

**OAKESHOTT'S HOBBS AND THE
FEAR OF POLITICAL RATIONALISM**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Michael Oakeshott was both an admirer of Thomas Hobbes and a critic of political rationalism. Insofar as Hobbes himself is synonymous with political rationalism, the combination should strike us as paradoxical. My approach will pursue two issues: I will consider elements of Hobbes's political philosophy omitted in Oakeshott's interpretation, and I will argue the relevance of these omissions for critiques of political rationalism that remain influential among political theorists today. This criticism is part of a larger project, a critique of critiques of political rationalism, that begins with some of the conservative sources of postmodernism. Oakeshott is recognized as one such source; Hans-Georg Gadamer is another.

The purpose of this project is not to reaffirm, recuperate, or redeem political rationalism on its own terms. I will not be siding with Heinz Eulau against Bernard Crick,¹ with Bentham against Oakeshott,² with old Rawls against new Rawls, with Brian Barry³ against his various opponents, and so on. Rather, this critique of critiques of political rationalism will make the case that our criticisms have often rested in an underestimation of the problems we face.

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What kind of underestimation? We have underestimated the *political* character of political rationalism. Scholars today tend to associate an appreciation of “the political” with precisely those thinkers who have offered the most vigorous attacks on political rationalism. Of course, not all critiques of political rationalism are identical, and they certainly do not drive identical conclusions or political programs. Nevertheless, it is fair to conclude that some themes strike a cord that resonates with multiple antipolitical rationalist arguments: one such theme is a claim asserting the inadequacies of the rationalist understanding of the political. Following Oakeshott, Arendt—and through less dignified sources such as Carl Schmitt—the critics of political rationalism have concluded that the modern world has given birth to a species of thinkers with political tin ears. They lack the political practitioner’s sensibility. They fail to understand the contingency of that which is political.⁴ They fail to follow Aristotle’s caution against applying reasoning appropriate to a domain where certainty is possible to another domain (politics) where all matters must remain inherently uncertain and ambiguous. They abandon *praxis* and its accompanying virtue, *sophrosene*, for *techne*.⁵ Political decision making is made subordinate to the overconfident calculations of persons Sheldon Wolin once called “methodists.”⁶

Today the contest between methodists and political theorists is largely over. Methodism has won. It is triumphant in some quarters, but in others it remains a resident faith subject to occasional sacrilegious catcalls.⁷ These echo the complaints against methodists, but no one is holding their breath for the revolution. Is there a lesson in methodism’s victory over its critics? For the most part, the rationalist hegemony has done little more than affirm pessimistic elements that were a part of the critique of rationalism from the start. Having seen rationalism as a component of larger forces deemed ineffable—such as Weberian rationalization—one can look on the present as validation for those who accurately forecasted this future. As with Socrates before his Athenian jurors, the losses of the antirationalist partisans are themselves taken as affirmation of the insightful character of their arguments.⁸ It is confirmation of the totalitarian nature of rationalism as it developed from the early modern and enlightenment periods. Without denying the critical force of some of these claims, I want to suggest that we need to supplement this lesson. This new lesson will be available to us when we turn the suspicions concerning political tin ears back upon the political understanding implicit in the criticisms themselves.

There is something above and beyond the rationalizations of rationalism that we ought to understand as *political*. By making this assertion, I hope not to repeat something already obvious. We know that political rationalism produces results that *count* in the domains where self-consciously *political* polit-

ical theorists stake their claims. Defenders of the subject, or indeed of the human condition itself, have made a strong case. Their claims have resonated with the dissatisfactions of others, and this resonance has helped generate protest against what we take to be the unwitting consequences of the positivist overconfidence of our contemporaries. The issue now, however, is whether there remains an unacknowledged political sensibility that both antirationalists and rationalists may share in common. Is there, in short, a dimension of "being political" that antirationalists and perhaps rationalists have ignored? Antirationalists sometimes plead guilty to slipping back into the harmful ontologies of those they criticize, but this is not what I have in mind. I am not, therefore, gesturing toward the accidental lapses into metaphysics acknowledged by Heidegger⁹ and writers today informed by his spirit but toward the more mundane wish to impose order and neat solutions. Against this impulse, there has been only a one-sided indictment by antirationalist against rationalist. We could spread the blame a bit further. As with all sources of modern original sin, Hobbes's thought is a good place to look first. I will argue that Hobbes exemplifies the political sentiment I refer to and Oakeshott's Hobbes, while brilliant, tellingly banishes these sentiments in his account of Hobbes.

II. OAKESHOTT AND HOBBS: POLITICAL RATIONALISM AVERTED

Oakeshott's philosophical alliances shifted during the course of his career. One of the last British partisans of idealism in the early twentieth century, Oakeshott introduced skeptical elements into his repertoire, especially as he began to apply himself to Thomas Hobbes.¹⁰ Oakeshott's Hobbes is a rationalist, but he is not the political rationalist Oakeshott described in "Rationalism in Politics." Even before Oakeshott began to write on Hobbes, an image of the philosopher was being crafted in his defense by those who sought to revive him as one of the first social scientists. Oakeshott resisted this image of Hobbes:

it is a false reading of his intention and his achievement which finds in his civil philosophy the beginnings of sociology or a science of politics, the beginnings of that movement of thought that came to regard "the methods of physical science as the proper models for politics."¹¹

Hobbes, in other words, shares very little in common with Oakeshott's Bentham or Marx.¹² Oakeshott's Hobbes is a philosophical rationalist rather

than a political rationalist. His rationalism is rooted in a conception of what it is to reason philosophically. Hobbes may share elements of the materialistic and mechanistic world-picture with some of the true progenitors of our social sciences (here Oakeshott fingers Descartes), but his mechanistic account of the world serves the limited end of a philosophical conception of the world and not the goal of empirical explanation itself. If these two goals occasionally appear confused in Hobbes's work, Oakeshott asserts, it is only because Hobbes himself was not yet able to fully achieve a distinction between science and philosophy that implicitly informed his work.¹³ Oakeshott therefore assigned himself the task of clarifying and articulating this conception of philosophy, and he crafted his interpretation accordingly. It orbits about an account of Hobbes as an intellectual practitioner; it is an interpretation that claimed to discern the difference between the Hobbes grafted onto the social scientist's family tree and the philosopher he claimed for himself:

The coherence of his philosophy, the system of it, lies . . . in a single 'passionate thought' that pervades its parts. The system is not the plan or key of the labyrinth of the philosophy: it is, rather, a guiding clue, like the thread of Ariadne. It is like the music that gives meaning to the movement of dancers, or the law of evidence that gives coherence to the practice of a court.¹⁴

The thread or hidden thought Oakeshott refers to is itself a "doctrine about the nature of philosophy." Specifically, this is to conceive philosophy as the world as it appears in terms of causes and effects: "cause and effect are its categories" and one may use philosophy to determine the conditional causes of effects, or conditional effects of given causes.¹⁵ Oakeshott claims that the application of this doctrine yields a materialist explanation neither of the world nor of politics. In spite of seeming affinities with fellow scientific revolutionaries such as Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus, and Descartes, his philosophy limits itself to rendering "the world reflected in the mirror of the philosophic eye, each image the representation of a fresh object, but each determined by the character of the mirror itself."¹⁶

A careful look at Hobbes's philosophical conception, moreover, reveals to Oakeshott the need to look to the past, not to social scientists who claim to extend this path. He is a part of a philosophical tradition identified in Oakeshott's introduction to *Leviathan* as "Will and Artifice." Although its roots are classical, Oakeshott—not unlike his recent French predecessor and philosopher of science, Duhem (1861-1916)¹⁷—found more proximal roots for this, so called, scientific revolutionary in the intellectual practices of the schools (particularly late scholasticism, especially elements of nominalist

belief attached to individuality, which emphasized a picture of humans as willful rather than reasonable creatures).¹⁸

“Will and Artifice” may be Hobbes’s tradition, but “Artifice” should not on this reading suggest something like the work of some of our most characteristic artificers, architects. The social-scientific readings of Hobbes are chided for making this mistake. Oakeshott writes,

For what is expected here is that a philosophical system should conform to an architectural analogue, and consequently what is sought in Hobbes’s system is a foundation and a superstructure planned as a single whole, with civil philosophy as the top storey. Now, it may be doubted whether any philosophical system can properly be represented in the terms of architecture, but what is certain is that the analogy does violence to the system of Hobbes.¹⁹

For Oakeshott, the “Artifice” is a work of imagination, and not a material (or materialist) construction or causal account of the world.²⁰ Oakeshott’s rejection of the architectural analogy will become a key point of departure for a criticism of Oakeshott’s interpretation. Ultimately, I wish to make the case for a selective acceptance of Oakeshott’s approach to Hobbes. Before launching this criticism in the essay’s next section, however, I will address one of the strongest elements of Oakeshott’s argument for distancing Hobbes from the social-scientific reading.

As noted above, Oakeshott associates Hobbes with the *conditional* knowledge of the world reflected in the philosophic mirror. Oakeshott’s Hobbes is also a skeptic. The roots of this skepticism are not merely to be found in the limited ambitions Oakeshott assigns to Hobbes’s philosophy but in the more concrete assertion that Hobbes’s cause and effect centered philosophy can (and must) only yield hypothetical knowledge. According to Oakeshott, Hobbes does not use philosophical reasoning to strive for absolute truths. Rather, reasoning in the modality of cause and effect limits what we can assert when we conclude that something is a cause:

we can mean no more than that such and such is a possible efficient cause, and not that it is the actual cause. . . . For reasoning, a cause must be ‘imaginable’, the necessity of the effect must be shown to follow from the cause, and it must be shown that nothing false . . . can be derived. And what satisfies these conditions may be described as an hypothetical efficient cause. . . . Philosophy is limited to the demonstration of such causes.²¹

From “beginning to end,” Oakeshott asserts, Hobbes never suggests that philosophy “is anything other than conditional knowledge of hypothetical generations and conclusions about the names of things, not about the nature of things.”²²

The reference to the “names of things” bespeaks Hobbes’s nominalism, and this is also a critical part of Oakeshott’s case for Hobbes’s skepticism. Nominalism, for Oakeshott, is the path by which Hobbes’s philosophy retreats from experience.²³ Naming is an arbitrary exercise. We assign names to the sense impressions coming at us from the world. Hobbes does not allow for a prior set of natural associations between things encountered and the actual names assigned. In using language, we, at once, name and come to consciousness of the sensations we experience.²⁴ Philosophy is the well-regulated practice of establishing logical relations between these names and, most important, our capacity to establish relations of cause and effect. He recollects Hobbes’s claim that reasoning is “nothing else but the addition and subtraction of names.” This “nominalist and profoundly skeptical doctrine” therefore teaches us how to produce philosophical truths, but these true propositions, he reiterates, are “not about the nature of things, but about the names of things.”²⁵ Indeed, the only true thing for Hobbes *is* a true proposition, one in which a philosopher appropriately combines terms (“*X is Y*”) in a way that agrees with the way in which we have predefined these terms.²⁶

Oakeshott’s Hobbes, therefore, is an example of intellectual caution and reserve—a philosopher who, however confident, resisted the temptation to extend the reach of his philosophy into the domains where contemporary social sciences have now staked their claim. In light of the incautious character of Oakeshott’s political rationalist, the contrasts invite an extended comparison. In his essays on Hobbes, Oakeshott is engaged in an act of interpretative reclamation: he extracts Hobbes from interpretations that would claim him for the history of the social sciences. In his essays on political rationalism, however, we begin to discern that the reclamation was not merely a matter of a disagreement over Hobbes’s philosophical ambitions. It also allowed Oakeshott to claim Hobbes for his side in a larger battle over the proper scope of rationalist thought. In his attacks on political rationalism, Oakeshott’s invective is directed against those who would substitute social science—political rationalism—for political judgement. Only in this broader intellectual and political context can we see the full significance of what Oakeshott does by disassociating Hobbes from social science.

This Hobbes is not merely in retreat from the world of experience, he is also miles away from the anxious political rationalists Oakeshott describes in “Rationalism and Politics” or “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind.”²⁷ Oakeshott’s political rationalist may be skeptical of authority—especially traditional political authority—but he is also an “optimist.” He is optimistic about the power of his reason to solve practical problems in the realm of experience: “the rationalist never doubts the power of his ‘reason’ (when properly applied) to determine the worth of a thing, the truth of an

opinion or the propriety of an action."²⁸ Lacking adequate experience, but anxious to make the force of his reason effective, the political rationalist is never held back by a suspicion that elements of human affairs may be beyond the capacity of human reason. The political rationalist lacks the "power of accepting the mysteries and uncertainties of experience without any irritable search for order and distinctness."²⁹ The political rationalist is a specialist in "irritable" searches for order.

Oakeshott's political rationalist is a "self-made man," a term Oakeshott uses derisively. Men who are "self-made" are in these arguments unfavorably compared to "some minds which give us the sense that they have passed through an elaborate education which was designed to initiate them into the traditions and achievements of their civilization."³⁰ The mind of the political rationalist is, according to Oakeshott, more the finely tuned instrument, a neutral, well-trained head, than one rooted in any particular historical tradition or sensibility. As such, the political rationalist's mind is said to lack "atmosphere"; in this barren place there is no change of season or temperature. Thinking here goes on "in the void."³¹

When such heads apply themselves to political affairs, they are a particularly dangerous force. Politics is, in Oakeshott's reading, deeply permeated with tradition; moreover, it is circumstantial and transitory. Just where one would hope for the reserve of a more seasoned mind, the political rationalist is characterized by an unwillingness to stop and contemplate the complexity of political practice. The political rationalist is inclined to tear down and start from scratch. He is a self-appointed member of a political wrecking crew. Patching up, repair—something that requires a more subtle knowledge of the material at hand—is a "waste of time" in the political rationalist's eyes.

The effective mode of political intervention for the political rationalist models itself on engineering. There is a singular task at hand. The question is whether the rational means to achieve that end will be adopted. The best way to ensure that it is, is to adopt a rational technique for discovering the nature of the problem and the solutions that might be found.³² It is the political rationalist's unflinching faith in technique in these inherently uncertain political domains that strikes Oakeshott as distinctive. It is the "assimilation of politics to engineering" that may be called "the myth of rationalist politics."³³

Here, then, is one of the chief sources for our understanding of the tin-eared political rationalist. The complex and dynamic character of political life is such that it will never be made to conform to expectations implicit in the abstract formulations of rationalist political techniques. No matter how intricate the political technique may grow, the scientific predispositions of its practitioners will be necessarily insufficiently sensitive to the dynamics of political life. What the political rationalist lacks is experience itself. Politics,

like any other activity, must be understood in its particular idiom. That is to say, political engagement and the making of political decisions is a practice, and it is only by gaining a practitioner's sensibility that one can engage in politics intelligently. A set of rules or procedures designed in advance of the activity itself, or a set of goals specified and considered outside a state of political engagement, is never a substitute for the judgment of the seasoned practitioner situated in the midst of political activity itself.

Famously, Oakeshott compares those who would make political decisions by rationalist techniques to persons who possess cookbooks but lack the sensibility of an actual chef. I have described tin-eared political rationalists. Antirationalist critiques often find themselves drawing on allusions to sensory deficiencies. Like a cookbook, a list of rational political techniques can only take a would-be practitioner so far:

for what the book contains is only what it is possible to put into a book—rules of technique. And, book in hand (because, though a technique can be learned by rote, they have not always learned their lesson well), the politicians of Europe pore over the simmering banquet they are preparing for the future: but, like jumped-up kitchen-porters deputized for an absent cook, their knowledge does not extend beyond the written word which they read mechanically—it generates ideas in their heads but no tastes in their mouths.³⁴

By pulling Hobbes away from the political rationalist camp, therefore, Oakeshott was doing something more than defending one reading of Hobbes against another. He was attempting to rescue Hobbes from a historical movement—already long dominant—for which he harbored boundless contempt. In section III, I will argue that in spite of correctly distancing Hobbes from a social scientific reading, he elides Hobbes's anxiousness for a politically useful and effective rationalism. Hobbes is not a social scientist, but he shares more in common with the "jumped up kitchen porters" than Oakeshott can bring himself to acknowledge—moreover, what he shares with these porters, and with all of us, emerges from within a political sensibility that may be dulled among social scientists but that still stands as an obstacle to the goals of antipolitical rationalists.

III. WHAT'S MISSING?

Oakeshott's reading of Hobbes can be termed what some political theorists call a "strong" reading of a political philosopher. That is, not unlike other forceful interpretations of Hobbes (although not Hobbes alone), Oakeshott's interpretation is, at once, an insightful gaze into Hobbes's writings and a work that travels beyond the bounds of Hobbes interpretation. As noted, we

can see Oakeshott's investment in Hobbes as a turning point in his larger philosophical career.³⁵ Moreover, Oakeshott's interpretation has inspired and helped clarify the thinking of other political theorists on matters such as authority.³⁶ In light of its status as a strong reading, it would seem foolish to attempt to offer corrections, to discuss where Oakeshott seemed to have gotten Hobbes wrong. A precocious child can miss the significance of a great drama if he or she is pleased to devote all of his or her attention to attacking its verisimilitude. If the point of this essay were to show that Oakeshott misread Hobbes simply for the sake of showing that he made a mistake, then it would be the legitimate subject of similar suspicions. We can, however, use this understanding of what Oakeshott represses in his interpretation to discern what many political theorists have neglected in their critiques of political rationalism. As such, this argument can also claim to serve a larger purpose. That purpose will be served largely in the fourth section of the essay. Here, I will build a brief case that will enter into some of the finer points of Hobbes's interpretation.

Hobbes's critical assessments of scholastic learning are one place to look for what Oakeshott leaves out of his interpretation. Reading Hobbes as a part of a tradition, Oakeshott's claim is that we should ignore Hobbes's criticisms of the schools. He finds the similarities between Hobbes's thought and tradition more fundamental.³⁷ This, however, ignores the spirit in which Hobbes compares his philosophical ideals with theirs. Convinced he knew the difference between idle knowledge and its opposite, he writes in *De Corpore*,

For the inward glory and triumph of mind that a man may have for the mastering of some difficult and doubtful matter, or for the discovery of some hidden truth, is not worth so much pains as the study of Philosophy requires; nor need any man care much to teach another what he knows himself, if he think that will be the only benefit of his labour. The end of knowledge is power; and the use of theorems (which, among geometricians, serve for the finding out of properties) is for the construction of problems; and, lastly, the scope of all speculation is the performing of some action, or thing to be done.³⁸

His hope was to offer the world a philosophy that would yield practical results. To do so, according to Hobbes, philosophy must make us capable of action.

This concern further reveals itself where Hobbes describes the difference between prudence and science. Hobbes valued science above prudence; this is well known among political theorists, and it is often used as evidence in arguments against the hubris of today's social science.³⁹ He boasted that his was the first science of politics, and in doing so he was asserting the superiority of his political thought to that of his predecessors.⁴⁰ This includes the doctrines of the schools, but it is also thought to include those who made history

and experience their guide.⁴¹ Missed in the rush to emphasize the difference are some of the fundamental equivalencies in Hobbes's means of evaluating the accomplishments of "prudence" and his "science." Specifically, both remain fixed within the realm of human action. It is true that Hobbes's *science* distinguishes itself because it is methodical and (as Oakeshott correctly observes) centered in a concern for causes and effect. However, these aspects do not complete Hobbes's boast on behalf of science or its favorable juxtaposition with prudence. The proof of the worthiness of science is also in the practical results that it achieves. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes the distinction this way:

And whereas sense and memory are but knowledge of fact, which is a thing past and irrevocable, *Science* is the knowledge of consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another, by which, out of that we can presently do, we know how to do something else when we will, or the like, another time; because when we see how anything comes about, upon what causes, and by what manner, when the like causes come into our power, we see how to make it produce the like effects.⁴²

We need to take Hobbes seriously when he speaks of causes in *our power* and the production of effects. In the quote above, he offers material for Oakeshott's skeptical rebuttal to the social scientific reading but also makes assertions that should point beyond the limited scope Oakeshott allows Hobbes's philosophy. Experience and prudence, as Hobbes notes in the passages in *Leviathan* just preceding the quote, are concerned with matters of fact, and as above, with "things past and irrevocable." As Oakeshott argued, Hobbes's concern is not with the past but with cause and effect. Hobbes's science, however, is not merely distinguished on the basis of the subject upon which the philosopher exercises his or her mind (cause and effect) but by what this knowledge allows us to *do*. The consequences that Hobbes speaks of are consequences in the world itself; they are actions—things we *do* or *can do*. Following the guide of such scientific reason yields power, not merely the self-restrained philosophical knowledge Oakeshott describes. Although they involve the contemplation of different things, science and prudence share a common domain—human activity—in which the fruits of their distinct labors can be compared with one another.⁴³

The emphasis on practical consequences also emerges when Hobbes describes philosophy's place in the context of human history. Philosophy makes a contribution to the way we live. It makes us capable of creating a world where we enjoy "commodious living." Indeed, the things that Hobbes promises as the products of philosophical practice are also the things that distinguish life in civil society from life in the state of nature. Life in the state of

nature is famously “solitary, poor, nasty brutish and short,”⁴⁴ but in this wretched condition there is also

no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor the use of commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious buildings, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society.⁴⁵

Important for our purposes, Hobbes credits philosophy with these contributions to our condition. In *De Corpore*, he writes,

But what the utility of philosophy is, especially of natural philosophy and geometry, will be best understood by reckoning up the chief commodities of which mankind is capable, and by comparing the manner of life of such as enjoy them, with that of others which want the same. Now, the greatest commodities of mankind are the arts; namely, of measuring matter and motion; of moving ponderous bodies; of architecture; of navigation; of making instruments for all uses; of calculating the celestial motions, the aspects of the stars, and the parts of time; of geography, &c. By which sciences, how great benefits men receive is more easily understood than expressed. These benefits are enjoyed by almost all the people of Europe, by most of those of Asia, and by some of Africa: but the Americans, and they that live near the Poles, do totally want them. But why? Have they sharper wits than these? Have not all men one kind of soul, and the same faculties of mind? What, then, makes this difference, except philosophy? Philosophy, therefore, is the cause of all these benefits.⁴⁶

Such accounts of philosophy’s gifts do not square with Oakeshott’s reading. Hobbes’s philosophy crosses the boundaries that might delimit a conception of philosophical reason; Hobbes’s philosophy reaches the practical domain.

I have suggested, however, that Oakeshott is correct in distancing Hobbes from the readings that turn him into a social scientist. In light of Hobbes’s concern to craft a useful philosophy, this might suggest the need for second thoughts. The social scientific reading may overlook key elements of Hobbes’s skepticism, but these readings possess the virtue of at least answering to Hobbes’s obviously practical intents. Indeed, among Hobbes’s critical admirers from this camp, one finds arguments chiding the philosopher for not having more fully realized the value of empirical inquiry in light of the purposes of his enterprise.⁴⁷ This raises the question, Can one reject the social scientific reading and still find room for a Hobbes who wishes to craft a philosophy that serves his practical orientation? Can Hobbes be said to offer us a knowledge that serves his ends—power and a philosophy directed toward worldly practices—and yet *not* be, in some measure, devoted to the development of a predictive/descriptive account of the world? For some of Hobbes’s

recent interpreters who have explicitly addressed this question, the answer has been no.⁴⁸

I have suggested in a different context that we can answer this question in the affirmative.⁴⁹ To see that this is so in this context, it will be useful to return to Oakeshott's claim that we ought not to see Hobbes's philosophy in architectural terms. Oakeshott placed Hobbes in the tradition of "Will and Artifice." Nevertheless, to distance Hobbes from interpretations that see him offering a mechanical and/or materialist explanation of the world, Oakeshott denied that Hobbes's philosophy is architectural. In other words, Oakeshott denied that one ought to look for a scientific foundation in Hobbes's claims concerning matter. His assertions concerning elemental parts of material things, or even about human beings themselves, were not meant as foundational assumptions from which he could derive his civil philosophy—in short, one should not look for a continual line of development between his physics and his politics.⁵⁰

What I wish to suggest is that Oakeshott is correct to deny this line of development, but *not*, as he claims, because Hobbes's artifice is not architectural. The "physics to politics" reading is wrong precisely because Hobbes's philosophy is thoroughly architectural in character. Let me first build this argument in terms of an ideal type. Consider the ways in which architects, and the work of architecture, are *unlike* the work of social science. Architecture may begin with a set of assumptions about its materials, but these are *givens*. Architects may need to know such things, but it is not the architect's role to discover them. Whereas the inquiring scientist (a social scientist or a prototypical physicist) is concerned with the natural motions or behavior of matter, the architect's material is taken as essentially static and available to the will of the builder. True, poorly chosen or ill-used matter may decay or snap under excessive pressures, but the primary architectural concern with motion is not centered in the natural motions of matter itself. It is centered in the act of construction. The artificer himself or herself must decide what to combine, must put matter into motion himself or herself—that is, give instructions to those who would build the artifice. No matter how mindful an architect must be of material, the first question is, "What do I wish to build?" and not "What are the characteristics of some thing in the world?" Answers to the second question may certainly condition answers to the first, but this does not conflict with the basic distinction between construction and inquiry. This is not a division of labor between two persons engaged in the same task but a more fundamental distinction.

Good architecture does not yield a more accurate picture of the world, it yields a well-made building. To the extent that the architect knows the world well, it is because the architect has built that world himself or herself and not

because the architect devoted his or her efforts to achieving some special insight into the natural motions of the world. It is certainly true that social scientists design institutions based on observations that have yielded predictions about human behavior, but the architect's level of intervention into the world is more direct. The social scientists design institutions in light of the motives, actions—the motions—they expect from human beings (and this is, therefore, an enterprise that naturally values the capacity to predict behavior). By contrast, the architect imparts motion to his or her matter, imposes structure on matter until it conforms with the architect's design.

It remains now to show that Hobbes did in fact subscribe to this understanding of his philosophy as an essentially constructive, architectural enterprise. In the quote above, Hobbes associates human progress not merely with philosophy in general but with geometry and natural philosophy. Of these two, it was geometry that Hobbes most often cited as his inspiration for his philosophy.⁵¹ Moreover, Hobbes himself was heavily invested in a particular notion of geometry. He places geometry at the center of his account of proper philosophical practice, authored a number of works on geometry, and also fought an ongoing battle with Oxford's Savilian Professor of Geometry, John Wallis, over the course that geometry and mathematics should take.⁵² I will not review these conflicts here. Instead, I will offer evidence that Hobbes's conception of geometry (and geometrically inspired political philosophy) conforms to the model of construction described above and that it is not directed toward the goal of inquiry.

As the quote above illustrates, Hobbes valued geometry for the commodious things it provided. Hobbes also valued geometry because it embodied a form of intellectual caution that he thought lacking among his intellectual contemporaries. His philosophical rivals were prone to abuse words.⁵³ By contrast, geometers, following the example of Euclid, always began with definitions and built methodically from these definitions. Hobbes emphasized the exemplary role geometry played in allowing him to discern sound method from the error-prone. Geometry was a model in the careful use of definitions, and, Hobbes adds by way of emphasis, the only science God has been pleased to grant to mankind:

Seeing then that *truth* consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations, a man that seeketh precise *truth* had need to remember what every name he uses stand for, and to place it accordingly, or else he will find himself entangled in words: as a bird in lime twigs, the more he struggles the more belimed. And therefore in geometry (which is the only science that it hath pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind) men begin at settling the significations of their words; which settling of significations they call *definitions*, and place them in the beginning of their reckoning.⁵⁴

Hobbes also idealized the geometrician because he possessed “maker’s knowledge.”⁵⁵ The geometrician knows with certainty the figures he builds on the page. Unlike the inquirer, he derives his knowledge not from some special observation of the world but because he built the structure or figure himself. Hobbes offers an example in *De Corpore*. Were a figure, “having, as near as may be, the figure of a circle” placed before us, we would not be able to “perceive by sense” whether it is a true circle.⁵⁶ By contrast, “nothing is more easy to be known to him” who knows how to generate a circle on his own. The thinker who generates the circle on his own, “by the circumduction of a body whereof one end remained unmoved” (fixing the end point of a line and spinning the line about it), knows the figure he has created fits the definition of a circle (i.e., where the radius is equal on every point of the circumference).⁵⁷

Was geometry a useful tool for understanding the workings of nature or the cosmos? It was for Galileo and Descartes. They began with the expectation that nature itself would conform to the dictates of human reason. A mathematical explanation of the events of the natural world, therefore, could be said to count as the best explanation of what was really happening. By contrast, Hobbes took a more skeptical position. Nature was God’s handiwork. It was beyond the power of men to know how God produced the effects that he did on earth. Instead, the best we could do is produce accounts of cause and effect that reproduce the effects observed in nature. Whether these explanations actually accounted for the means by which they were produced was something we could not know. To continue from the example with the circle, our knowledge of how to produce a circle does not tell us how the circle already set before us was *in fact* generated:

by knowing first what figure is set before us, we may come by ratiocination to some generation of the same, though perhaps not that by which it was made, yet that by which it might have been made.⁵⁸

The same logic applies with regard to the proper subject of physics, the phenomena of the natural world. Like the circle already before us on the page, we cannot be certain how it was in fact created, but through an appropriate mastery of causes, we can know how it could be created:

since the causes of natural things are not in our power, but in the divine will, and since the greatest part of them, namely the ether, is invisible; we, that do not see them, cannot deduce their qualities from their causes. Of course, we can, by deducting as far as possible the consequences that we do see, demonstrate that such and such *could* have been their causes.⁵⁹

For Hobbes, the distinction between hypothetical cause and actual cause was more than a skeptical objection. It meant that there would have to be new criteria for evaluating the worth of physics itself. Instead of valuing this science as a source of explanation, Hobbes stressed the fact that physical inquiry would make us capable of re-creating natural effects. Physics is a science that begins with effects and concludes with an account of causes that *merely could* reproduce that effect. It was the practical, “commodious” value of this capacity that Hobbes emphasized, not its standing as an account of the world.⁶⁰

For Hobbes, however, there was a still more impressive way to proceed in the sciences. He called sciences such as physics that began with effects and concluded with hypothetical causal reconstructions *aposteriori*. However, one need not begin with observed effects. In some forms of reasoning, one could begin with causes and work one’s way up to the creation of wholly original effects—these he termed *apriori*.⁶¹ Geometricians themselves belonged to this class of intellectual practitioners. This class of philosophers took on the more creative task of building artifices of their own. For Hobbes, it was not merely the geometrician who fit into this class of practitioners. Any science that begins with causes and works its way to effects belonged to this class, and the most lofty of these were the practitioners of the science of politics:

Finally, politics and ethics (that is the sciences of *just* and *unjust*, of *equity* and *inequity*) can be demonstrated *a priori*; because we ourselves make the principles—that is, the causes of justice (namely laws and covenants)—whereby it is known what *justice* and *equity*, and their opposites *injustice* and *inequity*, are. For before covenants and laws were drawn up, neither justice nor injustice, neither public good nor public evil, was natural among men any more than it was among beasts.⁶²

Political philosophy, therefore, ought to be understood as a construction project. It is not an account of how individuals actually found themselves living in civil society; it is a set of instructions on how to construct a civil society built to last.

It is in this context that we should understand Hobbes’s insistence that the laws of nature do not bind without the impetus provided by a coercive sovereign. The laws of nature are the dictates of reason that tell us our rights and duties and supply us with a means of constructing a commonwealth. They are our escape from the state of nature, but, as Hobbes notes, these laws do not bind us without human intervention. Hobbes’s laws of nature are not like the laws of Newtonian physics or, to use a more contemporary example, the laws of economics. They are not an account of what will happen naturally. His

laws are a part of the construction project. Hobbes sometimes drew parallels between reasoning per se and the operations of addition and subtraction. In *Leviathan*, he notes that geometricians add and subtract lines, figures, angles, proportions, and so on; arithmeticians add and subtract numbers. Likewise, “writers of politics add together *pactions* to find men’s duties.” The bodies that form the basic elements of the leviathan (here, our human bodies) must be set in motion, made to conform to the duties stipulated in the laws of nature. It is the coercive sovereign who ensures that our motions follow the natural law’s dictates. If anything, the laws of nature that Hobbes stipulates are counternatural and must be imposed on us:

For the laws of nature (as *justice, equity, modesty, mercy*, and (in sum) *doing to others as we would be done to*) of themselves, without the terror of some power to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge, and the like. And covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all.⁶³

Notwithstanding their identification as “laws,” we can only make the laws of nature bind by virtue of the impetus of a coercive power to ensure our obedience to them.⁶⁴ Sociability may come naturally to beasts, but for human beings sociability must be the product of artifice.

IV. THE POLITICS OF THE ARTIFICER

I have suggested that Oakeshott has not merely missed something in his interpretation but that his elision is indicative of a more pervasive underestimation of the obstacles that face antirationalist political theory. Let me now refine this argument by suggesting that Oakeshott in fact represses two elements in his interpretation. The two are connected but should be understood as distinct. In this essay, I will deal with the first in passing and emphasize the second.

The first element can be attributed to his aristocratic prejudices.⁶⁵ As noted above, Hobbes credited philosophy with supplying us with “commodious living.” His dedication to the “commodious” meant that Oakeshott’s adopted philosophical hero was in spirit too close to the ambitious, upwardly mobile, bourgeois—to the expert mechanic of political affairs. Rather than acknowledge these aspects of Hobbes’s philosophical project, he read them out of the picture. Oakeshott’s Hobbes does not get his hands dirty. He is not eager to please or impress others. He is already assured of his merits, and these reside in his capacity to reason philosophically. Rather than produce commodious

effects, this Hobbes is happy to sit back in cool aristocrat detachment; secure in his ways, he contemplates what it means to engage in philosophic thought. Having achieved a rationally coherent conception of political affairs, he is satisfied that he has amply fulfilled his duties as a philosopher. Oakeshott's Hobbes can be no "jumped up kitchen porter," and this is because there is not only something wrong with trying to do something with philosophy that one ought not to do but also because there is something wrong, for Oakeshott, with the idea of a kitchen-porter philosopher. The prejudices that animate this reappropriation are not uncommon among the critics of political rationalism, but it is not the flaw most representative of antirationalist political theory.

The second element concerns the elision of Hobbes's motivation for the imposition of mechanical order on politics. Here, Oakeshott helps clear a path that more have followed. In this more representative flaw, he locates the will to impose order in a particular form of epistemological overconfidence: a sense of optimism about one's capacity to grasp the world as it really is, combined with a belief that this understanding of the world is a prelude to solving its problems. Oakeshott denies that Hobbes has this overconfidence—and I have agreed with him on this point—but he also makes the assumption that being free of this kind of overconfidence implies an end to the will to impose order on the world. This last assumption is a poor one. Even after we give full acknowledgement to the skeptical elements of Hobbes's philosophy, he remains a philosopher committed to imposing order on his world. Revealing the motive for this kind of mastery also reveals the larger but neglected challenge that antirationalist political thought has yet to fully appreciate. This is not the motive of a political ignoramus; it is not the product of a methodologist's overconfidence or the blindness of a purely instrumental rationality. It is, rather, a panic induced by a fear of chaos, and in neglecting this motivation the antirationalists have illustrated that political tin ears are not exclusively located among their opponents.

I want to return briefly to Hobbes's claims concerning the "commodious living" philosophy makes possible. The social scientific reading of Hobbes links him with Galileo and with Descartes. On this reading, Hobbes, Galileo, and Descartes were alike in their desire to use new science to offer mathematical accounts of the world.⁶⁶ Hobbes's actual boasts are of a different nature. As noted, he does not claim a knowledge of the world. He claims instead a useful knowledge that allows us to move "ponderous bodies," engage in "architecture . . . navigation . . . instruments for all uses," and so on.

Among antirationalist political theorists, such emphasis on practical effects raises concern. Modern political reason has been taken over by a narrowly instrumental mindset. Effectiveness, in and of itself, has become the

standard against which persons evaluate political decisions. Moral reasoning has been squeezed out of the picture, and so have the requisite intellectual skills whereby such moral reasoning might be cultivated.⁶⁷ As noted, Oakeshott's interpretation allows him to spare Hobbes, but Oakeshott is undoubtedly a contributor to contemporary critiques of the instrumentalist mindset.⁶⁸ In Oakeshott's critique, the criticism is reinforced with aristocratic disdain for the inflated expectations of political upstarts. According to Oakeshott, the origins of political rationalism are to be found in Descartes and Bacon, but the circumstances that have allowed political rationalism to truly blossom in the twentieth century have been accumulating over the centuries. With the "incursion" of "new ruler[s], new ruling classes, and of a new political society" (this last being a reference to the newly politically enfranchised—Oakeshott was writing in 1947), we find ourselves with more and more persons required to lead and participate in political affairs who have no experience of their own. Persons under these circumstances, "not brought up or educated to the exercise," find rationalist politics a godsend:

His need of it is so great that he will have no incentive to be sceptical about the possibility of a magic technique of politics which will remove the handicap of his lack of political education. The offer of such a technique will seem to him the offer of salvation itself; to be told that the necessary knowledge is to be found, complete and self-contained, in a book, and to be told that his knowledge is of the sort that can be learned quickly and applied mechanically, will seem, like salvation, something almost too good to be true.⁶⁹

It is precisely the character of Oakeshott's political rationalist to make such fantastic promises and to believe in them as well. The most characteristic thing about the rationalist politics of his contemporaries, Oakeshott remarked, was "the prevailing belief that politics are easy." Such a belief is merely a correlate of the core "rationalist faith in the sovereignty of technique" and presuppositions sustaining "the notion that some over-all scheme of mechanized control is possible." The American Founders are an example of an earlier instance of this faith. They were convinced that they did not have to consult the "old parchments and musty records" of civilization. Instead, their new and accurate grasp of human nature and their superior techniques would ensure their success. With such hopeful feelings, modern political rationalism converts politics in all its complexity into an "easy" matter of administration.⁷⁰

Against Oakeshott's diagnosis, we might ask whether an anxious desire for an effective, well-ordered political sphere always emerges in these contexts. Is it the case that the politically inexperienced are the only ones who find solace in the provision of a rationalist political philosophy? Today's Oakeshottian antirationalists tend to overlook his distasteful class biases, for

it would seem that his critique of the hubris of political rationalism is a criticism that might be made from a number of perspectives. This brings us the second element repressed in Oakeshott's interpretation, the one most pertinent to contemporary antirationalist political theory.

Even if one could extract Oakeshott's critique from its aristocratic trappings, his focus on the overconfidence of the political rationalist remains misleading. This is not because there have not been overconfident political rationalists but because the circumstances that lead us to wish for a form of politics that asserts a rational mastery over our circumstances are not limited to those Oakeshott—and many other antirationalists—describe. Hobbes, moreover, illustrates this very characteristic. Hobbes may have been confident of his own rationality, but he was famously nervous about politics. Hobbes did not wish to impose order on the political world because he thought he could penetrate the mysteries of human political conduct. Hobbes certainly made a point of disagreeing with Aristotle. Man was not, by nature, a *polis* animal; but Hobbes hardly counted it a great accomplishment to see the error of Aristotle's assumption.

Put another way, Montesquieu and Rousseau were correct when they said they suspected Hobbes of transferring his impressions of his fellow citizens onto the 'nature' of man in the state of nature.⁷¹ Life in Hobbes's state of nature was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short, because life in Hobbes's Britain was threatening to become—and for some it was—solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Having acknowledged the transfer, however, we need not follow the lead of these Enlightenment philosophers and look for man's true nature to substitute for Hobbes's account. Instead, we can reasonably draw the conclusion that a will to impose a rational order on political life does not always stem from a primary desire to know political (or natural) phenomena or from the overconfidence of those who claim to have such knowledge. It was not out of confidence, but out of desperation, that Hobbes adopts his political rationalism. With Montesquieu and Rousseau, we should acknowledge that Hobbes's political philosophy was a reaction to his contexts, and one that was at least discerning of the flaws and pitfalls of his own society.

A view of political society that declares a constant danger of devolving into a state of war is not a confident view. In fact, Hobbes shared this pessimistic assumption not with the new, self-made men among his contemporaries but with weary and disappointed aristocrats who served as his patrons.⁷² Importantly, the desire for a rational mastery of political affairs emerges with a different mindset from the one described by Oakeshott and other anti-political rationalists. The motivation for the imposition of a rational scheme is not an overconfident claim to know the world, or human nature,

as it really is. The motivation, rather, was a fear of life-threatening political contexts. Hobbes's problem was not an unawareness of the contingency of the political—he was more than happy to show his political rivals that the knowledge of the world they claimed was built on sand. Rather, it was an intense fear that the contingency of political life was not survivable. Hobbes did not need to—and did not claim to—know the world as it really is with scientific certainty. His was a science at once skeptical and impatient. Not only was he dubious as to the claims of those who asserted a definitive knowledge of the world we observe, he hadn't the time to engage in such speculations. Hobbes's first priority was to merely impose an order on the chaotic world—to lift humanity out of the disastrous state of nature—and that is why he was not looking for relief in sciences that offer us an accurate picture of nature itself. Geometry was Hobbes's science of choice, and of inspiration, because it puts aside questions of natural motion and (like an architect) gets about the business of directly manipulating matter to suit our needs. That need—rather than expectation—was the desperate desire for peace, as the first law of nature dictates. Thus, it was misery and fear that drove Hobbes to a rationalist politics, not fascination with a new and exciting way to describe the workings of the universe or human nature.⁷³

Important for our purposes, the will to impose order out of misery and fear cannot as easily be dismissed as “apolitical.” Hobbes's impulse is rooted in a reaction to his political contexts. Unlike the politically obtuse rationalist now subject to antirationalist critique, Hobbes's plea for the imposition of a rational order emerges out of life in the thick of political affairs. Hobbes maintained very close connections with the politically prominent Cavendish family throughout most of the seventeenth century. He was employed as mathematics tutor to Charles II in the exiled court, and he continued contact with Charles II following the Stuart Restoration. This meant that Hobbes was closer to the political life of his nation than most contemporary political theorists ever will be. Moreover, the desire of the panicked to impose order, to create order out of chaos, is hardly something we can rule out as a likely reaction among politically engaged persons.⁷⁴ Even the most committed postmodernist— anxious to avoid the language of metaphysics and a subsequent unwitting imposition of rationality—might find himself or herself under circumstances wherein the deliberate choice to impose order becomes a possibility.

What ramifications does this have for contemporary antirationalist politics? In a recent review of James Scott's anti-political rationalist *Seeing Like a State*, Shannon Stimpson makes the point that there are ironies in presenting such an antagonistic thesis at this time.⁷⁵ Scott's book, an expansive survey and critique of grand modernist-rationalist projects such as Brasilia, may be less than timely in the twenty-first century:

If this is his message, Scott may be preaching to the converted. It is interesting to see a critique of state-inspired planning, even one so admittedly elegant, appear at this time. Without prognosticating the future, ours would seem to be an era in which the end of “big-government” solutions has been declared. . . . Even the most meager government intervention in the economy now meets with organized political resistance.⁷⁶

Stimpson makes a valid point. The intellectual sources of political rationalism no longer have the clout they once did during their heydays in the twentieth century. Present political contexts are clearly different. The intellectual machinery that developed to accompany the growth of the modern welfare state, however, has not changed with these contexts. That is, even as the legitimacy of “scientific” perspectives on political affairs has diminished in recent years—although one might note that every opponent of “big government” is happy to cite scientific studies when it suits his or her purposes—its place within the academy has not. Why has there not been a parallel diminution?

In light of what Oakeshott’s antirationalism misses, we can venture an explanation. A part of the decline in the public legitimacy of political rationalism is surely a less trusting attitude toward scientific authority. Perhaps made weary by the contradictions between scientific authorities, perhaps infused with a new postmodern ethos, the Western public questions whether authoritative descriptions of political realities can exist. The authority of rationalist contemporaries against which Oakeshott or Marcuse chafed is now not quite so great. However, the need for a scientific legitimation once we elect to impose order on society remains as strong as ever. This suggests that the intellectual machinery of modern political rationalism may survive even as faith in its capacity to describe or explain political behavior disappears. If that is the case, then anti-political rationalism will experience diminishing marginal returns insofar as it directs its efforts toward skeptical attacks on the epistemology of political rationalism. Showing the political rationalist that his or her confidence is misplaced because it rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of the political may be missing the mark. The mere capacity to satisfy the desire, when it arises, to impose order may be what accounts for political rationalism’s longevity. Whether the political rationalists themselves are true believers in their capacity to *know politics* may be beside the point.

NOTES

1. Bernard Crick, *In Defense of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Eulau and Crick debated at a roundtable discussion at the 1996 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in San Francisco.

2. Michael Oakeshott, "The New Bentham," reprinted in Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, expanded ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991).

3. See, for example, Barry's defense of impartiality in Brian Barry, *Justice As Impartiality* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995).

4. William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 2d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

5. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon, 1971).

6. Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory As a Vocation," *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought*, ed. Martin Fleisher (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

7. Most recently, the controversy started with the "Mr. Perestroika" e-mail. See *PS: Political Science & Politics* 4 (December 2000): 735-41.

8. See, for example, Marcuse's observations on the status of philosophy and social science in Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

9. Hubert Dreyfus is a key proponent of this reading of Heidegger and of those Heideggerian-influenced thinkers such as Foucault. See Hubert Dreyfus, *Michel Foucault, beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Jacques Derrida's work, particularly the earlier works and his own critique of Foucault, are illustrative of the efforts to resist lapses into metaphysics. See, notably, Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness" in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

10. Steven A. Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000).

11. Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," [hereafter, "Introduction"] reprinted in Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 240. Oakeshott here quotes J. S. Mill's *Autobiography*, but more proximal sources for this claim included Ferdinand Tönnies, *Thomas Hobbes: Leben und Lehre* (Stuttgart, Germany: Friedrich Frommanns Verlag, E. Hauff, 1896); Harold Hoffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy; a Sketch of the History of Philosophy*, trans. B. E. Meyer (London: Macmillan, 1900). Oakeshott himself notes that a "Hobbes society" was founded in Oxford after an international congress in 1929; see Michael Oakeshott, "Thomas Hobbes," *Scrutiny*, 4 (1935-36): 263-77. Leo Strauss also wishes to distance Hobbes the moral philosopher from Hobbes the social scientist, but he allows for greater affinities between Hobbes and social scientific techniques. See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*, trans. Elsa Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1936] 1963).

12. Michael Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics" in Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, esp. 31; Michael Oakeshott, "Political Education," in *ibid.*, 54.

13. "Introduction," 235-39. Thus, Hobbes's enthusiasm for Kepler, Galileo, and Harvey should not outweigh his antipathy toward the Royal Society. When we see "what Hobbes was about" we realize that this confusion, this "internal tension" in his thought

arose from an attempted but imperfectly achieved distinction between science and philosophy. The distinction, well known to us now, is that between knowledge of things as they appear and enquiry into the fact of their appearing, between a knowledge (with all the necessary assumptions) of the phenomenal world and a theory of knowledge itself . . . his concern as a philosopher was with the second and not the first. (*Ibid.*, 239)

14. *Ibid.*, 236.

15. *Ibid.*, 236-37.

16. *Ibid.*, 236.

17. Pierre Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, trans. Philip P. Wiener (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954).

18. "Introduction," 227-28, 233, 276-78, 280. The important distinction for Oakeshott is that Hobbes is a part of—indeed the fruition of—a break from an earlier tradition of "Reason and Nature," which rooted obedience in natural law, and natural law in the obligatory force of reason's dictates.

19. *Ibid.*, 236.

20. *Ibid.*, 246-47.

21. *Ibid.*, 244.

22. *Ibid.*, 244-45.

23. It is also, notably, a part of an argument that stresses a picture of the individual that stresses willfulness over reason, but I will not be addressing this part of Oakeshott's interpretation here. See, for example, *ibid.*, 280.

24. *Ibid.*, 242.

25. *Ibid.*, 243.

26. Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, bk. I, chap. 3, sections 1-2, 7, *Opera Philosophica* (vol. 2), ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839) [hereafter, *De Corpore*, book, chapter, section]. See also Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 4, sections 11-12, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994) [hereafter, *Leviathan*, chapter, section]; Thomas Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, bk. I, chap. 5, section 10, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1889). In *De Corpore*, I, 3, 10, he writes, "truth adheres not to things, but to speech only, for some truths are eternal; for it will be eternally true, if man, then living creature; but that any man, or living creature, should exist eternally, is not necessary." This assertion is explained by the fact that Hobbes defines "living creature" as one of the accidents that are necessary to "man"; in his terminology, a cause of man. Thus, it is true that "man" entails the notion of "living creature," but it could be that men, and all living creatures, will one day be gone. Nonetheless, the formal truth that "man" is a "living creature" will nonetheless remain true. In *Leviathan*, 4, 11, Hobbes writes, "For True and False are attributes of Speech, not of Things. And where Speech is not, there is neither Truth nor Falsehood."

27. Reprinted in Oakeshott, *Rationalism and Politics*.

28. Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," 6.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, 7.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Michael Oakeshott, "Rational Conduct," reprinted in Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, esp. 102-15.

33. Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," 9.

34. *Ibid.*, 27. Oakeshott makes this point in the context of a more specific critique of "the politics of the book." Here, one imagines that he is not merely speaking of political rationalism generally but the political rationalist ideologies that generated books. None too specific, Oakeshott may be thinking of manuals such as Mao's little red book. In any case, this argument is an extension of his more general point about the inherent inadequacies of technique in the realm of politics.

35. Gerencer, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott*. Other instances of "strong readings"—and perhaps it is no accident that strong readings are often Hobbes interpretations—include Wolin's "epic theorist" interpretation of Hobbes, at once an explanation for strong reading and a strong reading in itself. Sheldon Wolin, *Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory*, (Los Angeles: Clark Memorial Library, 1970). See also Richard Flathman's account of his purposes in *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality and Chastened Politics* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), xxi.

36. Flathman, *Skepticism, Individuality and Chastened Politics* and Richard Flathman, *Willful Liberalism: Voluntarism and Individuality in Political Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

37. See the preceding discussion. See also "Introduction" 232-33, 237, 276 ff.

38. *De Corpore*, I, 1, 6.

39. For example, Habermas, *Theory and Practice*; Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy, Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Stephan Salkever, "'Lopp'd and Bound': How Liberal Theory Obscures the Goods of Liberal Practices," *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. R. Bruce Douglas, Gerald Mara, and Henry Richardson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 167-202.

40. These boasts are made in *De Corpore*, Epistle Dedicatory; see also the Dedicatory and the Preface to Readers of *De Cive, Opera Philosophica*.

41. Habermas, *Theory and Practice*; Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*.

42. *Leviathan*, 5, 5.

43. Hobbes's illustration of the difference between prudence and science in terms of the distinction between the merely prudent fencer and the scientific fencer (*Leviathan*, 5, 21) reinforces this point. He is not merely concerned with the knowledge of the scientific fencer but with the fact that he is "infallible" in his capacity as a fencer.

44. *Leviathan*, 13, 9.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *De Corpore*, I, 1, 7. See also *De Cive*, Dedicatory.

47. Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

48. Two contributors to the recent *Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) confront this question (and also answer no). See Alan Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy," in *ibid.*, 208-45, esp. 212-14, for the analogy between Hobbes's science and normative aspects of modern economics. See also Douglas Jesseph, "Hobbes and the Method of Natural Science" in *ibid.*, 86-107, esp. 100-101, where it is claimed that Hobbes had a commitment to "uncover the mechanical causes of natural phenomena"; this commitment is said to mitigate the force of his claims concerning the restriction of philosophic truths to true propositions (and therewith a conventionalist theory of natural science). These very recent interpreters are hardly alone. Even among earlier interpreters, who have been mindful of the distinction between Hobbes's work and contemporary social scientific enterprises, there is recognition that his science is concerned with describing the world. See, for example, David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 22-24, 52-54; J.W.N. Watkins, *Hobbes's System of Ideas* (London: Hutchinson, 1965) esp. 8-11, 47-81, 121-25.

49. Ted H. Miller, "Thomas Hobbes and the Constraints That Enable the Imitation of God," *Inquiry* 42 (1999): 149-76.

50. For an Oakeshott-inspired classification and evaluation of the secondary literature (written in the early 1970s) that affirms this division and critique of Hobbes interpretation, see W. H. Greenleaf, "Hobbes: The Problem of Interpretation," *Hobbes and Rousseau*, ed. Maurice Cranston and Richard Peters (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972).

51. I discuss this at length in Miller, "Thomas Hobbes and the Constraints." Some of the most sustained claims along these lines occur in *De Cive*, Dedicatory and Preface to the Readers. Some of the more important works on mathematics pertinent to Hobbes's own include Peter Dear, *Discipline and Experience: The Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Peter Dear, *Mersenne and the Learning of the Schools*

(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Paolo Mancosu, "Aristotelian Logic and Euclidean Mathematics: Seventeenth-Century Developments of the Quaestio de certitudine mathematicarum," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 23 (1992): 241-65 (Mancosu briefly discusses Hobbes's conflict with John Wallis); Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Nicolas Jardine, *The Birth of History and Philosophy of Science: Kepler's 'A Defence of Tycho against Ursus' with Essays on Its Provenance and Significance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Robert Westman, "The Astronomer's Role in the Sixteenth Century: A Preliminary Study," *History of Science* 18 (1980): 105-47; A. C. Crombie, "Mathematics and Platonism in the Sixteenth-Century Italian Universities and in Jesuit Educational Policy," *Prismata, Naturwissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien*, ed. Y. Maeyama and W. G. Slatzer (Wiesbaden, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), 63-94.

52. I discuss this conflict in *Making Certain: Thomas Hobbes and the Fashioning of States, Citizens, and Mathematicians* (book manuscript in preparation). See also Douglas Jesseph, *Squaring the Circle: The War between Hobbes and Wallis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Hobbes's mathematical works include *Six Lessons to the Professors of Mathematicques* (1656); ΣΤΙΓΜΑΙ or *MARKES of the Absurd Geometry, Rural Language, Scottish-Politics, and Barbarism of John Wallis* (1657); *Examinatio et Emedation Mathematicae Hodiernae* (1660); *Principia et Problemata Aliquot Geometrarum* (1666); *Lux Mathematica* (1672). All are reprinted in the *English Works* (11 vols.), ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839-45) or in *Opera Latina* (5 vols.), ed. Sir William Molesworth (1839-45).

53. *Leviathan*, 1, 5; 4, 4; 5, 5-16; 8, 27; 12, 31, throughout; *De Corpore* I, 5, 1-9.

54. *Leviathan*, 4, 12.

55. See discussion of "maker's knowledge" in Antonio Pérez-Ramos, "Francis Bacon and Man's Two-Faced Kingdom," *Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Rationalism*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson (London: Routledge, 1993); Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); Arthur Child, "Making and Knowing in Hobbes, Vico, and Dewey," *University of California Publications in Philosophy* 16 (1953): 271-310. Child, however, shies away from more interesting conclusions concerning Hobbes's civil science. See also Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), esp. 290-345. Although not discussing maker's knowledge, Norman Jacobson's reading of Hobbes in Norman Jacobson, *Pride and Solace* (London: Methuen, 1978) makes light of the God-like claims that Hobbes makes for his philosophy. I find that Jacobson's assertions are in many respects similar to my own conclusions, although the two studies have different purposes.

56. *De Corpore*, I, 1, 5.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

59. *De Homine*, chap. 10, section 5, trans. Charles Wood, T.S.K. Scott-Craig, and Bernard Gert, in *Man and Citizen* (New York: Anchor, 1972). See also Hobbes's concluding remarks in *De Corpore*, IV, 30, 15.

60.

The doctrine of natural causes hath not infallible and evident principles. For there is no effect which the power of God cannot produce by many several ways. But seeing all effects are produced by motion, he that supposing someone or more motions, can derive from them the necessity of that effect whose cause is required, has done all that is to be expected from natural reason. And though he prove not that the thing was thus produced, yet he proves that thus it may be produced when the materials and the power of moving

are in our hands: which is as useful as if the causes themselves were known. (Thomas Hobbes, *Seven Philosophical Problems*, Dedicatory, in *English Works* [vol. 7])

61. I discuss this distinction at length in Miller, "Thomas Hobbes and the Constraints."

62. *De Homine*, 10, 5. In the Latin, Hobbes writes of these things, "ipsi fecimus" (i.e., from "facere," to make), *Opera Latina* (vol. 1), 94.

63. *Leviathan*, 17, 2.

64. Oakeshott in fact argued this characteristic of Hobbes's laws of nature. See "Introduction," 256-57. He only does so, however, after having neutralized the practical implications of this reading—noting that in civil philosophy, "the generation [of effects] is rational and not physical" (ibid., 248).

65. This assertion may seem to cut against Oakeshott's professed liberalism. Oakeshott was in fact a liberal. He was particularly concerned with protecting the individual and with cultivating circumstances that allowed the virtues of individuality to flourish. See, for example, Michael Oakeshott, "The Masses in Representative Democracy," reprinted in Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, and Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Flathman, *Skepticism, Individuality and Chastened Politics*. One need not deny his liberalism to acknowledge that this liberalism, and his other stands, were defended with the tools of a rather aristocratic habit of mind. In fact, it is the preference for trading in critiques that emphasize habits of mind, of character revealed through practice (*habitus*), that make Oakeshott's intellectual tools so aristocratic in nature. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), a more distanced, scientific study of *habitus* in the pursuit of a fundamentally different political goal.

66. A good example is Richard Peters, *Hobbes* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1956).

67. Two good examples of such critiques are Habermas, "Theory and Practice"; Jürgen Habermas, "Technology and Science As Ideology," in Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society; Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1970), 81-122; and Hans Georg-Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

68. One finds, for example, citations to Oakeshott's arguments in the recent work of James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Ronald Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

69. Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," 28-29.

70. Ibid., 28, 32-33. The reference to old parchment is Alexander Hamilton's, here cited by Oakeshott.

71. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6; Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, trans. Donald Cress, *The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 53.

72. I discuss this in *Making Certain: Thomas Hobbes and the Fashioning of States, Citizens, and Mathematicians* (book manuscript in preparation), particularly the common feelings of political disillusionment and stoicism among the British political elite in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

73. To suggest that it is nothing but misery and fear that animates the politics of an artificer, however, is too one-sided. Hobbes also wrote to tempt and/or appease those likely to become sovereign over the order that he would found. He did so by appealing to their desire for glory. It

was not the glory of scientific discovery, but a glory that would allow them to see themselves as imitators of God. See Ted H. Miller, "Thomas Hobbes and the Constraints." Hobbes promises to make those who follow his philosophical advice concerning the a priori sciences imitators of God as a creator. Hobbes's creators do not create out of nothing, but, still like the divine, they create order where there was once none.

74. Carl Schmitt's temporary, but influential, admiration for Hobbes also bespeaks his credentials as a theorist familiar with 'the political'. A discussion of Schmitt, however, is outside the scope of this essay.

75. James Scott, cited in Shannon Stimpson, "Rethinking the State: Perspectives on the Legibility and Reproduction of Political Societies," *Political Theory*, 28 (2000): 822-34.

76. Stimpson, "Rethinking the State," 826.

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