

Mosaic Leviathan: Religion and Rhetoric in Hobbes' Political Thought

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The interpretation of a verse in the Hebrew, Greek, or Latin Bible, is oftentimes the cause of civil war and the deposing and assassinating of God's anointed...It is not the right of the sovereign, though granted to him by every man's express 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 then by and by to cry out (as some ministers did in the pulpit) *To your tents, O Israel!*?

~Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or The Long Parliament* (1668)

I. Introduction

There were virtually no Jews in mid-seventeenth-century England.¹ Yet the history of biblical Israel was at the heart of the charged political and religious debates of the English Civil War (1642-1650) (see figure 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. While there is a small but growing literature on the "Hebraic Hobbes" (Schwartz 1985, Mitchell, 1991, Elzar 1992, Sommerville 2000, Coleman 2004, Nelson 2010, Beiner 2011), there has been no systematic attempt to track and account for the changes in his engagement with biblical Israel over the course of his political works.² A cursory look at Hobbes' patterns of Scriptural citation reveals at least three interesting shifts. First, the total number of Scriptural citations more than doubles from *Elements of Law* (1640) to *De Cive* (1642) and then more than doubles again from *De Cive* to *Leviathan* (1651). These figures track an

¹ Jews were expelled from England in 1290. Those who remained were to be punished with death. While there is reason to think some individual Jews resided in or passed through England after the act of expulsion was passed, the number was no doubt very small. After their expulsion from Spain and Portugal in 1492 and 1497, respectively, a small

² There have also been several interpretations that examine particular aspects of Hobbes' use of the Hebrew Bible (e.g. his covenant theology) or briefly touch on these uses in the course of making larger arguments (e.g. about Hobbes' narrative of sacred history). See: Pocock (1970), Martinich (1992), Lessay (2007).

increasing focus on Scriptural and religious questions in Hobbes' political works.³ I will refer to this shift as Hobbes' "Scriptural turn." Second, Hobbes turns dramatically toward the Hebrew Bible in the early 1640s. While only 16 percent of the Scriptural citations in *Elements of Law* are drawn from the Hebrew Bible, this proportion increases to 52 percent in *De Cive* and remains strong at 44 percent in *Leviathan*. I will refer to this shift as Hobbes' "Hebraic turn." Third, after he made this Hebraic turn, Hobbes increasingly came to focus on the early history of the Mosaic polity in the book of Exodus (see figures 2 and 3). As we will see, this focus coincides with Hobbes' elevation of Moses as the Scriptural exemplar of a Leviathan sovereign. I will refer to this shift as Hobbes' "Mosaic turn." While this paper will touch on all three of these turns, its primary goal is to focus on the latter two and connect them to larger questions about the rhetorical and polemical strategies at work in Hobbes' political philosophy.⁴

My aim is to defend three connected claims. In section II, I argue that we can account for Hobbes' Hebraic turn by understanding the place of biblical Israel in the political and religious debates of seventeenth-century England. The theological commitments of the Reformation, along with pressing questions of political and ecclesiastical legitimacy raised by the country's break from Rome, elevated the status and importance of the Hebrew Bible in England. The polity of the ancient 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 to the period of the Davidic kings to ground their claims. However, as the political and religious conflict of the seventeenth-century intensified, parliamentarians, republicans, and radicals would increasingly turn to the polity of the Israelites under Moses for enticing alternatives to

³ Three of *Elements of Laws*' 29 chapters deal extensively with Scriptural and religious matters. By word count, this amounts to roughly one sixth of the book. This proportion increases to five of 18 with *De Cive*. By word count, this amounts to roughly one third of the book. In *Leviathan*, this proportion increases to 16 of 47 chapters. By word count, this amounts to roughly half the book.

⁴ I plan to discuss the first shift in more detail in a separate part of the project.

a powerful monarchy. Hobbes was not only alarmed by the *content* of these reformist and radical arguments, but also by their Scriptural *modes* of expression. These developments in the English political and rhetorical context, along with Hobbes' alarmed response to them, help to account for both his Scriptural and his Hebraic turns.

Yet, while attention to Hobbes' Hebraic context helps to solve one puzzle, it presents us with another. In section III, I argue that Hobbes' Mosaic turn is puzzling for both contextual and textual reasons. As a contextual matter, appeals to the Davidic kings had been used to ground arguments for absolute monarchical sovereignty 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' 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.

In section IV, I argue that Hobbes' Mosaic turn is best seen as a rhetorical and polemical move that appropriates the images and narratives of parliamentarians, republicans, and radicals and to subversively redirect 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' 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.

II. 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.⁵ The reformers' commitments led to two important changes in the way the Hebrew Bible was interpreted and approached. First, Martin Luther's defense of the principle of *sola scriptura*, which held that the Bible was the only infallible and therefore supreme authority on the requirements for salvation, contributed to a Protestant culture of Scriptural reading and translation. Individual believers had to confront the Bible for themselves as directly as possible, preferably in its original languages or at the very least through a reliable vernacular translation. 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.⁶ These developments led to an outpouring of scholarly works by Christian Hebraists and were essential to the creation of the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishops' Bible (1568), and the Authorized (King James) Version (1611).⁷ Biblical scholarship and theological investigation had been transformed.

Second, the Reformation also prompted a shift in the way in which the figures and narratives of the Hebrew Bible were read and interpreted. The Church fathers and medieval Catholic interpreters tended to read the figures and events of the Hebrew Bible typologically, as shadowy

⁵ This is not to suggest that there was no interest in the Hebrew Bible among Christian Europeans prior to the Reformation. For brief but helpful discussions of pre-Reformation engagement with the Hebrew Bible and other Hebraic sources by early Christians and the Church fathers, as well as medieval and Renaissance thinkers, see Prior (2013, 41), Nelson (2010, 8-9, 11), Guibbory (2010, 4-6), Sutcliffe (2003, 23-5).

⁶ In 1540, Henry VIII established professorships in Hebrew, among other things, at both institutions. On the creation and development of these positions and the study of Hebrew at English universities, see: Jones (1983, 180-220).

⁷ While it is clear that several prominent Christian Hebraists were involved in the translation of the Hebrew Bible for the Authorized Version, there is some debate about how familiar the translators of the Geneva and Bishops' Bible were with biblical Hebrew. In each of the two latter cases, at least some of the translators seem to have had a knowledge of Hebrew and those that did not nevertheless made use of work by prominent Hebraists. For discussion on this question, see: Jones (1983: 127-140).

prefigurations of the fuller reality of Christ.⁸ On this interpretive approach, the Hebrew Bible had been superseded and “hence made ‘old’ by the New Testament or Gospel” (Guibbory 2010, 9). While the Reformation did not do away with typological interpretations (cf. Nelson 2010), it did transform them. Suspicious of Catholic allegorizing, reformers read the narratives of the Hebrew Bible as an historical record of an actual people—a people uncorrupted by the ceremonies and doctrines of a fallen Church. Yet, eager to make sense of their own collective identity, reformers also read the Hebrew Bible not only as a prefiguration of Christ but also of the contemporary Protestant experience—the experience of a chosen people battling persistent challenges to their faith and their obedience to God (Lewalski 1979). In comparing the papacy to “the kingdom of Babylon” that had carried true Christians “away from our land, as in the Babylonian captivity,” Luther positioned the trials of reformers as a recapitulation of the experience of the biblical Israelites (Guibbory 2010, 25). In a similar vein, the sixteenth-century English martyrologist John Foxe read the Babylonian captivity as a prefiguration of the persecution and martyrdom of English and European Protestants (Foxe 1583). Less than a century later, the Puritans sailing to the New World drew upon the narratives and figures of the Hebrew Bible not merely because they were a handy repository of affecting slogans “but because their voyage was for them a seventeenth-century cyclical re-enactment of the Exodus from Egypt” (Roston 1968, 71; see also Walzer 1985). The turn to the Hebrew Bible was not only driven, then, by the theological and interpretive commitments of the Reformation, but also by the Protestant search for a source of collective identity.

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

⁸ For instance, in his epistle to the Romans, Paul draws an enduring typological connection between Adam and Christ. Adam was “a type of the one who was to come” (Romans 5:14). Similarly, 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). On its face, biblical typology creates a prophetic and historical connection between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. A darker interpretation, and one for which there is ample support in the Pauline Epistles, is that the aim of biblical typology is “to strip the Old Testament of its normative character and show that it is merely a shadow of things to come” (Auerbach 1984, 51).

became particularly pressing. Many of the efforts to answer them approached the Hebrew Bible 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 the doctrines of royal absolutism and supremacy, these answers were clear. In order to ground his case for absolutism, James I crafted a doctrine of the divine right of kings that drew extensively on the Hebrew Bible. He was particularly interested in the moment at which the Israelites ask Samuel to "appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations" (1 Samuel 8:5).⁹ God instructs Samuel to heed the request but also to issue a warning "about the practices of any king who will rule over them" (1 Samuel 8:9). The warning that Samuel conveys is harrowing and worth quoting at length:

This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as charioteers and horsemen...He will appoint them as chiefs of thousands of fifties; or he will have them to plow his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his courtiers. He will take a tenth part of your grain and vintage and give it to his eunuchs and courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, your choice young men, and your asses, and put them to work for him. He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves. The day will come when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and the LORD will not answer you on that day (1 Samuel 8:11-18).

Like other defenders of monarchical power before him, James interprets this warning as a list of royal permissions. That God consents to this arrangement is proof of his clear-eyed approval of monarchy. That the Israelites consent to it is evidence that they have forever renounced the right of

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all citations to the Hebrew Bible are from the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh translation.

collective self-rule.¹⁰ 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[?]” (James IV and I 1994 [1616], 70).¹¹

Similarly, in his defense 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 Chieftly 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, which the Sacred History speaketh of concerning the matter of mere religion, the affairs of the Temple and Service of God” (Hooker 1989 [1648], 128-9).¹² 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 (Hooker 1989 [1648], 153). 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 (Hooker 1989 [1648], 138; see also Nelson 2010 and Guibbory 2010).

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 associations. During a visit

¹⁰ Because he is primarily concerned with how interpreters squared this passage in 1 Samuel with the comparatively idealistic passage on kingship in Deuteronomy 17, Eric Nelson does not flag the importance of Israelite consent for monarchist readings of this passage (2010). As we shall see, Israelite consent also figures in Thomas Hobbes’ reading of the passage.

¹¹ Here, as elsewhere, I have modernized the early modern spelling but retained the original capitalization.

¹² While Book VIII of *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* was written in the 1590s, it was not published until 1648.

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)" (Nichols 1823, 140). 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 (Guibbory 2010; Parry 1981). Many others would affirm this association both during James' life and after his death. Bishop John Williams' sermon at the king's funeral, *Great Britains Salomon* [sic], imagined James interred in Solomon's "glorious tomb," along with the other great kings of Judah (1625, 7). 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 (1643, 1). As parliamentarians and radicals were fanning the flames of war and revolution, these devotions "represented Charles as David, who also had 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" (Guibbory 2010, 124). 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 Hebrew Bible 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, the prominent Scottish chaplain, writer, and controversialist George Gillespie, wrote a pamphlet that staged a dialogue between a "civilian" and a "divine" about the proper relationship between church and state. Here, Gillespie aims to counter an argument not only for

royal but for *civil* supremacy over the church more generally. An important thread of the discussion centers on the example of the biblical Israelites. 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 in the strongest terms. 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[?]” (Gillespie 1644, 18-9; see also Prior 2013). As the divine ultimately concludes, the association of political and ecclesiastical authority is historically contingent and variable, even in the case of God’s chosen people. An appeal to the example of the biblical Israelites cannot therefore ground an argument for civil supremacy.¹³ As the religious and ecclesiastical disputes of the English Civil War raged on, the example of biblical Israel would continue to serve as a polemical weapon for all sides.

In the midst of these debates about church and state, English Parliamentarians were turning to the Hebrew Bible 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 program of them in 1641 and printed those of which it particularly approved. These sermons are marked by their

¹³ Gillespie would go on to develop these arguments in much further detail in *Aarons rod blossoming* (1646), a work that emerged from an ongoing debate with the Erastian Thomas Coleman. In this work, the references to the Hebrew Bible are much more detailed and are supplemented with midrashic commentaries and the work of contemporary Hebraists and others (Prior 2013).

Hebraic preoccupations.¹⁴ 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" (Guiborrey 2010, 99). Salwey urged the Parliamentarians to play the zealous prophet Elijah to Charles' idolatrous Ahab—"down with Baal's altars, down with Baal's priests" (1643, 19). These Hebraic parallels would have been ominous ones for Charles' royalist supporters. Both Ahab and Jezebel met with the violent and gruesome ends foretold by Elijah (1 Kings 22: 29-40; 2 Kings 9:30-37). Ahab was hit by a stray arrow in battle and bled out 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" (Greenhill 1643, epistle, 50). 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" (Scudder 1644, epistle). 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

¹⁴ 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 ration 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" (Hill 1994, 83).

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 (Hammill 2012; Nelson 2010). 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" (Numbers 11:14). 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 favored by republicans. Moses stood "no more alone," but was now "prince of the senate, which God appointed to stand with him" (1977 [1657], 376). While God, Moses, or the senate might *propose* laws, the power of *resolution* or decision on these propositions rested with the people as the ultimate source of legal and political authority (1977 [1658], 421). 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' 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” (1977 [1657] 378). For Harrington and his fellow republicans, Samuel’s harrowing warning about kingly rule was not, as an earlier generation of monarchists had maintained, a list of royal permissions. It was 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 (Harrington 1977 [1659]; Beiner 2014). 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 (Milton 1966 [1651]; Sidney 1996 [1664]; Sidney 1996 [1698]; see also Nelson 2010). No longer safe in the hands of absolutists and defenders of royal supremacy, the Hebrew Bible proved as powerful and authoritative a tool for Parliamentarians and republicans as it had for monarchists.

III. 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. For Hobbes, nothing short of a unified, unconditional, and unlimited sovereign authority can provide a stable solution to the problems of the state of nature.¹⁵ In contrast, the forms of constitutional monarchy, other forms of limited government, or republican mixed constitution defended by

¹⁵ Hobbes’ political corpus can sustain several different accounts of these problems, all of which seek to explain why the state of nature is a state of war. Different lines of interpretation stress the role of competition for scarce goods and collective action problems (e.g. Gauthier 1969); insatiable passions and particularly pride, glory, and honor (e.g. Strauss 1963); transcendent interests and religious commitments (e.g. Lloyd 1992); moral and semantic anarchy (e.g. Tuck 1989, Wolin 2006, Pettit 2008); or some combination of two or more of these factors (e.g. Abizadeh 2011). The questions of whether and how a unified, unconditional, and unlimited sovereign provides a stable solution to the problems of the state of nature obviously depend on one’s view about what those problems are.

Parliamentarians and others all require some form of divided government.¹⁶ On Hobbes' view, divided government fails to provide a secure remedy to anarchy. There are at least two reasons for this. First, while a unified sovereign authority offers a single focus of loyalty and attachment for subjects, divided government leads to factionalization and the division of allegiances. In the case of a conflict between different political authorities, subjects will tend to ally with one branch or another, making civil war more likely (L 29.16; see also Cohen 2013). Second, divided government is ineffective. As a practical matter, the rights of sovereignty must be exercised together if they are to ensure a stable peaceful order. As Hobbes argues,

The power to coin money, to dispose of the estate and persons of infant heirs, to have preemption in markets, and all other statue prerogatives may be transferred by the sovereign, and yet the power to protect his subjects be retained. But if he transfer the *militia*, he retains the judicature in vain, for want of execution of the laws; or if he grant away the power of raising money, the *militia* is in vain; or if he give away the government of doctrines, men will be frightened into rebellion with the fear of spirits. And so if we consider any one of these said rights, we shall presently see, that the holding of all the rest will produce no effect, in the conservation of peace and justice, the end for which all commonwealths are instituted (L 28.16, 115).

This, suggests Hobbes, is precisely what happened in the English Civil War. If political and religious dissenters had not convinced “the greatest part of *England*” that the powers of sovereignty “were divided between the King, and the Lords, and the House of Commons, the people [would] never [have] been divided and fallen into this civil war” (L 28.26, 115-16).¹⁷ Taken together, the two

¹⁶ That is, they require “an organization of authority—a set of institutions—that is not unified around a single agent” (Cohen 2013, 7).

¹⁷ Two further points follow from this argument about the ineffectiveness of divided government. First, insofar as ineffectiveness results in the diminishment or limitation of sovereign power, a divided government will fail to reliably solve two of the problems for which the state was created in the first place—the assurance problem (in the state of nature, no individual can be assured that others will abide by the laws of nature, which creates a situation of “diffidence,” or distrust, and makes “anticipation,” or preemption, the rational strategy) and the temptation problem (in the state of nature, our natural passions divert us from our rational obedience to the laws of nature). As Cohen (2013) puts it, “by limiting power and thus reducing the capacity to overawe subjects into obedience, [divided government increases] the chances that some—perhaps united by one of the recognized authorities—will be tempted to act against the others. Recognizing the increased likelihood of temptations, others lack assurance. Recognizing this lack, other must prepare themselves for conflict” (10). Second, as a result of its ineffectiveness, divided government easily degenerates into a system of multiple overlapping authorities. As Lloyd (1992) puts it, “an ability to achieve one’s end in exercising any of these essential rights will be dependent on the cooperative activity of those in possession of other rights. Because this is so, any body which intends effectively to exercise its right in the face of noncooperation from other rights possessors,

arguments suggest that divided government, while possible for a time, is ultimately unstable because it is not possible to establish “a single sovereign will in conditions of institutional plurality” (Collins 2009, 335).

For Hobbes, the separation of political and ecclesiastical power is a species of divided government and is therefore subject to the same objections. Those, like George Gillespie, who advocated for a separation of these powers, effectively wanted to “grant sovereign power to the civil authority on issues affecting peace and the good things to this life; and to concede issues involving salvation of souls to others” (DCv 12.5, 135). However, because just behavior is, on many accounts, essential to salvation, this division of civil and spiritual power would lead to a problem of divided allegiance. Subjects loyal to spiritual authorities would “measure justice not, as they should, by the civil laws, but by the commands and teaching of people who are, in relation to the commonwealth, either private persons or foreigners” (DCv 12.5, 135). This is disastrous enough. However, spiritual authorities possess an advantage over their civil counterparts. The former wield the threat of eternal damnation, while the latter can only punish disobedience with mortal death. When the dictates of those threatening eternal damnation conflict with those of the sovereign, who can only threaten death, it is far from clear who will triumph. For, as Hobbes puts it, “no one can serve two masters, and the one to whom we believe that obedience is due, under fear of damnation, is no less a Master than the one to whom obedience is due through fear of temporal death, but rather more” (DCv 6.11, 80; see also L 29.15, 215-6). Even if most subjects are willing to obey their civil sovereign for fear of violent mortal death, there will still be some—“a party sufficient to trouble”—who will resist (L 29.15, 216). In such circumstances, the civil sovereign will be ineffective and the commonwealth will be thrown back into civil war.

will be compelled to claim for itself other (and perhaps all) of the essential rights of sovereignty. This is why unregulated, or unenforceably regulated, division of authority may, when conflicts arise, lead to the formation of multiple overlapping authorities...(which either undermine one another’s authority until none has effective authority, or proceed to fight it out for supremacy)” (86-7).

This brief reconstruction of Hobbes' case against divided sovereignty goes some way to explaining why he would have thought it necessary to respond to the *content* of Scripturally-based challenges to absolute sovereign authority. However, it does not explain why he chose to match these challengers' *modes* of argument—why he responded not only with philosophical arguments, but also with Scriptural claims of his own. Nor does it account for why these modes of argument become progressively more prominent across his three major political works. One explanation that has been advanced to account the increased use of Scriptural argument in *Leviathan*, compared to *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*, relies on a change in Hobbes' intended audience.¹⁸ On this view, his intended audience for *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* was very select. There is something to this. Indeed, Hobbes did not have *Elements of Law* printed, but rather circulated among his friends. The purpose of the work is not to transform mass opinion, but rather as Hobbes suggests in his epistle dedicatory, “to insinuate itself with those whom that matter it containeth most nearly concerneth” (EL, 20). Similarly, Hobbes did not initially have *De Cive* published, but circulated it among a small group of scholars and friends. The work was written in Latin—a decision that opened Hobbes' work to international scrutiny, but that limited the size of his audience substantially.¹⁹ The audience thesis accounts for the more limited use of Scriptural argument in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* by hypothesizing that the works were written for a small and philosophically sophisticated audience whose members would have had less need of biblical corroboration of the works' conclusions.

¹⁸ Audience explanations have also been used to account for a purported increase in Hobbes' use of rhetoric in *Leviathan*, compared to *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* (Johnston 1986). Whether there is, in fact, a “rhetorical turn” in Hobbes' later work and whether it can be explained by Hobbes' increased pessimism about the inherent human capacity for reason, as Johnston (1986) and Skinner (1996) argue, is itself a matter of some debate. See: Vaughan (2001), Garsten (2006), and Nauta (2010).

¹⁹ As Hobbes acknowledges in *Leviathan*, Latin “is not commonly used by any nation now in the world” (L 47.22, 483). While *De Cive* was translated into English in 1651, Hobbes did not authorize this translation.

In contrast, while there are some indications that he intended that *Leviathan* be read by a select few²⁰, the bulk of the evidence suggests that Hobbes was aiming at a much broader audience—the English reading public. The book was written in English, published, and widely circulated. The Scriptural arguments in *Leviathan* were perhaps included to persuade a broader audience whose philosophical sophistication could not be relied upon. The reasoned geometrical argument of the first half of the work therefore needed to be supplemented by the Scriptural argument of the second half. Hobbes also suggests that while the audience of the *text* of *Leviathan* may be limited to the reading public, the intended audience for the book’s *philosophy* is even larger. Because they are either too busy or too lazy to engage in “deep meditation...in the matter of natural justice,” most men “receive the notions of their duty chiefly from divines in the pulpit, and partly from such of their neighbours or familiar acquaintance as having the faculty of discoursing readily and plausibly seem wiser and better learned in such cases of law and conscience than themselves” (L 30.14, 225). One plausible account of the goal of *Leviathan* is to provide preachers and the gentry with the tools with which to acquaint others with their duties. At the end of *Leviathan*, Hobbes reflects that his doctrine might profitably be “taught in the Universities,” which “are the fountains of civil and moral doctrine, from whence the preachers and the gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same (from both the pulpit and in their conversation) upon the people” (L RC.16, 496). If this was his aim for the work, it seems plausible that he saw *Leviathan* not only as a source of arguments that might be deployed but also a source of possible modes for deploying them. We might then see his extensive use of Scriptural argument as a resource for preachers and the

²⁰ Hobbes sometimes suggests that his audience is restricted to sovereigns (L 31.41, 243-4) and university men (L RC.16, 496). For developed arguments for seeing each of these audiences as Hobbes’ primary one, see Shapiro (1980) and Strong (1993), respectively. For an assessment of these arguments, among others, see Vaughan (2001).

gentry to draw upon as they “sprinkle” the work’s civil and moral doctrine upon the philosophically unsophisticated.²¹

However, while this audience-based explanation may account for the comparatively extensive use of Scriptural arguments in *Leviathan*, it has difficulty explaining the increased incidence of such arguments in *De Cive* relative to *Elements of Law*. If, according to the audience explanation, both of these earlier works were intended for a select audience, it is not clear why *De Cive* would rely so much more heavily on Scriptural argument than *Elements of Law*.²² An alternative explanation that has the advantage of being both more complete and simpler is that Hobbes, despite having fled to Paris in November or December of 1640, monitored events in England quite closely. Both *De Cive* and *Leviathan* seem to have been written, at least in part, in response to the political and religious upheavals in England. In the preface to the revised (1647) edition of *De Cive*, Hobbes notes that he completed and printed the work out of sequence. He had originally planned to write a first work on “body and its general properties” and a second on “Man and his particular faculties and passions.” What became *De Cive*, Hobbes’ treatment of “the Commonwealth and the duties of citizens,” was to have been the third and final work in this statement of his system of philosophy. However, he hurried the completion of *De Cive* because “it happened that my country, some years before the civil war broke out, was already seething with questions of the right of Government and of the due

²¹ Hobbes seems to have thought that the challenging part of this task would be to get powerful and educated men to accept his doctrines. For, as he argues, “potent men digest hardly anything that setteth up a power to bridle their affections; and learned men, anything that discovereth their errors, and thereby lesseneth their authority.” However, once the difficult task of persuading the powerful and the learned had been accomplished, Hobbes seems to have thought that shifting mass public opinion would not be difficult. The “common people’s minds,” he suggests, “unless they be tainted with dependence on the potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by public authority shall be imprinted in them” (L 30.6, 221).

²² In his assessment of whether an audience-based explanation accounts for Hobbes’ purported increased use in rhetorical techniques in *Leviathan*, as compared to both *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*, Quentin Skinner suggests that such explanations have trouble accounting for the even more extensive use of these techniques in the Latin *Leviathan* (1668). This work was “obviously a further treatise intended for the learned” (Skinner 1996, 427). One might be inclined to reject an audience-based explanation of the increased use of Scriptural argument in *Leviathan* on similar grounds. The Latin *Leviathan* includes more Scriptural discussions and biblical citations than its English counterpart. However, I tend to think that the most plausible explanation for these additions is that Hobbes thought it necessary to respond to angry critiques of his earlier theological arguments and to protect himself against charges of heresy.

obedience of citizens, forerunners to the approaching war” (1998 [1647], 13). Hobbes was acutely concerned that arguments against monarchical power and absolute sovereignty were being made in Scriptural terms—that preachers, confessors, and casuists were attempting to show that their revolutionary doctrines were “consistent with the Word of God” (1998 [1647], 14). This concern can account for Hobbes’ increased attention to Scriptural argument in *De Cive*, and particularly his need to “show that the right of Sovereigns over citizens...is not in conflict with the holy Scriptures” (1998 [1647], 12).

Hobbes’ concern with both the content of these rebellious doctrines and the modes in which they were expressed had become even more acute by the time he began work on *Leviathan*. It was the spring of 1646. Once again, 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 Parliamentary 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* (as quoted in Skinner 1996, 330-1).²³ Hobbes’ alarmed response not only to the rebellious doctrines circulating in England but also to their Scriptural modes of expression, then, seem to account for his increasing reliance on biblical argument in *De Cive* and *Leviathan*—his Scriptural turn. 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 also made a Hebraic turn, drawing heavily from the Hebrew Bible in both *De Cive* and *Leviathan*.

What is more puzzling, however, is the period of Israelite history on which Hobbes comes to focus much of his analytical attention. As we saw at the outset, his patterns of Scriptural citation

²³ These are Skinner’s own translations of Hobbes’ Latin verse autobiography.

suggest that he devotes a substantial amount of this attention to the Mosaic period, especially compared to that which he gives to the era of the Davidic kings. This Mosaic turn is most pronounced from *De Cive* to *Leviathan* and it is accompanied by the elevation of Moses to the position of paradigmatic Leviathan sovereign. Indeed, by the time he wrote *Leviathan*, Hobbes had decided to center much of his Scriptural argument on a particular understanding of the Mosaic polity. 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 the authority of Scripture, as I shall make it appear when I shall come to speak of the kingdom of God (administered by *Moses*) over the Jews, his peculiar [=special] people by covenant" (L 30.5, 221).²⁴ 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 (L 41.5, 330; L 40.7, 321). 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 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' 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 (e.g. Exodus 4:10,

²⁴ The word "appear" might suggest to contemporary readers that Hobbes has in mind an act of conjuring. If true, this would be a boon for interpretations that hold that much of Hobbes' Scriptural argument is meant to cover up his own atheism or disguise his heretical views (e.g. Strauss 1963; Curley 1992). Seventeenth-century usage suggests, however, that he merely means that his analysis of the kingdom of God will make evident that his principles can be supported "from the authority of Scripture."

Exodus 6:12, Exodus 6:30). While these worries turn out to have been ill founded, what does seem clear is that Moses lacks some of the most basic qualifications to serve as an exemplar of Hobbes' Leviathan sovereign. To see why, we need to consider Hobbes' account of the history of biblical Israel. For Hobbes, the kingdom of God over the Israelites "is a real, not a metaphorical kingdom" (L 35.11, 276). 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" (L 35.3, 272). As their king and civil sovereign, God governed the Israelites "and none but them, not only by natural reason, but by positive laws, which he gave them by the mouths of his holy prophets" (L 31.4, 235). Moses and his successors served as God's "lieutenants or vicars," conveying His commands to the Israelites (L35.13, 277). In this important sense, their authority was the product of "divine right," which Hobbes thought was a profoundly unstable basis for political obligation.²⁵ To the extent that they ruled, they did so as God's instruments, "by authority immediate from God" (L 40.9, 322). 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 was not "subject to any human power" (DC 17.7, 210).²⁶ When questions arose about who had the authority to serve as a divine intermediary and instrument, God would occasionally intervene directly. When Korah, 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" (L 40.7, 320; see also Numbers 16:1-35).

This system of divine sovereignty came to an end when the Israelites, frustrated by the anarchy of private judgment and corruption during the period of the Judges, asked Samuel for a king "to govern us like all other nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). For Hobbes, much hinges on the fact that

²⁵ I discuss the reasons for this in the following section of the paper.

²⁶ Hobbes removes this language about the freedom of the polity of the Israelites in *Leviathan*.

Davidic kingship is the product of a popular request to be ruled “like all other 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 neighbors 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” (Walzer 2012, 54). Yet, the very thing that makes the request impossible makes it a boon for Hobbes’ purposes. Like 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 (L 20.16; DCv 11.6).²⁷ 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.²⁸

Somewhat radically for his time, Hobbes argues that the Israelites’ request for a king amounted to a rejection of “that peculiar government of God” (L 40.11, 323; see also Nelson 2010). 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 civil law” (L 40.11, 323). These kings were thus in a situation tightly analogous to contemporary civil sovereigns, whose

²⁷ Hobbes’ reasoning here echoes an argument more fully laid out in James I’s *True Law of Monarchies*, which takes the Israelites’ repetition of their original demand after Samuel’s warning to mean: “All your speeches and hard conditions shall not scare us, but we will take the good and evil of it upon us, and we will be content to bear whatsoever burden it shall please our King to lay upon us, as well as other nations do. For the good we will get of him in fighting our battles, we will more patiently bear any burden that shall please him to lay on us” (James VI/I 1994, 70).

²⁸ The possibility of such a reading had not been lost on parliamentarians, perhaps because divine right theorists like James I had already gestured it at. In his *Treatise on Monarchy* (1643), Philip Hunton acknowledges that the Davidic kings were not properly kings until the Israelites consented to their rule. However, he argues that the ritual of signaling God’s favor by anointing these rulers with oil made popular consent difficult to withhold. Anointing “had the power of Precept, to restrain the people’s choice to that person; which if they had not done, they had resisted God’s ordinance” (20).

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 (L 32.9, 42.7). Thus, in contrast to Moses, who occupies a different stage of sacred history and stands in a markedly different relationship to divine authority, Hobbes' 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' 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 biographical and contextual reasons for the decision. Two strike me as at least potentially plausible. First, as we have seen, appeals to the examples and iconography of Davidic kingship had been crucial to defenses of monarchical power and royal supremacy over the Church. By the time he published *Leviathan* in 1651, Hobbes may not have been especially eager to associate himself with arguments and imagery of such an unambiguously royalist flavor. When his associate Edward Hyde, the future Earl of Clarendon, reacted with horror to the page-proofs of *Leviathan* and asked him "why he would publish such doctrine," Hobbes is said to have replied: "The truth is, I have a mind to go home" (Hyde 1676, 8). Eager to leave Paris for Cromwell's England, Hobbes may well have feared that a work upholding the Davidic Kings as model sovereigns would hardly have eased his path homeward. There is a superficial plausibility about this line of argument. However, it does not explain why the Davidic

kings did not assume a larger role in *De Cive*, which was written when Hobbes was newly arrived in Paris, surrounded by staunch royalists, and without any immediate plans to return to England.²⁹ While Hobbes may well have had pragmatic concerns of this kind (Collins 2005), they do not explain his decision to avoid casting one or more of the Davidic Kings as the paradigmatic Leviathan sovereign.

Second, 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 behavior of several of the Davidic kings was a positive asset for Hobbes' line of argument. 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" (DCv 11.3, 138). That Saul was every bit as tyrannical as Parliamentarians and republicans alleged is essential for Hobbes' argument. No matter how terrible their kings, the Israelites had no legitimate right to revolution and regicide.³⁰ 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' Mosaic turn.

²⁹ As Nelson (2010) rightly points out, the pragmatic answer does an equally poor job accounting for why Hobbes does not adopt a position of monarchist exclusivism, choosing to remain instead a constitutional pluralist, in *Leviathan*. If the pragmatic explanation were correct, we would expect a more strongly monarchist line in *De Cive*. We do not find one.

³⁰ Once again, Hobbes' reasoning here closely tracks an argument in *True of Law of Monarchies* (James VI/I 1994, 70).

IV. Subversive Integration: Mosaic Leviathan

I suggest that the best way to make sense of Hobbes' Mosaic turn is to see it as an instance of a broader strategy of "subversive integration."³¹ This strategy begins by accepting the basic premises of parliamentarians, republicans, and radicals, but ends by showing how these premises can support substantially less radical conclusions. In order to understand how such a strategy might have been at work in Hobbes' Scriptural arguments, let us briefly consider the role it plays in his philosophical account. While there are hints of such a strategy in Hobbes' earlier political writings, it is employed most fully in *Leviathan*. He writes that his goal in *Leviathan* is to offer a doctrine that could pass "unwounded" between the contending swords of those who allow for "too great liberty" and those who permit "too much authority" (1994, 1). The most contextually plausible interpretation of this statement is that the unwounded course that Hobbes wants to steer is between parliamentary arguments that ground political authority in the consent of free and equal individuals, on the hand, and absolutist arguments that ground it in the divine right of kings, on the other (Skinner 1999, cf. Springborg 1996). Of course, it quickly becomes clear that Hobbes is not making a reassuring gesture of moderation here. He is not going to identify and defend a *political* middle ground that reasonable parties on either side might be inclined to accept. Rather, his argument will pass between these contending swords by using the premises and rhetorical resources of the defenders of liberty to ground absolutist conclusions. The argument will remain unwounded to the extent that it avoids grounding political authority on the unstable foundations of divine right, on the one hand, and allowing the contractual origins of this authority to limit its scope, on the other.

³¹ I borrow this term from Franck Lessay, who uses it to characterize Hobbes' approach to covenant theology (2007, 258). Lessay contrasts this strategy to those of criticism and rejection, but does not conceptualize it any further or offer other examples of Hobbes' recourse to it. This portion of the paper aims to develop and defend subversive integration as an accurate characterization of at least part of Hobbes' rhetorical strategy in *Leviathan*.

Within Hobbes' core philosophical argument, his account of the social contract seems aimed at steering precisely such an unwounded course. Parliamentarian propagandists like Henry Parker had sought to resist divine right arguments for absolutism 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" (1642, 1). Anticipating John Locke, Parker argues that naturally free and equal people would hardly yield all of their natural liberty to a king. They would instead institute a form of limited government in which the king stood in a "conditionate and fiduciary" relationship to the people (1642, 4). Rather than attempting a point-by-point criticism and rejection of this account, Hobbes seeks to discredit this parliamentary 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" (Skinner 2005, 169). He affirms the foundational premises of the parliamentary 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' innovation is to show that with an appropriately frightening account of man's natural state and a proper appreciation for the instability of limited government, these parliamentary premises can easily ground absolutist conclusions. There is a good case to be made that this strategy of subversive integration is similarly at work in the accounts of representation and liberty in *Leviathan* (Skinner 2005, Skinner 2008).³² But Hobbes' use of the strategy came at a high cost. Those who would otherwise have been friendly to the work's political

³² Skinner is, as the examples and citations in this paragraph suggest, deeply attuned to this dimension of Hobbes' rhetorical strategy, though he neither characterizes the strategy as one of subversive integration nor seeks to consider Hobbes' various uses of the strategy together as a whole. This section of the article tries to make some headway in that direction.

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* (1657, 515).³³

The strategy of subversive integration extends beyond the realm of philosophical argument. *Leviathan*, the work's subtitle informs us, is concerned with the "matter, form, and power of a *commonwealth*." In Hobbes' time, the term "commonwealth" was a deeply contested one. Among republicans, however, it referred exclusively to popular forms of government. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes subversively reappropriates this usage for absolutist ends—a decision that, once again, rested uneasily with those who might otherwise have been friendly toward the work's ultimate conclusions. Robert Filmer, for instance, worried that the term would confuse the ignorant, who "are apt by the name commonwealth to understand a popular government" (1991 [1652], 182). As Quentin Skinner notes, "Filmer may well have been right, but this objection misses the irony that pervades the whole of Hobbes's ensuing argument. What Hobbes aims to persuade us is that absolute monarchies may

³³ At this point, the reader may well be worried that I am giving up on Hobbes as a *philosopher* (or at least a philosopher of a certain kind)—as a thinker sincerely trying to arrive at the truth about important political and moral questions via rational deduction. Have I not offered a portrait of Hobbes as too deeply polemical and rhetorical? I take this to be part of Bryan Garsten's objection to Quentin Skinner's characterization of Hobbes' use of parliamentary premises as a primarily *rhetorical* move. Garsten argues that Hobbes' reasoned argument against divine right "and not a mere 'rhetorical strategy,' explains why Hobbes accepted so many of the parliamentarians' other premises" (2010, 543 n. 36). In short, it is Hobbes' sincere principles, rather than any polemical ends and rhetorical means that explain his use of parliamentary premises. The objection raises deep methodological questions that I cannot address thoroughly here. However, I have three things to say about this bundle of concerns. First, I am not convinced that we necessarily face a stark choice between "reasoned argument" and "rhetorical strategy" as characterizations of Hobbes' approach. It seems plausible that he could have begun his argument with parliamentary premises both because he had well-reasoned objections to divine right arguments and because doing so (and doing so in the way that he did) allowed him to make a powerful and polemical point. Trying to determine whether one set of motivations weighed more strongly than another strikes me as a losing battle, in large part because it is not clear what might count as conclusive evidence on either side. Second, there are at least two ways of interpreting the strategy of subversive integration. The first would see it as purely instrumental and strategic—Hobbes is not convinced that parliamentary premises are true, but employs them for polemical ends. The second would see it as a more sincere attempt to persuade and convince parliamentarians—Hobbes does not share the premises of his parliamentary opponents, but wants to show them that these premises have different implications than his opponents think they do. The latter is more consistent with an understanding of Hobbes as a philosopher (at least on a particular understanding of what it means to be a philosopher). I admit that I am undecided between these two possibilities and am unsure what might count as the observable implications that should prompt us to favor one interpretation over the other. Third, it is worth recognizing that, at least where Hobbes interpretation is concerned, we err in seeing the end of philosophy as truth. As Kinch Hoekstra (2006) has forcefully argued, Hobbes himself saw the end of philosophy as human benefit (and particularly peace) and we do well to approach his work with that in mind. If we accept this reading of Hobbes' own conception of his endeavor, the distinction between rhetorical polemicist and philosopher seems much less stark. I am grateful to Anna Stilz, David Estlund, and Melissa Lane for conversations on these issues.

be no less deserving of the name commonwealths than the freest and most democratic states” (2008, 210). Perhaps the most audacious instance of subversive integration is the title and central image of *Leviathan*. It strains belief that Hobbes was unaware of the biblical and mythical connotations of “leviathan” when he chose to name his most ambitious work of political philosophy after a monstrous sea beast (Malcolm 2007, cf. Farneti 2001). What seems more plausible is that he openly sought to embrace these monstrous connotations. When England’s Parliament issued a defense of the execution of Charles I in 1649, it argued that monarchy was not, as the king and his supporters had alleged, the product of nature and divine will. Rather, a king is “an unaccountable officer” and “a *strange monster* to be permitted *by mankind*” (1649, 14, emphasis mine). Hobbes accepts this characterization in its entirety. The Leviathan state is unaccountable, the product of human will, and every bit as monstrous as parliamentarians allege. What they fail to see and what Hobbes seeks to demonstrate is that if one wants a stable solution to the problems of anarchy, the state cannot be anything but monstrous.³⁴

Given that Hobbes uses a strategy of subversive integration in the philosophical arguments, terminological choices, and imagery of *Leviathan*, 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, republican, and radical 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

³⁴ Skinner (2005) gestures at this connection, focusing on Hobbes’ embrace of monstrosity. It strikes me as important to stress his embrace of all three dimensions of this parliamentarian characterization.

“viceroys” (e.g. L 40.5-6, 318; L 41.7, 331).³⁵ 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.³⁶

Hobbes’ 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: “All the people witnessed the thunder and lightening, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. ‘You speak to us,’ they said to Moses, ‘and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die’” (Exodus 20:15-16). At their own behest, God did not speak to the Israelites directly, but rather “by the mediation of Moses” (L 40.6, 319). As Bryan Garsten puts it, “God was effectively silent from the perspective of the people” (2010, 536). 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’ authority. If God did not speak to the Israelites directly and if Moses’ 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 believed that God spake unto him” (L 40.6, 318). This, for Hobbes, is one problem with any form of political authority 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

³⁵ Hobbes’ primary evidence for God’s status as a civil sovereign is God’s response to Samuel upon hearing that the Israelites want a human king: “it is not you [Samuel] that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king” (1 Samuel 8:7; L 40.11, 323).

³⁶ Edwin Curley notes this problem (L 40.7, 320, n. 3) and suggests that it might explain why, in the Latin *Leviathan*, Hobbes changes at least some of his wording to clarify that, as a practical matter, Moses alone was sovereign over the Israelites.

subjects are no longer “obliged to take anything for the law of God which [their sovereign] propounded to them in God’s name” (L 40.6, 318). In order for this belief to remain stable in perpetuity, subjects will require repeated supernatural signs of the divine favor of their sovereign. It is for this reason that the subjects of sovereigns who rule by divine right are, on Hobbes’ 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” (L 12.29, 72). 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.” Here again, the Israelites’ terrified request that Moses speak to God on their behalf is crucial to Hobbes’ account. Hobbes finds in this request their moment of consent and their promise of “absolute obedience to Moses” (L 20.16, 132). It was by this request that “they obliged themselves to obey whatsoever [Moses] should deliver unto them for the commandment of God” (L 40.6, 319). 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” (DCv 16.8, 191). 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” (2004, 128). Without God’s public affirmation of his own will, this proliferation of claims to divine authority could continue almost indefinitely. This, on Hobbes’ 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 (B I, 25). Hobbes’ 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 (L 32.9, 249-50; L 40.7, 320-1).

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 prophesy, that is to say, speak to the people in God’s 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” (L 40.8, 321). 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 for the people” around the mountain and to tell them: “Beware of going up the mountain or touching the border of it. Whosoever touches the mountain shall be put to death” (Exodus 19: 12; L 40.7, 320). In one of the greatest Hebraic analogies of *Leviathan*, Hobbes then continues:

Out of which we may conclude that whosoever in a Christian commonwealth 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 Scripture to proceed further than the bounds which are set by their several sovereigns. For the Scriptures, since God now speaketh in them, are the Mount Sinai, the bounds whereof are the laws of them that represent God’s 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 transgress the bounds God hath set us, and to gaze upon God irreverently (L 40.7, 321).

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 narratives of parliamentarians, republicans, and radicals and to subversively integrate it into a Scriptural justification of the Leviathan state. This strategy, I suggest, accounts for Hobbes’ Mosaic turn.

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*.³⁷ The Israelites, he repeatedly emphasizes, were God’s special people or “peculiar subjects” (L 35.3, 272 ff.). The particular experiences of the Israelites and their relationship to God must not, Hobbes suggests, shape the politics of the present too closely. He would have wanted, for instance, to resist in the strongest possible terms the suggestion made by

³⁷ David Nirenberg (2013) draws this tension out particularly usefully (312-7). See also: Pabel (1993, 342).

some of his more radical contemporaries that England should reinstate the entire legal code of the Mosaic polity (Nirenberg 2013; see also Guibbory 2010).³⁸ Another reason for his insistence on Israelite exceptionalism is that some political and religious radicals in Hobbes' 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 (L 44.4, 412-3).³⁹ 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 license for rebellion by stressing the exceptionalism of the polity of the Israelites and fixing it in a securely historical past (L 35.13, 276).⁴⁰

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' 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, republican, and radical contemporaries, he sought to subversively integrate it into a defense 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' hands, Moses becomes not only (or even primarily) a lieutenant of God who rules by divine right but a

³⁸ Hobbes is therefore often at pains to distinguish 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 (e.g. DCv 16.10, 192-193).

³⁹ Eric Nelson (2010) notes, quite rightly, that Hobbes was also concerned with the powerful hold that the notion of a spiritual or heavenly Kingdom of God held on his seventeenth-century contemporaries—the promise of punishments worse than death and rewards greater than life could prompt men to disobey their sovereigns (L 29.15, 215-6).

⁴⁰ 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." The chapter includes a brief etymological investigation of the word "peculiar" (L 35.5, 273-4).

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' philosophical arguments, these criticisms often came from those like Bishop Bramhall and Richard 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, parliamentary premises and language are so suggestive and fertile that they can easily be reappropriated for more radical ends. By giving such 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' part. Because the polity of the Israelites under Moses was seen by Hobbes' 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 parliamentary 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 (1 Samuel 8:7). For Hobbes, in making this request, the Israelites reject, refuse, and depose God as their king (L 12.30, 73; L 29.13, 214; L 35.8, 275; L40.11, 323). The radical possibilities of such an argument were not lost on Hobbes' 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 favor 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” (1991 [1652], 196). As it turns out, Filmer was right to have been worried. The republican theorist James Harrington, who had attended closely to Hobbes’ 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.⁴¹ 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” (1977 [1656], 175). 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’ account of the polity of the Israelites, it would seem, was itself subject to a strategy of subversive integration.⁴² A certain anxiety about this possibility may explain Hobbes’ decision in the Latin *Leviathan* to remove or soften the language of several passages dealing with the Israelites’ request for a king (Nelson 2010).⁴³ Once loosed, this politically explosive narrative of God’s chosen people had proven impossible to contain.

⁴¹ Harrington frequently cites Hobbes and aspects 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: Pocock (1977), Collins (2005), and Beiner (2014).

⁴² 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” (1977 [1658], 423). He does not, however, go so far as to deny that Hobbes was the proximate source of the interpretation.

⁴³ On Nelson’s account, the concern is not so much that, on the basis of Hobbes’ analysis, the Mosaic polity might be taken to be an exemplary instance of popular sovereignty. It is rather that the republican political theory of the 1650s had increasingly begun to interpret the Israelite demand for a human king as “inherently a usurpation of the kingdom of God” and proof that “monarchy is therefore an instance of idolatry” (2010, 25). However, among republicans like Milton and Harrington, such interpretations tended to assume that the Mosaic polity was a republic—a commonwealth with no earthly king.

V. Conclusion

I have argued that Hobbes' Hebraic turn 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 Hebrew Bible was particularly authoritative. It seems plausible that Hobbes realized this and, for this reason, sought to engage extensively with the Hebrew Bible in his later political works. His Mosaic turn is best explained, I have suggested, as 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" (Robin 2011).⁴⁴ More modestly, we might say that the account offered in this paper 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 fellow absolutists, in order to redeploy them.

⁴⁴ As Robin himself points out, the term "counter-revolutionary" does not "appear to have come into circulation until the French Revolution or later." Whether or not the English Civil War is best seen as a revolution is also a matter of substantial debate among historians (Robin 2011, 63).

Figures

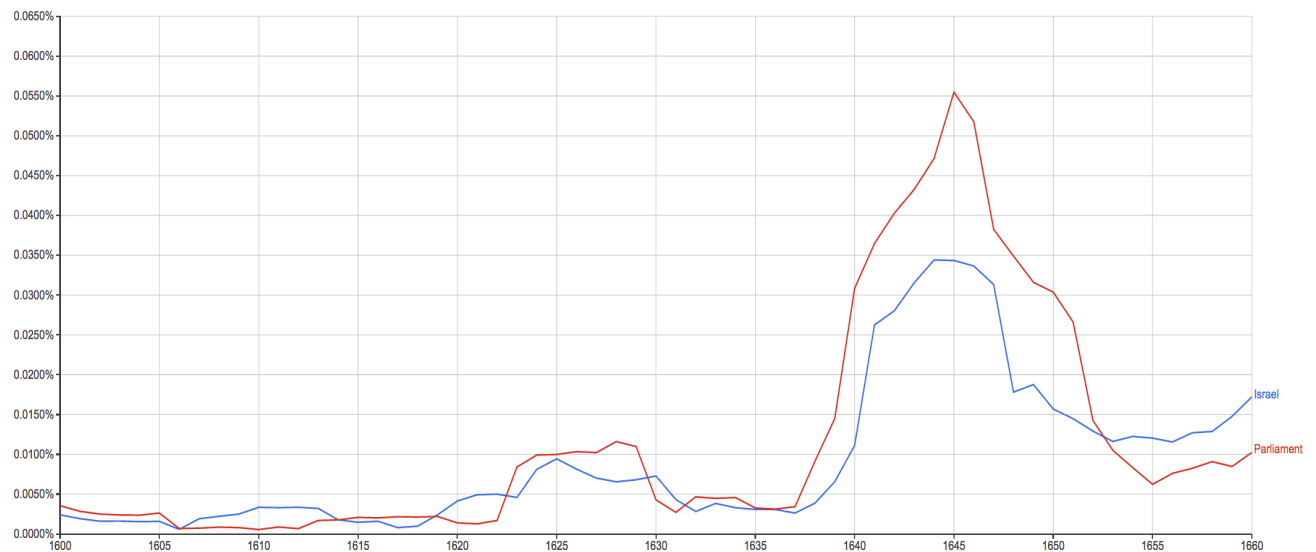


Figure 1: Frequency of “Israel” (blue line) in British English texts published between 1600 and 1660 (measured as a percentage of all unigrams, or single words, contained in Google’s sample of books from this period). Note the steep increase during the first half of the English Civil War. To put this information in context, I have also included the frequency of “Parliament” (red line) during the same period. Google Books Ngram Viewer.

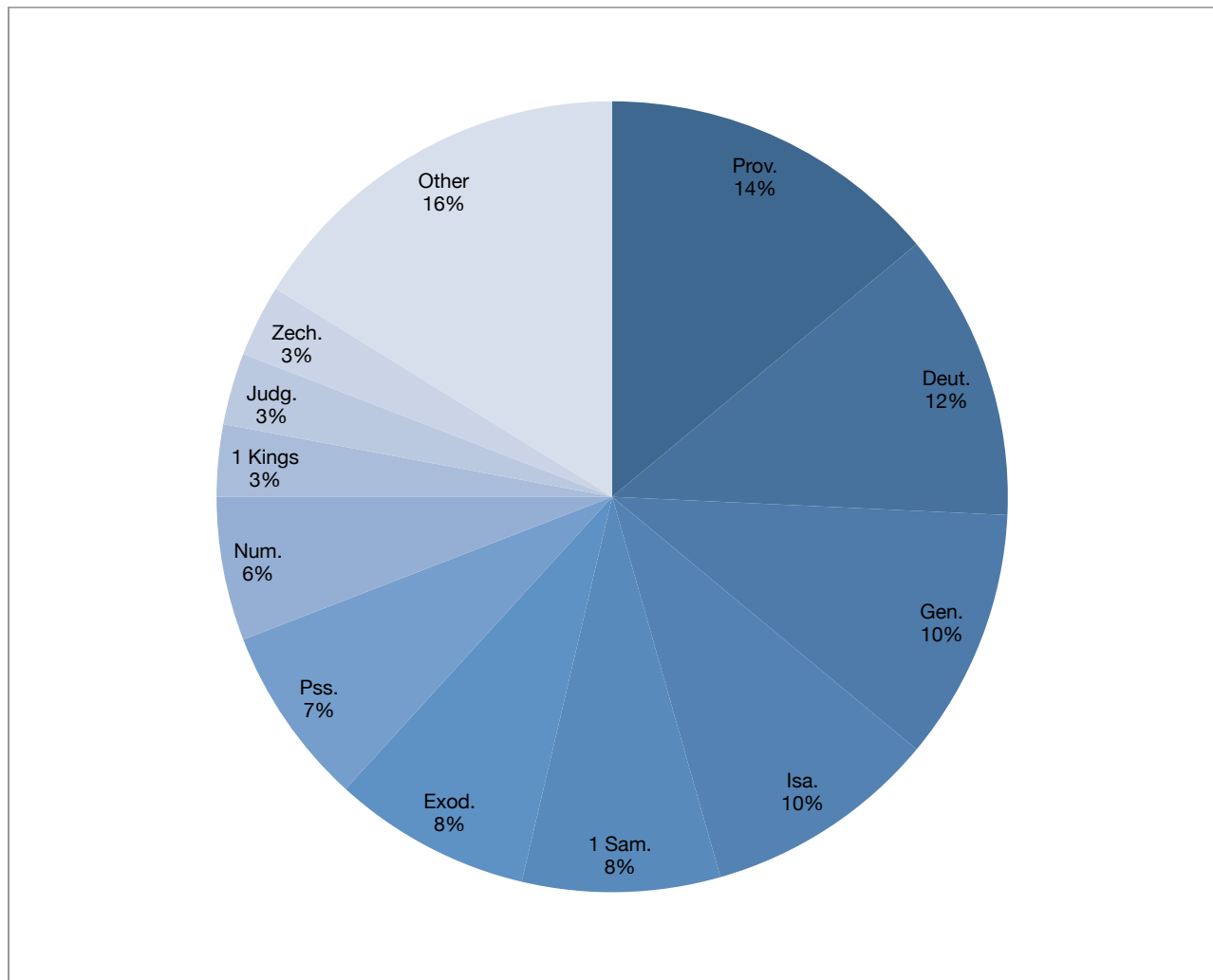


Figure 2: Citations to books in the Hebrew Bible as proportion of total citations to the Hebrew Bible in *De Cive*. The “other” category includes books whose proportion of citations is less than 3% (2 Kings, Jeremiah, Leviticus, 2 Samuel, Ecclesiastes, Ezekiel, Job, 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Haggai, Joshua, Micah). These figures are based on the author’s own count of biblical citations in Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne’s edition of *De Cive (On the Citizen)*. The count includes those citations included by Hobbes as well as editorial interpolations of biblical passages that Hobbes quotes directly. It excludes editorial interpolations of biblical narratives that are paraphrased (i.e. not quoted directly) by Hobbes. When Hobbes cites multiple verses of a biblical chapter within a single paragraph, I have counted the range of verses as a single citation.

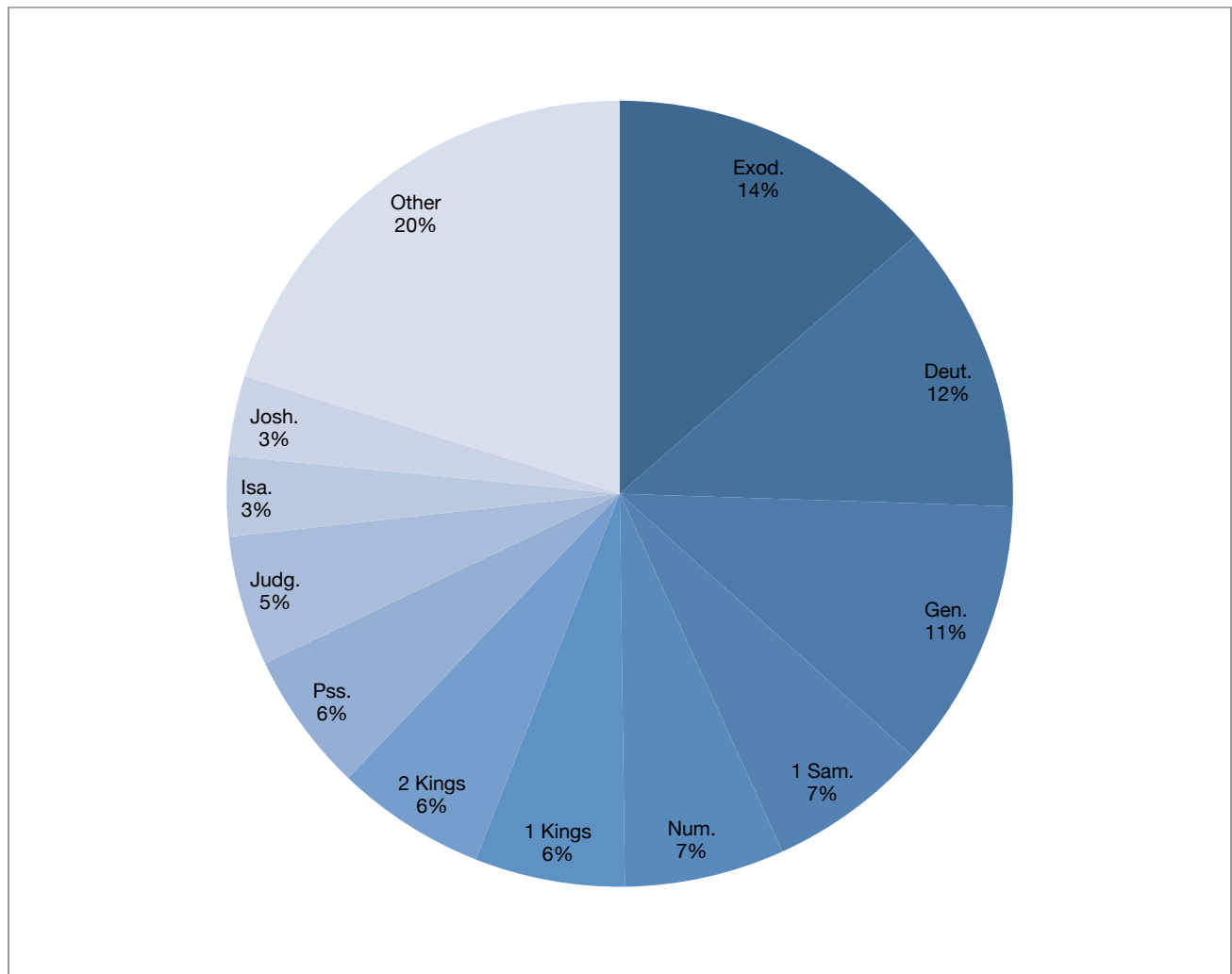


Figure 3: Citations to books in the Hebrew Bible as a proportion of total citations to the Hebrew Bible in *Leviathan*. The “other” category includes books whose proportion of citations is less than 3% (Leviticus, 2 Samuel, Ezekiel, Job, Daniel, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, 1 Chronicles, Joel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Zechariah, Esther, Micah, Obadiah, Ruth). These figures are based on the index of biblical citations in Edwin Curley’s edition of *Leviathan*. Where I have found errors in this index, I have corrected them. The count includes those citations included by Hobbes as well as editorial interpolations of biblical passages that Hobbes quotes directly. It excludes editorial interpolations of biblical narratives that are paraphrased (i.e. not quoted directly) by Hobbes. When Hobbes cites multiple verses of a biblical chapter within a single paragraph, I have counted the range of verses as a single citation.

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