



ON

HOBBS,  
LEVIATHAN,  
&

LIBERALISM  
&  
FASCISM

AS THEORIES  
OF  
THE

BEHEMOTH:

STATE



Juan Manuel Ávila Conejo

---

Hobbes' work is often viewed as central to the development of liberalism and liberal theories of the state. In this essay, I examine the relation between fascism and liberalism as two aspects of the capitalist state, and particularly of fascism as a failed liberal state. I argue that the symbiotic relation between liberalism and fascism can be found in Hobbes' theory of the state and, therefore, in all subsequent versions of the liberal state. I go on to suggest that the perpetual threat of fascism is a contradiction produced by the liberal state to justify itself and that escaping the liberalism-fascism dichotomy is a crucial step towards the establishment of communism.

---

# Hobbes uses a materialist theory of violence based around the problem of distribution of property, and then proceeds to build a state theory around the problem of this very violence, the violence of property.

**T**he biblical myth of Leviathan and Behemoth<sup>1</sup> has had a special place in political theory since the publication of Thomas Hobbes’<sup>2</sup> *Leviathan* in 1651. Centuries later, Carl Schmitt’s<sup>3</sup> *Leviathan* (1938) embraced again the image of warring monsters to formulate his theory of the state. Since then, much has been written on the relation between these two interpretations of the myth and its consequences for political theory.<sup>4</sup> This essay examines this myth through a Marxist lens that attempts to bring together Marxist historians of the English Civil War with more recent work on 20th Century fascism. To this end, I propose an analysis of the relation between liberalism and fascism as the political forms of the capitalist state—that is, to understand them as theories of the state corresponding to different historical phases of capitalism. The tension between these two state theories has been represented mythologically as the war of Leviathan and Behemoth. The liberal state corresponds in the myth to Leviathan, a form of authori-

tarian liberalism following from the model described by Thomas Hobbes in the eponymous book. The fascist state corresponds to Behemoth, which I describe following the state theory of Carl Schmitt in *Land and Sea* (1942) and Benito Mussolini in *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932), as well as following the works of Franz Neuman, Michael Parenti, and others. I also take into account Hobbes’ own *Behemoth* (1668) on the outcome of the English Civil War. Against the notion of Hobbes as a natural predecessor to Schmitt and of fascism, I propose that Hobbes recognizes the looming danger of a reactionary crisis of the ‘*Ancien Régime*,’ that is the feudal-theocratic politico-economic system, and, in opposition, proposes *Leviathan* as a foundation and defense of the nascent liberal state and capitalism. Additionally, I delve into the contradictory and dialectical relation between capitalism, as the primary engine of liberalism, and fascism, as a reaction against the very erosion of traditional authority caused by capitalism, while showing that this superficial opposition serves a very specific political purpose: to uphold the regime of private property—the back-





bone of capitalism—during times of crisis.

The methodology of this essay follows from a passage of T.S. Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919) that reads: "In any work the past should be altered by the present just as the present is directed by the past."<sup>5</sup> Eliot creates this thesis as a formula for aesthetic interpretation, meaning that a work of art is in dialectical relation with the art that came before it—both as its result and as its reinterpretation. In historiographical terms, and for the purposes of this work, Eliot's thesis corresponds to a form of recursive history, which means we must consider history as a description of past events that retroactively affects our understanding of the present and modifies our understanding of the past. Specifically, this means considering how the origins of fascism might be found by examining the much older *Leviathan* in its historical context while also examining its history in the light of a modern understanding of fascism. Considering liberalism and fascism as phases of capitalist development, as opposed to specific moments in time, permits us to trace back from Schmitt and Mussolini to the proto-fascism of Hobbes' time,

propose a general definition of fascism, and reveal its permanent relation to the liberal state and capitalism.

The German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1935 that "Fascism is a historic phase of capitalism; in this sense *it is something new and at the same time old*."<sup>6</sup> In order to fully understand this definition, we must take into account that Brecht was writing at the historical dawn of what we now call capital-f Fascism: the right-wing authoritarian states of Germany and Italy in the 1930s and 1940s. However, Brecht rejected the narrow view that fascism was a new and unique phenomenon; he considered a "capitulation to Fascism" the notion that it "is a new, third power beside (and above) capitalism and socialism" because the notions of supremacy and a break with modernity are part of the mythos of fascism. Thus, in order to understand fascism in the broader context of the development of capitalism, we must engage in the seemingly anachronistic move proposed by Brecht: to consider fascism as something very new and very old at the same time, both as a reaction of ancient power structures and as a phase in the his-

# The great beast that Hobbes posits is the result of the forces of nature and human artifice.

tory of capitalism.

This article examines the relation between the mythical war of Leviathan and Behemoth, and the effect it has had on western notions of the state since the publication of Hobbes' eponymous books in the 17th Century, focusing on how the myth has articulated the relation between the liberal and the fascist theories of the state. The myth of the warring beasts has roots in Ancient Near Eastern mythology, in which sea serpents feature prominently, under the name Lotan.<sup>7</sup> The myth itself derives from Jewish and Christian genealogy in the books of the *Torah*, *Job*, *Psalms*, and *Isaiah*, which describe the sea monster by saying: "Behold, the hope of him is in vain; shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?"<sup>8</sup> In modern political theory, the myth is most closely associated to the relation between Hobbes and Carl Schmitt, the principal intellectual of Nazi Germany. The myth relates the battle of the Leviathan and Behemoth with the history of the liberal state and fascist states, and it suggests a false genealogy between Hobbes' authoritarian liberalism and Schmitt's fascism. In this work, we track the relation between the myth and the corresponding theories of the state in order to explain how it both structures and relates the ideologies of liberalism and fascism in our current understanding of the state. The purpose of this analysis is to historicize the myth and the seemingly antagonistic relation between these theories of the state, thus demystifying the origins of fascism and the liberal state while showing the ideological content within the myth that continues to structure our politics around the alleged inevitable confrontation.





## Leviathan or Liberalism

What is Leviathan? Hobbes' theory of the state begins with a mythological image of a great chimera, a monster: part animal, part man, part machine, part god. "Nature," Hobbes writes,

is by the art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial animal. For seeing life is but a motion of

limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within, why may we not say that all automata... have an artificial life?... Art goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of nature, man. For by art is created that great *LEVIATHAN* called a *COMMON-WEALTH*, or *STATE*.<sup>9</sup>

The great beast that Hobbes posits is the result of the forces of nature and human artifice; it is not supernatural nor a preordained form, like that of



# Without a centralized monopoly of force, Hobbes thinks, individuals will be compelled to use force against each other.

absolute monarchy. Instead, it is a construct composed of human beings, structured by the combination of reason and what Hobbes claims to be natural or divine laws in what effectively constitutes a form of social contract. This construct of reason and natural creatures produces a political body “in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body.” This image of the state breaks with the permanent and unchanging structure of the absolute monarchical power of the *Ancien Régime* by posing that power is immanent in power structures; that is, that the power of the state stems from its members. Hobbes’ theory of the state is a materialist theory inasmuch as it considers sovereignty a consequence of the social interactions between material creatures and not as the result of supernatural forces nor symbolic institutions. This view of political power, as historian Quentin Skinner points out, was strongly rejected by his religious compatriots but was received favorably by some in the continent, particularly in France.<sup>10</sup>

The immanence of power in Hobbes is incompatible with any tyrannical form of hierarchy—both the divine right of kings and the reactionary authoritarian leader. For Hobbes, sovereignty belongs to the social construct (or contract) that is Leviathan; power resides in one political body but not in any one person. In the article “Hobbes and Schmitt,” the historian Tim Stanton posits that Hobbes is “a proponent of absolute and unlimited sovereignty” while at the same time claiming “that it was the consent of subjects that constituted the

authority of the sovereign. [Hobbes’] position combined an authority whose commands could not be challenged with individual rights and freedom as the means of establishing and conditioning that authority.”<sup>11</sup> From this, we can say that Hobbes’ theory of the state is authoritarian, but not absolutist, because sovereignty is not presented as external to society but as immanent in the state itself. The immanence of power in Hobbes does not mean, however, that sovereignty is a necessary condition for society to exist; it means only that power is equivalent to the effective control of society and thus not bestowed by supernatural forces. This materialist turn in Hobbes’ analysis of power does not mean a limitation on the exercise of power, so even if the liberal state’s power is rooted in society, it is not necessarily limited by it nor by an individual’s rights. That is to say, individual rights are limited by the factual powers of the state because the rights of the state are absolute and they are, in fact, coeval with its power. That is, for the Hobbesian state, might is right. As such, Hobbes’ characterization of the liberal state as authoritarian is not a matter of the author’s political leanings but an early pragmatist, materialist understanding of politics. In this sense, the Hobbesian state is close to Schmitt inasmuch as it is in permanent antagonism with anything outside itself, and it is precisely this permanent antagonism that gives the liberal state its mythological justification.

Sovereignty, for Hobbes, first and foremost means the monopoly of violence. Beginning with the

# Sovereignty, for Hobbes, first and foremost means the monopoly of violence.

mythological image, Hobbes says that the *raison d'être* of Leviathan is the “protection and defence”<sup>12</sup> of individuals in order to assure peace. Peace here ought to be understood in the narrow sense of the absence of war and the stability of the state. In other words, for Hobbes, the sovereign is whomever controls the power to make war and declare peace. As he writes later in the book, “...because the end of this institution is the peace and defence of all, and whosoever has right to the end has right to the means, it belongeth of right to whatsoever man or assembly that hath the sovereignty to be judge both of the means of peace and defence, disturbances of the same, and to do whatsoever he shall think necessary to be done.”<sup>13</sup> Hobbes continues: “it is annexed to the sovereignty the right of making war and peace with other nations and commonwealths, that is to say, of War, and Peace, as judging when it is for the public good, and how great forces are to be assembled, armed, and paid for that end, and to levy money upon the subjects to defray the expenses thereof.”<sup>14</sup> It is clear that, for Hobbes, the first prerogative of the state is the monopoly of violence, or the power of war and peace, and also that from this first prerogative stems the second: in order to command military power, the sovereign must have the power of the purse; that is, the prerogative to impose and levy taxes on society. As such, the Leviathanic state is structured around the separation of internal and external space; that is, civil society and peace (and taxation) on the inside and the state and war on the outside. This separation of civil society and the state is a constitutive feature of the liberal

state, and it dissolves when the liberal state is in crisis, giving way to reactionary forces within society.

The structure of Leviathan is organized around the principle of war. Hobbes organizes the state as a rational response to what he calls the state of “nature,” a time when “men live without a common power to keep them all in awe.”<sup>15</sup> Without a centralized monopoly of force, Hobbes thinks, individuals will be compelled to use force against each other. In a central passage of the book, Hobbes describes the state of war:

In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, 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, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.<sup>16</sup>

A common reading of this passage, particularly of the well-known last sentence, proposes that Hobbes has an exceedingly pessimistic view of human nature in itself. As Curley and other historians have pointed out, this common misinterpretation of the state of nature takes it to mean the state of life of early humans, but it is clear that Hobbes is not referring to a specific time but to any political



# The state of war begins when the state is no longer able to assure individual security and property.

moment in which the state has failed. As such, we must discard here the hypothesis that Hobbes considers humans to be predetermined to war or evil or that the state of war refers simply to anarchy in general.

If, instead of essentializing the human condition to any particular notion of human nature, we proceed with a materialist reading of Hobbes, we find that the state of nature refers to a particular historical moment in which the material conditions of society have become miserable. In the last sentence, Hobbes writes that life in the state of nature is *nasty, brutish, and short*—three conditions which refer to violence in the absence of personal security. However, he first says that life in this state is *solitary* and *poor*, two conditions which refer to changes in the political economy of society: the first, in which the relations of production have been interrupted; and the second one, in which production itself has stopped. In the first part of

the passage, Hobbes highlights the political economic consequence of war noting that in this state there can be no industry, no agriculture, and no commerce. Consequently, we can say that the state of nature is neither an idealist claim on human nature nor simply a consequence of a human proclivity to violence; on the contrary, it refers to a real crisis in the material conditions of existence of society. The state of nature is, thus, a politico-economic crisis which begets the most reactionary forces in society: gangsterism, and the degeneration of the rule of law into coercion by force.

From this crisis in the conditions of life, the “state of nature” also begets a crisis of faith in Leviathan’s social contract. The state of war begins when the state is no longer able to assure individual security and property. In the state of war, “Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues,” and thus, “there be no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct, but only that to be every man’s that he can get, and for so long as he can keep it.”<sup>17</sup> Fundamental to the Hobbesian state of war is not only the loss of personal security, but also the loss of property as a key factor in the crisis of faith in liberalism. Property, in the Hobbesian state of war, is reduced to force, and this makes it fundamentally incompatible with the liberal premise of property as a political right. But more important for this discussion is the fact that Hobbes finds in this crisis of property the origin of violence in the state of war and, as we have indicated, not in an essentialist notion of human nature.

In chapter XIII of *Leviathan*, writing on the conditions of “felicity and misery” of mankind, Hobbes notes the fundamental equality of human beings, saying “when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he.”<sup>18</sup> Hobbes was not a communist, but this quote suggests that he adheres to some form of economic equality, discarding the notion that economic inequality is a fact of life. From his historical framework, however, it is clear that here Hobbes is arguing for the bourgeois form of property, that is private property, and against monarchical forms

of property like nobility titles. Also, Hobbes here presents an early critique of the concept of property in general, arguing against property as a power hierarchy and for some fundamental equality of power over material wealth. Hobbes continues exploring the consequences of property, saying:

From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. *And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and ...endeavour to destroy or subdue one another* [italics added].<sup>19</sup>

Hobbes' argument here comes full circle to mark the starting point of violence, and by doing so, it reveals a fundamental contradiction of Leviathan: property is both the consequence of the monopoly of violence by the state and the cause of the violence that destabilizes it. It is not just that life becomes *poor* in the state of war but that the immiseration of life itself might bring forth the state of war. By placing the condition for wellbeing (and peace) in the satisfaction of economic needs, Hobbes links the emergence of violence to the competition for the means to satisfy those needs. As such, the state of war is in no way a natural state; on the contrary, it is the result of the breakdown of the politico-economic system.

We must turn now to the historical framework in which Hobbes writes *Leviathan*, that is, the English Civil War (1642–1651). Now the question is: what were the politico-economic conditions at the historical roots of this war? As

Marxist historian Norah Carlin notes when discussing the complicated class struggles that took place before and during this period, “there is no doubt that the gentry did play the leading role in the preliminary crisis of 1640: they dominated the House of Commons, and the concessions they demanded of Charles I – the ‘constitutional revolution’ and the execution of his chief ministers – were major ones, resulting from the bitterness of the opposition to the King’s policies that had grown up during his eleven years’ rule without



# The dual political structure of Leviathan and Behemoth, although first presented as antagonism, reveals itself in history as one of strategic alliances.

Parliament.”<sup>20</sup> The gentry—composed of the landed aristocracy and the landed bourgeoisie—became representative of the national interests of the bourgeoisie as it amassed political power. This accumulation of political power was in itself the result of what Marx calls the process of primitive accumulation, the historical phase of capitalism in which land is transformed into private property, which was well underway in England by this point in time.

On the period leading to the Civil War, Carlin notes: “There is also no doubt that the previous hundred years had seen a major redistribution of landed property, which had benefited the gentry at the expense of both the peasantry, and of the Crown and peerage, and that this had put the gentry in a very strong position to challenge Charles I’s ham-fisted attempts at establishing an absolute monarchy.” As a consequence, poverty and inequality rose in this period: “The number of propertyless was even greater than the number of actual wage-earners, for unemployment, underemployment and the destitution of small producers were widespread.” We see here how Hobbes’ political theory relates to his historical situation. The accumulation of land into fewer and fewer aristocrats led to both the emergence of a property-owning class strong enough to resist the monarchy and

a landless peasantry large enough to threaten the landholding class. This produced a new landless proletariat and a reactionary royalist aristocracy, both of which now posed a threat to the emergent liberal state from the left and the right, respectively. Thus, in the period preceding the war, the poverty of a growing sector of the population threatens to undermine the very model that the gentry seeks to impose; that is, the liberal capitalist state. And this is precisely what we see happen in the context of the war: initially, the landless sectors of the populations organized under proto-socialist organization seeking forms of communal ownership of land, specifically the Diggers and the Levellers. These left-wing movements were eliminated in 1649 as the gentry consolidated the power of the state under Oliver Cromwell. This finally permits us to examine the dialectical role of Oliver Cromwell in the revolution; as Carlin notes, “what the bourgeoisie needed in 1648–9 was an arbiter to save it *from royalist restoration on the one hand and revolution from below on the other.*” (italics added).



# Under fascism, force is both the prime philosophical and ethical justification. Might is both truth and right.

## Behemoth, or Fascism

The alliance between authoritarian liberalism and fascism and the dual political structure of revolution and reaction become clear when we examine the historical period of the English Civil War. The principal result was, in form, the triumph of liberalism over monarchism and the establishment of parliamentary rule over absolute rule: in a limited way, a democratic triumph. However, in practice, the result was much different. In order to establish hegemony, the Cromwellian regime made many alliances with the monarchical and ecclesiastic forces of reaction.<sup>21</sup> Early in the war, the parliamentarian side had the support of the ethnonationalist English Puritans, which provided the pretext to persecute the Scottish, Irish, and royalist sides, on the charge of suspected Catholicism and 'Popery.' Cromwell was also responsible for the suppression of left-wing political formations centered around land redistribution and most prominently a large campaign of settler colonialism and subsequent genocide in Ireland which killed up to five-sixths of the island's population.<sup>22</sup> Through the Act for the Settlement of Ireland of 1652, Cromwell and the Parliament confiscated large amounts of land from Irish Catholics and gave it to English Protestant settlers, thus committing an

ethnic cleansing and transforming the politico-economic structure of the island into agrarian capitalism, completing the primitive accumulation of Irish soil and labor under British imperial capitalism.

The dual political structure of Leviathan and Behemoth, although first presented as antagonism, reveals itself in history as one of strategic alliances. In a time of crisis, the liberal state fails to uphold its end of the deal, the liberal social contract, and property and security are no longer assured. In spatial terms, this means the collapse of the distinction between the inside and the outside, public and private, and thus the lack of a clear demarcation between the space of peace, controlled by the state, and the space of war. In political terms, this alliance entails the fusion of the state into civil life. This does not entail the disappearance of the state, which would be the communist end goal; on the contrary, this constitutes the expansion of the state into every aspect of social life, not unlike the military structure of the army does unto its troops. The consequence of the crisis is the total mobilization of society itself, because as war permeates every aspect of internal life, the only security remaining is in gangsterism. If the giant Leviathan is the assurance of perpetual peace, Behemoth is of war. In this condition of crisis, the state becomes



*brutish*, that is, no longer based on reason and the social contract, but purely on gangsterism and opportunism. Under the Leviathanic state, only security and property are assured. Therefore, all the forms of illiberal political oppression (such as unequal voting rights, slavery, the subjugation of women and children as tools) are not only permissible but also legal. Consequently, Leviathanic capitalism, or minimally-regulated capitalism, is completely unimpeded by the most illiberal forms of government, and thus is promptly co-opted by these. Capitalism, as any economic system, produces political systems modeled after itself; thus it can be stripped of its own liberal political form by the forces of reaction and thrive under tyrannical forms of government, particularly during times of

crisis and civil war such as Hobbes' own state of nature. This is the historical function of fascism: to uphold capitalism during times when its liberal state form is in crisis.

In *Behemoth* (1681), the sequel to *Leviathan* which remained unpublished until after Hobbes' death, the author describes the period of the Civil Wars as a time where, if someone "as from the Devil's Mountain, should have looked upon the world and observed the actions of men, especially in England, might have had a prospect of all kinds of injustice, and of all kinds of folly, that the world could afford, and how they were produced by their hypocrisy and self-conceit, whereof the one is double iniquity, and the other double folly."<sup>23</sup> In this book, Hobbes' opposition to reaction (and



**Capital will seek alliances with all the sedimentary leftovers of previous modes of production, in order to keep control of the state.**

*Leviathan's* position as a defense of the liberal state) become clearer, as he rejects the political opportunism as well as the religious nationalism that characterizes the state that results from the war. For Hobbes, as the passage makes clear, this period of reaction is characterized by injustice, folly, hypocrisy, and self-conceit; in a word, gangsterism. Clearly, this is not a situation of war fought under romantic notions of 'honor' or 'duty,' with well-defined sides and aims, but a devolvement into a state of statelessness and of might as right. A similar political climate of gangsterism and chaos is noticeable in Franz Neumann's *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*. When analyzing the ideology of Nazism, the author writes: "National Socialist ideology is devoid of

any inner beauty. The style of its living writers is abominable, the constructions confused, the consistency nil. Every pronouncement springs from the immediate situation and is abandoned as soon as the situation changes."<sup>24</sup> Neumann makes it clear that fascism has a completely "immediate and opportunistic" relation to reality and therefore its ideology is purely reactionary and not based on any set of principles. This opportunism also points to the larger condition of failed judiciary, meaning that right again has devolved into might; this is when gangsterism takes the role of the social contract. Under fascism, force is both the prime philosophical and ethical justification. Might is both truth and right.

It is of no consequence to ponder on whether the



Cromwellian regime should be called fascist. The noteworthy fact here is that every crisis of the liberal state unleashes the forces of reaction present in the foundational antagonism within the liberal state itself which, as we have seen, is property. It is also around property that the forces of reaction agglomerate and form hegemonies. Under fascism, right ceases to be based on reason and instead is based on force, which under capitalism corresponds to property. Therefore, under fascism, which is always also capitalist, property becomes *causa sui*, its facticity becomes its own justification. As such, this state form provides the optimal politico-economic environment for primitive accumulation, which is always carried out by force. As we have seen, this was the case in Ireland in 1652; the case of the Third Reich's *Lebensraum*, Imperial Japan's conquest of China and Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, the United States' Manifest Destiny and the conquest of the west, provide similar historical examples. The alliance between the ruling class of capitalism and the forces of reaction, as we have said, is one of strategy: absent the state to assure property and security, the capitalists must turn to the traditional power hierarchies to maintain control of property. In practice, this means that capital will seek alliances with fundamentalist religion, patriarchy, nationalism, and monarchism; that is, all the sedimentary leftovers of previous modes of production, in order to keep control of the state. Thus, as the foundation of sovereignty changes from reason (contract) to fact (force) the liberal state ceases to be and the fascist state rises.

In principle, but only in principle, fascism is opposed to capitalism, as the primary engine of liberalism. To understand the fundamental antagonism between fascism and liberalism we must consider the inner workings of capitalism. Marx explains this process in a well-known passage from the *Communist Manifesto*, which we quote at length:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of soci-

ety. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. *All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air...*<sup>25</sup>

Capitalism constantly erodes at the basis of traditional power hierarchies because it constantly revolutionizes social relations of production. As Marx notes here and elsewhere, capitalism has an unmatched emancipatory power to dismantle ancient hierarchies of oppression: religious, political, sexual or of any symbolic kind, and refashion these social relations after its own image. In general, fascism struggles to uphold these symbolic structures of the past, but this is a tragic struggle, a lost cause in the fullest sense, because under capitalism *all that is solid melts into air*: capitalism is able to abstract any traditional symbolic structure into the general form of representation, namely capital. In other words, this means that there is no hallowed temple of Western Civilization that cannot be bought and sold, no sacred Indigenous ritual that cannot be made into a Broadway show. But capitalism, which constantly erodes the foundations of all traditional societies during times of peace, also provides the means for the forces of reaction to uphold traditional power structures, primarily property, during times of crisis.

What is fascism? In order to produce a general definition of fascism, we take several sources, referring to different historical manifestations. First, *fascism is idealism*: according to Mussolini & Gentile, in *The Doctrine of Fascism*, "The Fascist conception of life is a religious one," which rejects the "superficial, material" view of the world and instead proposes a worldview based around "common traditions and a mission which suppressing the instinct for life closed in a brief circle of pleasure, builds up a higher life, founded on duty, a life

**Fascism rejects democracy and consequently rejects the liberal foundation of political equality as well as completely rejecting communism.**



**The liberal state comes here to a fatal contradiction: by ensuring peace and property, it assures the violence of property. Leviathan, thus, creates and recreates Behemoth as justification for its own existence.**





free from the limitations of time and space, in which the individual, by self sacrifice, the renunciation of self-interest, by death itself, can achieve *that purely spiritual existence in which his value as a man consists.*"<sup>26</sup>

Second, *fascism is war*: for fascism, war is the natural state of human society. "War alone keys up all human energies to their maximum tension and sets the seal of nobility on those peoples who have the courage to face it. All other tests are substitutes which never place a man face to face with himself before the alternative of life or death. *Therefore all doctrines which postulate peace at all costs are incompatible with Fascism*"<sup>27</sup>; a direct consequence of this is the *total militarization of society*, that is the expansion of the state's security apparatus until it becomes one with civil society: "For Fascism the State is absolute, individuals and groups relative. Individuals and groups are admissible in so far as they come within the State. Instead of directing the game and guiding the material and moral progress of the community, the liberal State restricts its activities to recording results. *The Fascist State is wide awake and has a will of its own.*"<sup>28</sup> The fascist state is here reacting against the Leviathanic state, and the relative, immanent power of a social contract; instead holding that for the state to be sovereign, it must also be absolute, or all-encompassing. As such, for fascism, those outside the state are acting against the will of the state and vice versa. Here, the state and the will of the state become one. This point is expanded by Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political* when he declares: "The *protego ergo oblige* is the *cogito ergo sum* of the state," meaning that the protection afforded by the state demands unconditional obedience from its subjects."<sup>29</sup>

Third, *fascism is inequality*: fascism rejects democracy *tout court* and consequently rejects the liberal foundation of political equality as well as completely rejecting communism. "In rejecting democracy, Fascism rejects the absurd conventional lie of political egalitarianism, the habit of collective irresponsibility, the myth of felicity and indefinite progress."<sup>30</sup> The radical inequality of political subjects under fascism means that it is

fundamentally a rejection of democracy and a bid for elitism, which in practice under capitalism means oligarchy. The fascist political and economic state provides the conditions for what we could call in politico-economic terms War Capitalism, a system where economic inequality justifies political inequality. Under such an economic system, no social contract is possible, and thus fascism must rule by direct coercion of the majority. The oppression of a majority and the upkeep of strict vertical hierarchy is thus fundamental to fascism, and it is also this which necessarily leads fascist states to imperialism.

In Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*, the author makes clear that "...the fundamental goal of National Socialism [is] the resolution by imperialistic war of the discrepancy between the potentialities of Germany's industrial apparatus and the actuality that existed and continues to exist."<sup>31</sup> According to Neumann's definition, fascism is the violent resolution to the economic tension between internal existing capital and external space, that is, the tendency of capitalism to expand, by any means necessary. In the German case, fascist economic policy included widespread use of slavery and settler colonialism abroad, as well as strategic alliances with the industrial and financial bourgeoisie, including the largest banks and corporations in Germany. In the English case, the Cromwellian regime was supported by the landed aristocracy at home, composed by the bourgeoisie and nobility, while imposing slavery and colonialism on Ireland. Genocide was common to both regimes, as was ethnonationalism and religious fundamentalism. The dialectical relation present between Cromwell's historical roles is that of authoritarian liberalism and fascism, mythologically corresponding to the war of Leviathan and Behemoth.

According to Schmitt, the myth of Leviathan comes from the *Book of Job*, as a "strongest and most tremendous sea monster" endlessly crossing the oceans.<sup>32</sup> Schmitt in his 1942 *Land and Sea*, however, develops more fully the Jewish kabbalistic interpretation from the *Psalms*, in which "World history appears as a battle among heathens. The leviathan, symbolizing sea powers,

fighting the behemoth, representing land powers. The latter tries to tear the leviathan apart with his horns, while the leviathan covers the behemoth's mouth and nostrils with his fins and kills him in that way. This is, incidentally, a fine depiction of the mastery of a country by a blockade."<sup>33</sup> The mythological framework here poses the two theories of the state in antagonist relation, associated to different politico economic formations: land powers, which in Schmitt's formulation corresponds to Germany, and sea powers, which corresponds to England. This antagonism also refers to two contradictory economic forces: the imperative to accumulate agrarian economies and the imperative to expand commercial economies. It also refers to the cyclical nature of crises under capitalism and consequent bourgeois-fascist effort to return to a form of capitalism in which the social contract was intact. The Schmittian mythological framework of an endless war between monsters is, thus, a part of both the liberal and fascist state ideology inasmuch as it presents a dualistic political world trapped between the perpetual peace of Leviathan and the perpetual war of Behemoth. The Hobbesian mythological framework corresponds to liberal ideology in that it posits the final victory of Leviathan, and the possibility of a perpetual peace, which keeps the state of war forever on the outside.

The permanent outside of war is, thus, the justification of the liberal state, without which it has no purpose. For Hobbes, this condition is permanent because war is not a particular violent event, it is political condition in which the state has lost the monopoly of violence: "For WAR consisteth not in battle only, or the act of everyone, fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known. ...so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE."<sup>34</sup> The time of peace corresponds here to a situation in which the social contract, and thus the state, are firmly in place. Consequently, peace can exist only under the sovereignty of the state and the condition for the maintenance of peace becomes the perpetuation of the state.

## Perpetual War and the Emancipation of Humanity

The article "Behemoth and Leviathan: The Fascist Bestiary of the Alt-Right" by Harrison Fluss and Landon Frim describes the mythological framework of Leviathan and Behemoth in the international wave of reactionary political movements that began the second decade of the 21st Century. The authors present a contemporary reading of the myth in the following terms: "These beasts are a pair of opposites: Behemoth is autochthonous, representing the stable order of earth-bound peoples. Leviathan is thalassocratic, embodying the fluid dynamism of seafaring peoples. Behemoth signifies terrestrial empires, while Leviathan suggests commercial trade and exploration. The former stands for traditional, divinely sanctioned state authority, the latter for the spirit of pirate-capitalist enterprise (what Schmitt calls 'corsair capitalism')." In the article, they proceed to associate the thalassocratic and autochthonous ideologies to neo-fascist writers Nick Land and Alexander Dugin, reiterating Schmitt's theory of land and sea powers, which these writers also rely on.

However, as we have proposed from the historical comparison with Hobbes, liberalism's expansive thalassocracy is fundamentally linked with the worldwide expansion of capitalism and the completion of what Marx calls the *world-market*, or the process of globalization, while Behemoth corresponds to the collective response of the forces of premodern reaction against this seemingly unstoppable advance. In late capitalism, this mythological war continues to fuel the ideology of an antagonistic relation between liberalism and fascism as superficially competing, yet in reality intertwined, theories of the state. In late capitalism, the ideological function of the myth is to perpetuate the idea that reactionary or fully fascist crises are inevitable, that the Hobbesian 'state of nature' is a fact of the world and not a logical consequence of the liberal capitalist state itself. It is a properly ide-

# The ideological trick of myth has been in presenting the ideal antagonism as natural and inevitable, presenting the fall into fascism as a failure of human nature, instead of as alternating phases in the historical development of capitalism.

alist position that naturalizes the state of war as the world in-itself; and then naturalizes the liberal state as the only possibility of peace within this world. Instead, historicizing these moments of crisis permits us to see the structural causes that lead to the transformation of the liberal state into fascism, beyond particular considerations of each iteration, beyond the ideological formations of fatalism and pessimistic narratives about ‘human nature’.

Slavoj Žižek, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, writes “that every rise of fascism bears witness to a failed revolution.”<sup>35</sup> Regardless if Benjamin actually said this, the statement remains true: every crisis of the liberal state is an opportunity for a left-wing revolution, that is to change the regime of property and other power hierarchies; which is followed by right-wing reaction to reinforce all traditional power hierarchies, primarily property because it is also the source of factual power under fascism in absence of the liberal social contract. Thus, the rise of fascism is always a sure indicator of the condition for revolution, or at the very least, for civil violence. But the triumph of fascism can only take place when it successfully crushes left-wing resistance and takes over the whole of the po-

litical apparatus. Marx noted in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte* comparing the weak French autocrat to the Lord Protector, that history repeats itself, “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” This statement also points to the failure of the proletarian revolution to take power in times of crisis and, at least in the cases that we have examined, and the subsequent triumph of reaction both over the left as well as over liberal capitalism. The tragedy of a failed revolution leads to the farce of an oligarchic takeover. Marx understood that the cyclical historical pattern of the forces of reaction is explained by the very cyclical nature of crises under capitalism and, thus, as capitalism continues suffering crises, the liberal state will continue falling into fascism.

Hobbes uses a materialist theory of violence based around the problem of distribution of property, and then proceeds to build a state theory around the problem of this very violence, the violence of property. Thus, it is clear that liberalism, from its very foundations, depends on the perpetuation of peace only in opposition to the threat of perpetual war. The liberal state comes here to a fatal contradiction: by ensuring peace and property, it assures both the violence of property and the freedom



from violence. Leviathan, thus, creates and recreates Behemoth as justification for its own existence. The ideological trick of myth has been, thus far, presenting this ideal antagonism as natural and inevitable, presenting the fall into fascism as a failure of human nature, instead of as alternating phases in the historical development of capitalism.

## Endnotes

1. The myth describes two monstrous creatures perpetually at war with each other: Leviathan, a sea serpent; and Behemoth, a land animal sometimes depicted as a water ox or a hippopotamus. The mythical beasts have historically been used in political theory and other related fields to represent sea and land powers, respectively.

2. Thomas Hobbes (5 April 1588 – 4 December 1679) was an English philosopher, widely considered a founding figure of modern political philosophy and liberalism.

3. Carl Schmitt (11 July 1888 – 7 April 1985) was a German legal scholar and political theorist, as well as the most prominent intellectual figure of the Nazism.

4. See: Tralau “Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt: The Politics of Order and Myth”; Tralau “Order, the ocean, and Satan: Schmitt’s Hobbes, National Socialism, and the enigmatic ambiguity of friend and foe.”; Weiler “From absolutism to totalitarianism: Carl Schmitt on Thomas Hobbes”; Ette “Carl Schmitt’s Radical Democracy: Schmitt, Hobbes and the Return to Political Identity”; Springborg “Hobbes’s Biblical Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth”; Dean “A political mythology of world order: Carl Schmitt’s *nomos*”

5. Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays*, 1917–1932. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. 5

6. Brecht, Bertolt. *Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties*. Syracuse University Press, 1935. 2

7. Uehlinger. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. 515.

8. *Psalms* 74

9. Hobbes, T. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Hackett Publishing, 1994. 3.

10. Skinner, Quentin. “The Ideological Context of Hobbes’s Political Thought.” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 9, no. 3, 3, 1966. 288.

11. Stanton, Timothy. “Hobbes and Schmitt.” *Pact with the Devil: The Ethics, Politics and Economics of Anti-Machiavellian Machiavellism*, vol. 37, no. 2, June 2011. 163.

12. Hobbes 3.

13. *Ibid.* 113.

14. *Ibid.* 114.

15. *Ibid.* 76.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.* 78.

18. *Ibid.* 74.

19. *Ibid.* 75.

20. Carlin, Norah. “Marxism and the English Civil War.” *International Socialism*, vol. 10, 1980, pp. 106–28. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/carlin/1980/xx/civilwar.html>

21. On the rationale for Puritan support of Cromwell, see Lamont 349.

22. Prendergast, J. P. *The Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland*. P.M. Haverty, 1868. 177.

23. Hobbes. *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*. J. Bohn, 1839. 165.

24. Neumann, Franz. *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944*. Oxford University Press, 1944. 37.

25. Marx, K., and F. Engels. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*. Prometheus Books, 1988. 212.

26. Gentile, G., and Mussolini, B. “The Doctrine of Fascism” *Encyclopedia Italiana* vol. 14. 1932. <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm>

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. Schmitt, C. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. 52.

30. Gentile, G., and Mussolini, B.

31. Neumann, Franz. *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944*. Oxford

University Press, 1944. 66.

32. Schmitt, C. *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. 6.

33. Schmitt, C. *Land and Sea: A World-Historical Meditation*. Telos Press Publishing, 2015. 8.

34. Hobbes. *Leviathan* 76.

35. Zizek, S. *Living in the End Times*. Verso, 2011. 152.

## Works Cited

Brecht, Bertolt. *Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties*. Syracuse University Press, 1935.

Carlin, Norah. "Marxism and the English Civil War." *International Socialism*, vol. 10, 1980, pp. 106–28. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/carlin/1980/xx/civilwar.html>

Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays, 1917–1932*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.

Fluss, Harrison, and Landon Frim. "Behemoth and Leviathan: The Fascist Bestiary of the Alt-Right." *Salvage*, no. 5, Oct. 2017, pp. 109–23. Apr. <http://salvage.zone/in-print/behemoth-and-leviathan-the-fascist-bestiary-of-the-alt-right/>

Gentile, G., and Mussolini, B. "The Doctrine of Fascism" *Encyclopedia Italiana* vol. 14. 1932. <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm>

Hobbes, T. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Hackett Publishing, 1994.

---. *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*. J. Bohn, 1839.

Lamont, W. "Richard Baxter, 'Popery' and the Origins of the English Civil War." *History*, vol. 87, no. 287, July 2002, pp. 336–52. 30h.

Marx, K., and F. Engels. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*. Prometheus Books, 1988.

Neumann, Franz. *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944*. Oxford University Press, 1944.

Parenti, M. *Blackshirts and Reds: Rational Fascism and the Overthrow of Communism*. City Lights Publishers,

1997.

Prendergast, J. P. *The Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland*. P.M. Haverty, 1868.

Ross, A. R. *Against the Fascist Creep*. AK Press, 2017.

Schmitt, C. *Land and Sea: A World-Historical Meditation*. Translated by R.A. Berman and S.G. Zeitlin, Telos Press Publishing, 2015.

---. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

---. *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*. Translated by G. Schwab, University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Stanton, Timothy. "Hobbes and Schmitt." *Pact with the Devil: The Ethics, Politics and Economics of Anti-Machiavellian Machiavellism*, vol. 37, no. 2, June 2011, pp. 160–67.

van der Toorn, K., et al. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Skinner, Quentin. "The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 9, no. 3, 3, 1966, pp. 286–317. JSTOR.

Uehlinger, Christoph. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. 515.

Zizek, S. *Living in the End Times*. Verso, 2011.

