A. Prior, 'Hebraism and the Problem of Church and State in England, 1642–1660', *The Seventeenth Century* 28.1 (2013), 37–61.

[31] Christopher Hill notes that 'of 240 sermons which got into print, the texts of 181 were drawn from the Old Testament, 59 from the New: a ratio of 3 to 1 . . . From November 1640 to October 1645, the preponderance of the Old Testament is even more remarkable: 123 texts to the New Testament's 26, a ratio of 4 ¾ to 1.' Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin Press, 1993), 83.

[32] Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, 99.

[33] Arthur Salwey, *Halting Stigmatiz'd in a Sermon Preached to the Honorable House of Commons* (London, 1644), 19.

with the violent and gruesome ends foretold by Elijah.[34] Ahab was hit by a stray arrow in battle and bled to death in a chariot. A few years later, Jezebel was defenestrated and eaten by dogs.

Other preachers turned to an earlier time in Israelite history—one uncorrupted by the rule of human kings. Addressing Parliament after a series of royalist military victories in 1643, William Greenhill invited its members to be 'the worthies of our Israel, to repair her breaches, and settle her foundations'. He concluded by calling upon them to intercede with an angry God: 'You that are the Mosesses that sit at the stern, and know all passages, hasten to the Lord, pour out your hearts before him, your sighs, tears, prayers may . . . secure the kingdom.'[35] Not long after, Henry Scudder echoed this call, casting parliamentarians as the 'repairers of our breaches' and urging them to be 'Mosesses and Phineasses to our Israel'.[36] For these preachers and for their audience, the Davidic kings offered lessons in the dangers of idolatry and corruption, while the Mosaic period offered an enticing model of political founding and new beginnings. Parliamentarians differed, of course, about what such new beginnings might look like. Many envisioned a constitutional monarchy, others advocated more robust forms of parliamentary supremacy, while an increasing number of more radical members pursued republican alternatives.

Like these Fast Day preachers, English republicans would turn to the Mosaic period, finding in it the model for a divine polity with no earthly king.[37] These republican interpretations would only begin to receive their fullest articulations in the Interregnum. However, these later interpretations give us some idea of what Parliament's republicans might have had in mind. For James Harrington, as well as for many of his seventeenth-century republican contemporaries, the Mosaic polity was a 'commonwealth' of the sort he advocated for England. On Harrington's account, the crucial political moment for the Israelites comes not with their covenant with God at Sinai, but when a weary and frustrated Moses cries out, 'I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me.'[38] In response, God instructs him to appoint seventy elders (in Harrington's reading, a 'senate' of sorts) for assistance. From this point onward, Harrington argues, Israel had a mixed constitution of the kind favoured by republicans. Moses stood 'no more alone', but was now 'prince of the senate, which God appointed to stand with him'.[39] While God, Moses, or the senate might *propose* laws, the power of *resolution* or decision

[34] 1 Kings 22:29–40; 2 Kings 9:30–7.

[35] William Greenhill, *The Axe at the Root, a Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons* (London, 1643), epistle, p. 50.

[36] Henry Scudder, *Gods Warning to England by the Voyce of His Rod . . . A Sermon Preached . . . before the Honourable House of Commons* (London, 1644), epistle.

[37] Graham Hammill, *The Mosaic Constitution: Political Theology and Imagination from Machiavelli to Milton* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 208–42; Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 37–56.

[38] Numbers 11:14.

[39] James Harrington, *Pian Piano*, in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 376.

on these propositions rested with the people as the ultimate source of legal and political authority.[40] In Harrington's hands, the Mosaic polity became a Roman commonwealth.

Just as the Mosaic polity provided a pattern worthy of imitation, so its ultimate fate offered a cautionary example for England. After the death of Moses's successor, Joshua, the Israelites, 'mindless of the excellent orders of their commonwealth', allowed their institutions to decay. In the anarchy that ensued, the Israelites appointed judges or, in Harrington's Roman reading, 'dictators'. The failure of these leaders to guarantee a stable order prompted the popular demand for a king and the transition to monarchical rule, 'under which [Israel] fared worse'.[41] For Harrington and his fellow republicans, Samuel's harrowing warning about kingly rule was not, as defenders of monarchical authority had maintained, a list of kingly behaviours against which subjects must not resist. Echoing early monarchomach arguments, republicans read the passage as a prophetic caution that would ultimately be vindicated in the profound moral failures of the bad Davidic kings and the idolatrous missteps of the good ones.[42] As his republican contemporaries John Milton and Algernon Sidney argued in even clearer terms, the Israelites had sinned against God by asking for a king. Their yearning for monarchy, their desire to have a king 'like all other nations', was itself a form of idolatry that ought to have been resisted.[43] No longer safe in the hands of absolutists and defenders of royal supremacy, the Old Testament proved as powerful and authoritative a tool for parliamentarians and republicans as it had for monarchists.

7.2 The Road Not Taken: Davidic Kingship

Given the core commitments of his political philosophy, as well as his diagnosis of the causes of civil war, it is hardly surprising that Thomas Hobbes thought that the *content* of these challenges to absolute sovereignty and civil control of the church demanded a response. However, he was also increasingly concerned by these challengers' scriptural *modes* of argument as well. In order to see why, consider what Hobbes himself tells us about the circumstances in which he came to write *Leviathan*.[44] Despite having fled

[40] James Harrington, *The Prerogative of Popular Government*, in *Political Works of James Harrington*, 421.

[41] Harrington, *Pian Piano*, 378.

[42] James Harrington, *The Art of Lawgiving*, in *Political Works of James Harrington*, 599–704; Ronald Beiner, 'James Harrington on the Hebrew Commonwealth', *The Review of Politics* 76.2 (2014), 169–93. For earlier monarchomach readings of the passage, see George Buchanan, *A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots*, ed. and trans. Roger A. Mason and Martin S. Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 109–11; [Anon.], *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos*, ed. and trans. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 128–9. Indeed, it is Buchanan and others to whom James VI/I's reading of the passage is responding.

[43] John Milton, *A Defence of the People of England*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, trans. Donald C. Mackenzie (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), iv, 301–537; Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, ed. Thomas G. West (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1996); Algernon Sidney, *Court Maxims*, ed. Hans W. Blom, Eco Haitsma-Mulier, and Ronald Janse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 37–55.

[44] Hobbes's description of these circumstances echoes the one he gives in the preface to the second edition of *De Cive*.

to Paris in November or December of 1640, he monitored events in England quite closely. It was the spring of 1646.[45] He had immersed himself in the development of his systematic philosophy, resuming work on *De Corpore*. However, in July, the young prince Charles and his entourage arrived in Paris with fresh news of royalist defeats, which the king's enemies were interpreting as evidence of God's support for the parliamentarian cause. Hobbes writes that he 'could not bear to hear such terrible crimes attributed to the commands of God'. He set *De Corpore* aside and, determined 'to write something that would absolve the divine laws', turned his attention to the work that would become *Leviathan*.[46] Hobbes's alarmed response not only to the rebellious doctrines circulating in England but also to their scriptural modes of expression suggest one explanation for his increasing use of biblical argument in his political philosophy. And, as biblical Israel had assumed such a central and authoritative place in the scriptural politics of the civil war, it is hardly surprising that Hobbes focused substantial attention on the Old Testament.

What is more puzzling, however, is the period of Israelite history on which Hobbes comes to focus his attention in *Leviathan*. As we saw at the outset, his patterns of scriptural citation suggest that he focuses a substantial amount of this attention on the Mosaic period, especially compared to that which he gives to the era of the Davidic kings. Indeed, in *Leviathan* Hobbes devotes much of his scriptural argument to showing that Moses is a paradigmatic Leviathan sovereign. Having concluded the work's philosophical argument, he acknowledges that there may be some who reject it. However, he goes on, 'supposing that these of mine are not such Principles of Reason; yet I am sure they are Principles from Authority of Scripture; as I shall make it appear, when I shall come to speak of the Kingdome of God, (administered by *Moses*,) over the Jewes, his peculiar people by Covenant'.[47] Hobbes repeatedly refers to the sovereign as he who sits in 'Moses seat' or holds 'the place of Moses' and thus continues a pattern set by this exemplary figure.[48] However, as we shall see, the interpretive challenges of appropriating Moses as a Leviathan sovereign are much more pronounced than they would have been in the case of the Davidic kings. What is more, there was a robust contextual precedent for justifying both absolute sovereignty and civil supremacy over religion by appeal to the Davidic kings. Given these interpretive challenges and contextual

[45] Hobbes's own dating of the start of his work on *Leviathan* is contested because his account was written after the Restoration and he may have had cause to cast his motivations in a pro-Stuart light. That Hobbes might, writing years later, have been somewhat muddled about the precise chronology of his work on *Leviathan* seems plausible. That his account of his motivations was significantly distorted by a desire to establish his royalist credentials with the restored Stuarts is less so. And it is the question of motivations, rather than dating, that is important for my argument here. The preface to the revised edition of *De Cive*, along with several of the arguments in that work and an even greater number of those in *Leviathan*, show that Hobbes was deeply concerned with refuting arguments that God's laws justified rebellion against any established sovereign.

[46] As quoted in Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 330–1. These are Skinner's own translations of Hobbes's Latin verse autobiography.

[47] L, 30, p. 522. [48] E.g. L, 41, p. 766; 40, p. 744.

precedents, I suggest, we need an account of why it is that Hobbes decided to engage the Hebraic debates of his time in overwhelmingly Mosaic terms. Such an account, I will ultimately argue, tells us something important about Hobbes's rhetorical strategy.

The biblical Moses is a famously reluctant prophet. He claims that a speech impediment renders him unqualified to serve as a representative of God and the Israelites.[49] While these worries turn out to have been unfounded, what does seem clear is that Moses lacks some of the most basic qualifications to serve as an exemplar of Hobbes's Leviathan sovereign. To see why, we need to consider Hobbes's account of the history of biblical Israel. For Hobbes, the kingdom of God over the Israelites 'is a reall, not a metaphoricall Kingdome'.[50] God did not just rule over the Israelites '*naturally* by his might', as he did over all men, but also as a civil sovereign over his '*peculiar* Subjects'.[51] As their king and civil sovereign, God governed the Israelites 'and none but them, not onely by naturall Reason, but by Positive Lawes, which he gave them by the mouths of his holy Prophets'.[52] Moses and his successors served as God's 'Lieutenants, or Vicars', conveying His commands to the Israelites.[53] In this important sense, their authority was the product of 'divine right', which Hobbes thought was a profoundly unstable basis for political obligation.[54] To the extent that they ruled, they did so as God's instruments, 'by Authority immediate from God'.[55] Because Moses and his successors were merely intermediaries, it is possible for Hobbes to say that the polity of the Israelites was 'an utterly free regime' whose people were not 'subject to any human power'.[56] When questions arose about who had the authority to serve as a divine intermediary and instrument, God would occasionally intervene directly. When Corah, Dathan, and Abiram gathered 'two hundred and fifty Princes of the assembly' to accuse Moses and Aaron of unjustly elevating themselves above the rest of His holy people, 'God caused the Earth to swallow' the three leaders 'with their wives and children alive, and consumed those two hundred and fifty Princes with fire'.[57]

This system of divine sovereignty came to an end when the Israelites, frustrated by the anarchy of private judgement and corruption during the period of the Judges, asked Samuel for 'a king to judge us like all the nations'.[58] For Hobbes, much hinges on the fact that Davidic kingship is the product of a popular request to be ruled 'like all the nations'. As Michael Walzer has pointed out with reference to the biblical text, there is an important sense in which this request is impossible. For Israel's neighbours in the ancient Near East, monarchy would have been seen as 'the divine and natural form of government'. The fact that the Israelites 'imagine a king being made at their instance means that he can't be a king like the kings of all other nations'.[59] Yet the very thing that makes the request impossible makes it a boon for Hobbes's purposes. Like

[49] E.g. Exodus 4:10, 6:12, 6:30. [50] L, 35, p. 642. [51] L, 35, p. 634. [52] L, 31, p. 556.
[53] L, 35, p. 644. [54] I discuss the reasons for this in section 7.3. [55] L, 40, p. 748.
[56] DCv, 17.7. Hobbes removes this language about the freedom of the polity of the Israelites in *Leviathan*.
[57] L, 40, p. 744. See also Numbers 16:1–35. [58] 1 Samuel 8:5.
[59] Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 54.

the Leviathan sovereign, the authority of the Davidic kings is artificial—the product of human will. That the Israelites choose to subject themselves to monarchical authority even after hearing Samuel's harrowing litany of kingly abuses is, for Hobbes, evidence of an especially robust and informed consent.[60] While his monarchist forerunners and contemporaries had appropriated members of the Davidic line to ground arguments for divine right, Hobbes shows that their authority can plausibly be read as the product of popular consent.

Hobbes argues that the Israelites' request for a king amounted to a rejection of 'that peculiar Government of God'.[61] When God granted this request, he ceased to be the Israelites' civil sovereign and, from then on, ruled them as he did all other people—by natural reason alone. The Davidic kings then exercised rightful jurisdiction over both civil and spiritual affairs, 'for there was no other Word of God in that time by which to regulate Religion, but the Law of Moses, which was their Civill Law'.[62] These kings were thus in a situation tightly analogous to contemporary civil sovereigns, whose authority is grounded in a social contract borne of an acute awareness of the inconveniences and dangers of anarchy. In the succeeding period, which will endure until the restoration of divine rule with the Second Coming of Christ, argues Hobbes, the political and ecclesiastical authority of civil sovereigns is grounded in consent, rather than divine right. God no longer intervenes directly to make his will known. In the absence of miraculous manifestations of divine will, we can rely only on Scripture and by right it falls to the civil sovereign to interpret its commands for his people.[63] Thus, in contrast to Moses, who occupies a different stage of sacred history and stands in a markedly different relationship to divine authority, Hobbes's *own* account of the Davidic kings suggests that they shared the primary attributes of the Leviathan sovereign. Given his own textual account of the history and development of the polity of the Israelites, Hobbes's decision to appeal to Moses and not one or more of the Davidic kings as the central biblical exemplar of sovereign power remains a puzzling one.

While there are no clear textual grounds for Hobbes to avoid selecting a biblical sovereign exemplar from among the Davidic kings, perhaps there were contextual reasons for the decision. One strikes me as at least potentially plausible. Parliamentarians and republicans had found in the history of the Davidic line a catalogue of monarchical abuses. As we have seen, these abuses offered compelling fodder for parliamentary fast sermons, which tended to emphasize the idolatrous and despotic habits of the biblical kings. Perhaps Hobbes was eager to choose a biblical exemplar less tainted by these tyrannical associations. The problem with this suggestion is that the appalling behaviour of several of the Davidic kings was an asset for Hobbes's line of argument.

[60] L, 20, p. 316; DCv, 11.6. Hobbes's reasoning here echoes an argument more fully laid out in James VI and I, *Trew Law*, 70. Where Hobbes differs from James and other earlier thinkers who relied on the passage to ground claims about non-resistance is that Hobbes reads the passage as one that unambiguously describes the rights of the king. See DCv, 11.6; L, 20, p. 316.

[61] L, 40, p. 750; see also Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 23–6, 53–6.

[62] L, 40, p. 752.

[63] L, 32, p. 584.

Consider the brief use he makes of Saul—a jealous, deceptive, and murderous king and therefore hardly a paragon of monarchical virtue. Saul was a brute, Hobbes acknowledges. Yet David, the king's primary rival and ultimate successor, refused to slay him and likewise forbade his servants from doing so. This, for Hobbes, serves as scriptural proof that the power of sovereigns is absolute and that 'Kings cannot be punished by their subjects'.[64] That Saul was every bit as tyrannical as parliamentarians and republicans alleged is essential for Hobbes's argument. No matter how terrible their kings, the Israelites had no legitimate right to revolution and regicide.[65] And they knew it. As for Israel, so too for England. Far from wanting to avoid the tyrannical associations of the Davidic kings, Hobbes had good reason to embrace them. We must, then, look elsewhere for an explanation of Hobbes's Mosaic turn.

7.3 Subversive Integration: Mosaic Leviathan

I suggest that the best way to make sense of Hobbes's Mosaic turn is to see it as an instance of a broader strategy of 'subversive integration'.[66] This strategy begins by accepting the basic premises of parliamentarians and republicans but ends by showing how these premises can support substantially less radical conclusions. As Quentin Skinner has shown, this is precisely what Hobbes does in his account of the social contract. Parliamentarian propagandists like Henry Parker had sought to resist divine right arguments by arguing that the rule of kings is neither natural nor instituted by God. The natural state is one of perfect freedom in which men possess complete powers of self-government. Any legitimate form of political authority, then, must be grounded in the 'common consent and agreement' of all those subject to it and expressed in the form of 'Pactions and agreements'.[67] Free and equal people would hardly yield all of their natural liberty to a king. They would institute a form of limited government in which the king held his authority conditionally as a trust.[68]

Rather than attempting a point-by-point criticism and rejection of this account, Hobbes seeks to discredit the parliamentarian argument 'by demonstrating that it is possible to accept the basic structure of their theory without in the least endorsing any of the radical implications they had drawn from it'.[69] He affirms the foundational premises of the argument—that political authority is artificial, that the natural state of man is one of perfect freedom, and that any legitimate political authority must be grounded in consent expressed in the form of a social contract. Hobbes's innovation is

[64] DCv, 11.3.

[65] Once again, Hobbes's reasoning here closely tracks an argument in James VI and I, *Trew Law*, 70.

[66] I borrow this term from Franck Lessay, who uses it to characterize Hobbes's approach to covenant theology. Franck Lessay, 'Hobbes's Covenant Theology and Its Political Implications', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 258.

[67] Henry Parker, *Observations upon Some of His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses* (London, 1642), 1.

[68] Ibid., 4.

[69] Quentin Skinner, 'Hobbes on Representation', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 13.2 (2005), 169.

to show that with an appropriately frightening account of man's natural state and a proper appreciation for the instability of limited government, these parliamentarian premises can easily ground absolutist conclusions. But Hobbes's use of the strategy came at a high cost. Those who would otherwise have been friendly to the work's political conclusions saw in its premises the seeds of rebellion. Bishop Bramhall, for instance, suggested that *Leviathan* might have been better titled the *Rebel's Catechism*.[70]

Given that Hobbes uses a strategy of subversive integration in the philosophical arguments, it seems reasonable to think that such a strategy is at work in his scriptural argument. And this may explain why he turns increasingly to the history of the Mosaic polity and, despite all the interpretive difficulties of doing so, seeks to elevate Moses—the Hebraic hero of his parliamentarian and republican contemporaries—to the position of paradigmatic Leviathan sovereign. However, in order for Moses to serve as an exemplar in this way, Hobbes must embark on a radical reinterpretation of the locus, basis, and scope of political authority in the Mosaic polity. The Israelite Kingdom of God, Hobbes explains, was a civil kingdom. God ruled over the Israelites as their civil sovereign and chose Moses alone to serve as his 'Lieutenant' or 'Viceregent'.[71] On this account, the ultimate locus of political authority was God. Moses exercised political authority merely on God's behalf. This fact seems to pose a serious problem for any attempt to use Moses as an exemplar of Leviathan sovereignty, which, as Hobbes is at pains to insist, must be both unified and supreme.

Hobbes's unorthodox solution to this problem is to cast God as a *silent* sovereign. Frightened of his awesome power, the Israelites ask to be protected from immediate access to God: 'And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak though with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'[72] At their own behest, God did not speak to the Israelites directly, but rather 'by the mediation of Moses'.[73] As Bryan Garsten puts it, 'God was effectively silent from the perspective of the people.'[74] Moses is the only authoritative interpreter of God's will. His authority to render this will law and to enforce it is therefore, from the perspective of the Israelites, as unified and supreme as that of any Leviathan sovereign.

However, God's silence raises an important question about the basis of Moses's authority. If God did not speak to the Israelites directly and if Moses's authority derived solely from the fact that God spoke *only* to him, 'it appeareth not as yet, that the people were obliged to take him for God's Lieutenant, longer than they beleeved that God spake unto him'. This, for Hobbes, is one problem with any form of political authority

[70] John Bramhall, *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes His Last Animadversions in the Case Concerning Liberty and Universal Necessity Wherein All His Exceptions About That Controversie Are Fully Satisfied* (London, 1657), 515.

[71] L, 40, pp. 738–40; 41, p. 331. [72] Exodus 20:18–19. [73] L, 40, p. 740.

[74] Bryan Garsten, 'Religion and Representation in Hobbes', in *Leviathan*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 536.

grounded in divine right. Such an account of the basis for political authority only works to secure obedience as long as subjects continue to believe that their sovereign is chosen by God. When belief fails, the grounds of obedience dissolve and subjects are no longer 'obliged to take any thing for the law of God, which [their sovereign] propounded to them in God's name.'[75] In order for this belief to remain stable in perpetuity, subjects will require repeated supernatural signs of the divine favour of their sovereign. It is for this reason that the subjects of sovereigns who rule by divine right are, on Hobbes's view, miracle-hungry. The experience of the Israelite polity under Moses illustrates the problem well. Despite the many miracles performed during the exodus from Egypt, the absence of Moses and his attendant miracles for a mere forty days caused the Israelites to relapse 'into the Idolatry of the Egyptians.'[76] While belief can certainly ease the path of obedience, sovereign authority that rests on belief alone is always vulnerable to the whimsy of subjects.

It is therefore important for Hobbes that the authority of Moses not be seen to rest only (or even primarily) on his status as God's chosen instrument. It is crucial that his authority, 'as the authority of all other princes, must be grounded on the consent of the people and their promise to obey him.'[77] Here again, the Israelites' terrified request that Moses speak to God on their behalf is central to Hobbes's account. Hobbes finds in this request their moment of consent and their promise of 'absolute obedience to *Moses*'.[78] It was by this request that 'they obliged themselves to obey whatsoever [Moses] should deliver unto them for the Commandment of God'.[79] And though their consent is, in typical Hobbesian fashion, born of fear, it is not undertaken hastily. As Hobbes reminds us, the Israelites were not only 'wholly free' when they consented 'but also totally hostile to human subjection because of their recent experience of Egyptian slavery'.[80] The Israelites, like the subjects of the Leviathan state, assumed the burdens of the law fearfully but willingly.

The vision of political authority that emerges against the backdrop of a silent God and a consenting people is one whose scope encompasses both civil and religious questions. Here again, a consideration of the weakness of political authority founded on divine right is essential. Even if subjects do manage to maintain a stable belief that their sovereign rules by divine right, this basis for political authority is a dangerously promiscuous one. As Kinch Hoekstra puts the problem, 'just as belief in the divine inspiration of the sovereign would further his authority, so belief in the inspiration of a subject would further his authority, at the expense of the sovereign's. If divinity or special access to divinity confers authority, then it is difficult to restrict the authority to the sovereign, as nothing can stop God from entering into or communicating with whomever he chooses.'[81] Without God's public affirmation of his own will, this

[75] L, 40, p. 740. [76] L, 12, p. 184. [77] L, 40, p. 740.
[78] L, 20, p. 316. [79] L, 40, p. 740. [80] DCv, 16.8.
[81] Kinch Hoekstra, 'Disarming the Prophets: Thomas Hobbes and Predictive Power', *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 59.1 (2004), 128.

proliferation of claims to divine authority could continue almost indefinitely. This, on Hobbes's reading, was precisely what had happened in the lead-up to the English Civil War. Self-styled prophets claimed divine inspiration in order to authorize their challenges to civil sovereignty.[82] Hobbes's response to this problem was, at least in part, to insist again on the effective silence of God. While it is possible that God speaks directly to particular individuals, he does not confirm his will publicly to the rest of us. Divine inspiration cannot therefore ground any claim of political or religious authority. The only authoritative public expression of God's will is Scripture, which is subject to competing interpretations. In order to stabilize this interpretive anarchy and to avert the threat it poses for civil peace, we must vest our civil sovereign with the sole authority to interpret Scripture.[83]

Similarly, in the Mosaic polity, the consent of the Israelites to the sovereignty of Moses amounted to an agreement that he would be the sole legitimate interpreter of God's commands. While Israel had prophets of its own in the form of the seventy elders appointed by Moses to help him in the difficult work of government, God had endowed them 'with a mind conformable and subordinate to that of Moses, that they might Prophecy, that is to say, speak to the people in Gods name, in such manner, as to set forward (as Ministers of Moses, and by his authority) such doctrine as was agreeable to Moses his doctrine.'[84] Their prophetic authority came not from divine right but was rather derivative of and subordinate to the sovereign and interpretive authority of Moses. In order for this interpretive authority to remain unchallenged, the bounds of Mount Sinai were strictly policed. God instructs Moses to 'set bounds unto the people' around the mountain and to tell them: 'Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death.'[85] In one of the greatest Hebraic analogies of *Leviathan*, Hobbes then continues:

> Out of which we may conclude, that whosoever in a Christian Common-wealth holdeth the place of Moses, is the sole Messenger of God, and Interpreter of his Commandments. And according hereunto, no man ought in the interpretation of the Scripture to proceed further than the bounds which are set by their severall sovereigns. For the Scriptures since God now speaketh in them, are the Mount Sinai; the bounds whereof are the Laws of them that represent Gods Person on Earth. To look upon them, and therein to behold the wondrous works of God, and learn to fear him is allowed; but to interpret them, that is, to pry into what God saith to him whom he appointeth to govern under him, and make themselves Judges whether he govern as God commandeth him, or not, is to transgresse the bounds God hath set us, and to gaze upon God irreverently.[86]

Faced with a God who is publicly silent, Moses and the Leviathan sovereign must represent his will on earth. By reinterpreting the locus, basis, and scope of political authority in the Mosaic polity, Hobbes has attempted to take one of the most powerful

[82] B, p. 138. [83] L, 32, p. 584; 40, pp. 742–6. [84] L, 40, p. 746.
[85] Exodus 19:12; L, 40, p. 744. [86] L, 40, pp. 744–6.

narratives of parliamentarians, republicans, and radicals and subversively integrate it into a scriptural justification of the Leviathan state.

The argument that I have offered here may strike some as implausible. After all, as much as Hobbes insists on the *exemplarity* of the Israelite kingdom of God under Moses, he is also sometimes at pains to stress its *exceptionalism*.[87] The Israelites, he repeatedly emphasizes, were God's special people or 'peculiar subjects'.[88] The particular experiences of the Israelites and their relationship to God must not, Hobbes suggests, shape the politics of the present too much. He would have wanted, for instance, to resist in the strongest possible terms the suggestion made by some of his more radical contemporaries that England should reinstate the entire legal code of the Mosaic polity.[89] Another reason for his insistence on Israelite exceptionalism is that some political and religious radicals in Hobbes's time had believed that the Kingdom of God was at hand and had, on the basis of this belief, licensed rebellion against their earthly sovereign.[90] By insisting that the kingdom of God was a civil kingdom of God's 'peculiar subjects' that came to an end with the election of Saul and would not be restored until the Second Coming of Christ, Hobbes attempts to close off this licence for rebellion by stressing the exceptionalism of the polity of the Israelites and fixing it in a securely historical past.[91]

I would suggest that this uneasy tacking back and forth between Israelite exemplarity and exceptionalism might also reflect a certain anxiety about his chosen rhetorical strategy. I have argued that Hobbes's decision to turn to the early history of the Israelite polity and to the figure of Moses in particular is part of a strategy of subversive reintegration. Recognizing that the scriptural account of the Mosaic commonwealth was especially authoritative for his parliamentarian and republican contemporaries, he sought to subversively integrate it into a defence of absolute sovereignty. As we have seen, subversive integration is both a demanding and a risky rhetorical strategy. It is demanding because it requires a radical (and perhaps often implausible) reinterpretation of the argument, imagery, or narrative one is trying to integrate. In Hobbes's hands, Moses becomes not only (or even primarily) a lieutenant of God who rules by divine right but a Leviathan sovereign who is God's sole representative on earth. This is no small feat and the two visions of the Mosaic polity ultimately rest uneasily with one another.

Subversive integration is a risky strategy because it exposes one's argument to criticisms that it might otherwise have been able to avoid. In the case of Hobbes's

[87] David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013), 312–17.

[88] L, 35, 634 ff.

[89] Hobbes therefore insists on distinguishing those laws that obligated the Israelites by nature and were therefore universally applicable and those that God gave as the civil sovereign of his chosen people and were therefore particular to the Israelites. See, for example, DCv, 16.10. See also Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 300–24; Guibbory, *Christian Identity*, 21–120.

[90] L, 44, p. 960.

[91] L, 35, p. 642. Indeed, the place in *Leviathan* where Hobbes most stresses the Israelites' identity as God's 'peculiar' subjects is in chapter 35, 'Of the Signification of Kingdom of God'.

philosophical arguments, these criticisms often came from those like Bishop Bramhall and Robert Filmer who might otherwise have been sympathetic to some of the work's political conclusions. At least part of the concern in both of these cases is that, whatever conclusions Hobbes uses them to reach, parliamentarian premises and language are so suggestive and fertile that they can easily be reappropriated for more radical ends. By giving these arguments and language such systematic and persuasive expression, Hobbes may have, in spite of himself, helped rather than hindered the cause of future rebellion. We might read the uneasy tension between Israelite exemplarity and exceptionalism as a reflection of a similar anxiety on Hobbes's part. Because the polity of the Israelites under Moses was seen by Hobbes's more radical contemporaries as an especially authoritative source for political argument, it made polemical and rhetorical sense for Hobbes to redeploy it. But for the same reason, it was very difficult to control the results of that redeployment once it had been made, as Bramhall and Filmer would have been all too aware.

As it turns out, Hobbes had grounds for such concerns. While there is not, to my knowledge, evidence that his account of the Mosaic polity was taken up and redeployed by parliamentarian or republican contemporaries, other aspects of his Hebraic arguments may well have been. This is clearest in the case of his reading of the Israelites' request for a human king.[92] For Hobbes, in making this request, the Israelites reject, refuse, and depose God as their king.[93] The radical possibilities of such an argument were not lost on Hobbes's absolutist critics, who were eager to contain them. Filmer was quick to claim that the request had been borne of short-term prudential concerns, rather than a considered decision in favour of regime change: 'The people did not totally reject the Lord . . . they did not desire an alteration of government, and to cast off God's laws, but hoped for a certainer and speedier deliverance from danger in time of war.'[94]

Filmer was right to have been worried. The republican theorist James Harrington, who had attended closely to Hobbes's account of the polity of the Israelites and shared his Erastian commitments, seized on this reading of the request for a king as evidence that the Mosaic polity had been a popular commonwealth.[95] To reject God, Harrington reasons, 'that he should not reign over them, was as civil magistrate to depose him. The power therefore which the people had to depose even God himself as he was civil magistrate, leaveth little doubt, but that they had the power to have rejected any of those laws confirmed by them throughout the Scripture.'[96] That the Israelites had the authority to 'depose even God himself' was proof that (contra Hobbes) the Mosaic polity was an exemplary instance of popular sovereignty. Hobbes's account of the

[92] 1 Samuel 8:7. [93] L, 12, p. 184; 29, p. 506; 35, p. 640; 40, p. 750.

[94] Robert Filmer, *Observations Concerning the Originall of Government*, in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, 196.

[95] Harrington frequently cites Hobbes and aspects of the former's ecclesiological arguments track those of the latter quite closely. These connections were not lost on several of Harrington's contemporary critics. For detailed analysis of these connections, see J. G. A. Pocock, 'Historical Introduction', in *Political Works of James Harrington*, 77–99; Collins, *Allegiance*, 185–91; Beiner, 'Harrington on the Hebrew Commonwealth'.

[96] James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, in *Political Works of James Harrington*, 175.

polity of the Israelites, it would seem, was itself subject to a strategy of subversive integration.[97] A certain anxiety about this possibility may explain Hobbes's decision in the Latin *Leviathan* to remove or soften the language of several passages dealing with the Israelites' request for a king.[98] Once loosed, this politically explosive narrative of God's chosen people had proven impossible to contain.

7.4 Conclusion

I have argued that Hobbes's attention to the Old Testament can be explained by appealing to the polemical work that biblical Israel was doing in seventeenth-century England. Because it was thought to express God's political preferences, the Old Testament was authoritative. It seems plausible that Hobbes realized this and, for this reason, sought to engage extensively with it in *De Cive* and *Leviathan*. His decision to focus particularly on the Mosaic polity in *Leviathan*, I have argued, is part of a demanding and risky rhetorical strategy of subversive integration. In his extensive use of this strategy, Hobbes may well have been—if one can forgive the anachronism—'the first counter-revolutionary'.[99] More modestly, we might say that the account offered in this chapter confirms a picture of a Hobbes who, despite his exile in Paris, was deeply attuned to the political discourse in his native England. He was clearly troubled not only by the content of the political arguments that were being made by parliamentarians, republicans, and radicals, but also by their scriptural and Hebraic modes of expression. However, he also recognized the rhetorical and polemical power of Hebraic narratives and was willing to radically reinterpret them and risk the support of his political allies, in order to redeploy them.

[97] In response to a suggestion by the clergyman and scholar Matthew Wren that 'Mr Harrington . . . does silently swallow down such Notions as Mr Hobs hath chewed for him', Harrington responded that his interpretation of the Israelite request for a king can be traced back to the Roman-Jewish historian Josephus, a source 'more ancient than Hobbes'. See Harrington, *Prerogative*, 423. He does not, however, go so far as to deny that Hobbes was the proximate source of the interpretation.

[98] Cf. Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 25.

[99] Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 61.