The Sleeping Subject: On the Use and Abuse of Imagination in Hobbes's *Leviathan*

Abstract

The work of Thomas Hobbes is typically interpreted with a strong focus on the ideals of reason and rationality. This paper contributes to the growing scholarly recognition of the complexity of Hobbes's thought and of his deep interest and concern with the less rational aspects of human nature and action and the danger they pose to political order and stability. In particular, this paper explores the role played by the imagination in Hobbes's conception of human nature and his political argument. As I argue, the imagination is a central element in Hobbes's epistemology and psychology and hence an inextricable part of his conception of human nature, actions, and motivation. I provide further textual evidence that suggests that the role of imagination in Hobbes's thought is not limited to his epistemology and psychology, but also to his political thought more generally. The imagination can be both conducive to social order and a major source of political and social instability. Accordingly, I argue that in order to secure the stability and longevity of his rule, the Hobbesian sovereign has to control the imagination, to utilize it in a way that will contribute to the maintenance of order while securing against its disruptive potential.

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1. Introduction

The work of Thomas Hobbes, including his political work in general and *Leviathan* in particular, is typically interpreted with a strong focus on the ideals of reason and rationality. This tendency is, of course, quite natural: throughout his philosophic work, Hobbes seems to have a

firm belief in the power of reason to promote, through rational inquiry, true knowledge of the world. Moreover, his political writings can be easily read as assuming the rationality of human actors and as portraying the end of human actions as nothing more than utility maximization and self-preservation. This tendency is most clearly evident in the work of thinkers such as Hampton (1986) and Gauthier (1969). This "standard philosophical interpretation" of Hobbes is summarized well by Lloyd. According to her, such views hold "that Hobbes intended to derive a necessary form of political organization from fundamental egoistic human nature, that Hobbes was a moral subjectivist or relativist, that the essentials of Hobbes's theory can be captured without reference to religious interests, that political obligation is solely prudentially based, that might makes order, and correspondingly that fear of death and the desire for self-preservation are the strongest motivating forces" (Lloyd 1992, 7).

At the same time, however, Hobbes devotes a large part of *Leviathan* to some of the irrational aspects of men's nature: passions, fears, false beliefs, and prejudices. These seem to indicate that for Hobbes, humans are not as rational as we may think, and reason is not the only motivating force behind their actions. Among those irrational aspects, one appears particularly important for Hobbes: the faculty of imagination. While Hobbes's work suggests that he was genuinely interested in the imagination, scholars have often overlooked this aspect of his thought.[1] In short, there seems to be a tension or a certain contradiction in our traditional approach to Hobbes and in the tendency to prioritize the role of reason in his political theory at the expense of the immaterial, irrational, and imaginary.

This paper aims to contribute to the growing recognition of the complexity of Hobbes's work and to its non-unitary nature. Such a depiction of Hobbes was promoted in a number of major

[1] Important exceptions for this can be found in Sepper (1988), Birmingham (2011) and Pern (2015).

scholarly works that demonstrated the multidimensionality of his writings, his grave concern with religion and scriptural arguments, and the tension that is found in his thought between his commitment to the traditions of the "new science" on the one hand and of the art of rhetoric on the other. The scholarly recognition of Hobbes's interest in religion and scriptural arguments have grown significantly in recent decades (e.g., Springborg (1975), Sommerville (2007), Lessay (2007) and Tuck (2011)). Lloyd (1992), for example, argues that the traditional reading of Hobbes's *Leviathan* has led us to virtually ignore the second half of this book and to miss how concerned Hobbes was with the destabilizing potential of religious "transcendent interests." Recently, McQueen (2017) demonstrated how situating Hobbes's political work within the context of the proliferation of religious apocalyptic visions and prophecies can shed light on his concern with such phenomena and their contributions to the potential and actual collapse of social order. Other recent revisionist perspectives in the study of Hobbes's political thought highlight, for example, his interest in the art of rhetoric and the tension between this interest and his commitment to the scientific method (Johnston (1986); Skinner's (1996)).

Though this new literature enlarges our understanding of the complexity of Hobbes's thought, it nonetheless provides us only with a partial understanding of the role played by the imagination in Hobbes's thought in general, and his political thought in particular. Specifically, by focusing on Hobbes's conceptions of the irrational and the imaginary in the context of his religious and scriptural arguments and his rhetoric, it is unable to provide us with a comprehensive account of the foundations of Hobbes's conception of the imaginary and the irrational. Nor can it account for the critical role these elements play in his understanding of human nature, human psychology and epistemology, human action and motives, the state of nature and the causes of war, the problem of political stability, and the means by which peace and order can be achieved and secured.

In this paper, I wish to offer an alternative reading of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, one that is centered around his conception of the human faculty of imagination. As I will argue, imagination plays a central role in Hobbes's argument in the *Leviathan*. It appears as an inextricable part of his epistemology and psychology and thus as an intrinsic aspect of human nature and behavior. Acknowledging this, it should not come to us as surprise that the imagination plays an essential role in Hobbes's political argument as well. Specifically, as I will argue in detail, the imagination is a crucial aspect of Hobbes's primary political concern—that of political stability—by being both a significant source of potential instability and, accordingly, a necessary part of stable and enduring sovereignty.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: the first part is dedicated to a reconstruction of Hobbes's conception of the imagination as it appears in the early chapters of the *Leviathan,* specifically with respect to his conception of epistemology and human psychology. In the second part of this paper, I will argue that the role of imagination in Hobbes's argument is not limited to his understanding of human nature, psychology, and epistemology, but is, in fact, an integral part of his broader political argument and project. As I will show, the imagination can both contribute and be detrimental to political stability. Specifically, I will draw from Hobbes's account of the state of sleep and of the operation of the imagination during sleep to argue that Hobbes solved the problem of the imagination by generating a powerful imaginary that aims to capture the subject's mind, and then maintain the subjects in a state of sleep, preventing any kind of alternative imaginary from entering their mind and thereby disrupting the social order.

2. The Imagination in Hobbes's Epistemology and Psychology

To understand the role played by the imagination in Hobbes's political thought, we first ought to have a clear understanding of its role in his conception of human nature. This route is somewhat laborious, but it fits well with Hobbes's geometrical scientific method, which typically starts with laying down the fundamental building blocks of the laws of physics and epistemology and providing a comprehensive set of definitions and axioms that guide the rest of the inquiry. Moreover, following Hobbes's laborious route and carefully working through his definitions is quite rewarding, as it helps us uncover the ways in which these basic assumptions continue to bear significant consequences in his understanding of politics and his construction of a solution to the problem of social and political instability.

2.1. The Imagination in Hobbes's Epistemology

Hobbes devotes the first part of *Leviathan* to an outline of the foundations of his political theory and of his conception of human nature, a discussion where the faculty of imagination plays a central role. The first building blocks in this discussion are the senses and sense perception. What we view as sense perception is, according to Hobbes, merely the results of an external motion that causes pressure on one or more of the sense organs. This, in turn, leads to inner motions, pressure within the human body, and then an outward endeavor of the heart. Finally, the outward endeavor results in *seeming* or *fancy*, which is what appears to us as sense perception. Thus, argues Hobbes, "Sense in all cases, is nothing els but original fancy, caused by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of externall things upon our Eyes, Eares, and other organs thereunto ordained" (Hobbes 1968, 86).

A clear and important implication of Hobbes's theory of sense perception is that what we perceive and the objects of our perception are not identical. Indeed, Hobbes explicitly argues that "the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another" (Hobbes 1968, 86). This argument is developed more fully in *The Elements*, where Hobbes holds that "whatsoever accidents or qualities our senses make us think there be in the world, they are not there, but are seemings and apparitions only. The things that really are in the world without us, are those motions by which these seemings are caused. And this is the great deception of sense, which also is by sense to be corrected" (Hobbes 2008, 26).[2]

Thus understood, imagination plays an essential role in Hobbes's epistemology and his account of sense perception. In this account, the end-product of the sense perception is not an objective knowledge of external material objects, but it is rather nothing more than a "fancy" of our mind. However, the power of the imagination is not limited to the production of such ephemeral and vivid "fancies." Rather, the mental representation that is created by the imagination in our mind retain some of its force, but as a "decaying sense" that losses its vividness as time passes. As such, "the longer the time is, after the sight, for Sense of any object, the weaker is the Imagination" (Hobbes 1968, 88). This is, in part, due to the constant stimuli of the mind by external movements, such that "though the sense be past, the image or conception remaineth; but more obscurely while we are awake, because some object or other continually plieth and soliciteth our eyes, and ears, keeping the mind in a stronger motion, whereby the weaker doth not easily appear" (Hobbes 2008, 27).

[2] This argument is based on a prior distinction that Hobbes makes in *The Elements* between an "accident" and a "conception" of bodily things. The former represents the "thing in itself," what it actually is or has, whereas the latter is what we perceive of the thing as a "phenomenon" (Hobbes 2008, 24). For a comprehensive analysis of this argument, see Leijenhorst (2007), Gaskin (2008, xix) and Barnouw (1980).

Following a similar logic, Hobbes defines memory as another form of imagination (more specifically, as a "decaying imagination"). Thus, we see that "*Imagination* and *Memory* are but one thing, which for divers considerations hath divers names" (Hobbes 1968, 89). Our ability to form memories is essential to the formation of human experience, as it allows us to follow our mental conceptions of causes and effects. By recording our mental impressions as a "succession of conceptions," we are able to gain experience and form expectations about the future (Hobbes 2008, 32).

Furthermore, we find that the imagination is also central to Hobbes's account of human understanding and knowledge. Understanding is defined as "the imagination that is raised in man ... by words, or other voluntary signes" (Hobbes 1968, 93-94). More accurately, understanding follows from a process of cognitive efficiency, where humans begin to create a set of "marks" that, by observing them, bring back to mind the thoughts they had when they set them up (Hobbes 2008, 35). While understanding, by itself, is common among all animals, what makes human understanding unique is that it includes "not onely his [man's] will; but his conceptions and thoughts, by the sequel and contexture of the names of things into Affirmations, Negations, and other forms of Speech" (Hobbes 1968, 93-94). Speech is the uniquely human faculty that allows us to elevate our natural imagination and conceptions onto a systematic and compounded collection of impressions and concepts. It represents a stable and common "mark," and provides us with the ability to register our fancies and "train of thoughts" in a more complex way and share them with others. It does this by allowing us to abstract and generalize: "the consequence found in one particular, comes to be registered and remembered, as a Universal rule; and discharges our mental reckoning, of time and place; and delivers us from all labour of the mind, saving the first;

and makes that which was found true *here*, and *now*, to be true in *all times* and *places*" (Hobbes 1968, 104).

Prior to this use of speech, human cognitive capacities are confined within the natural and primitive attempt to find the causes of phenomena in the amalgam of fancies and trains of imagination. Given an underdeveloped state of the human cognitive capacities, all that men could aim for would be the natural prudence that results from one's diverse experiences throughout life and the quickness of one's imagination (Hobbes 2008, 33). In contrast, the development of speech allows humans to replace natural prudence with reason and science by expanding humans' natural capacities and replacing the limited and uncertain approximation of causal relationship with actual knowledge of causes and consequences. The use of words—which are nothing but artificial universal signifiers—allows the formation of a set of definitions. Hence, it provides us with the means to develop a more stable and tractable process of reasoning, one that records the consequences of words, rather than fancies (Hobbes 1968, 101, 110-111).

It seems that this reasoning process, and the replacement of the subjectivity of fancies with the more stable and certain arithmetic and geometric methods of science, should allow us to base our knowledge on more objective grounds. And yet, Hobbes explains that "no discourse whatsoever, can End in absolute knowledge of Fact." This conclusion follows from the earlier definition of human sense perception, "for, as for the knowledge of Fact, it is originally, Sense; and every after, Memory. And for the knowledge of Consequence, which […] is called Science, it is not Absolute, but Conditionall" (Hobbes 1968, 131). A further explanation for the conditional nature of human knowledge is found in *The Elements*. There, Hobbes explains that the many errors in humans are the result of the deception of the senses, the inconstant nature of names and their tendency to be equivocal, and "how diversified by passion […] and how subject men are to

paralogism, or fallacy in reason" (Hobbes 2008, 39). Both sense perception and the human attempt to record and order their sensual experience by the use of words are prone to errors, and that fact can account for the unstable and conditional nature even of scientific forms of knowledge.[3]

The imagination is thus a central aspect of Hobbes's mechanistic account for human sense perception. It provides a link between the movement of external material objects and the impression that our mind produces of them, and it explains the inherent instability of every form of human knowledge: scientific and pre-scientific alike. In the next section, I continue to explore the role of the imagination in Hobbes's depiction of human nature, by examining its functions in human psychology and in his account of a wide range of human emotions and behavior.

2.2. The Imagination in Hobbes's Psychology

In the following chapters of the *Leviathan*, we learn about the multiple human behaviors and psychological traits that owe their origins, at least in large part, to the imagination. As I argued above, Hobbes's account of the imagination suggests that it plays an essential role in the formation of human understanding, knowledge, and science, but it can also account for their unstable nature. And indeed, Hobbes is deeply concerned with the fact that while the imagination can be constructive and constitutive of knowledge, it can also easily lead man to mistake visions and 'waking dreams' as reality. In the *Leviathan*, for example, he argues that "even they that be perfectly awake, if they be timorous, and supperstitious, possessed with fearful tales, and alone in

[3] This argument led some commentators to argue that Hobbes's epistemology in the *Leviathan* abolishes the distinction between science and reason on the one hand, and imagination on the other (Leijenhorst 2007, 96-97), and that his theory of senses and knowledge leads to an inescapable phenomenalism, and cannot establish knowledge in a proper sense (Leshen 1985, 432-433)

the dark, are subject to the like fancies, and believes they see spirits and dead mens Ghosts walking in Church-yards" (Hobbes 1968, 92). Similarly, in *The Elements,* he explains that "proceeding from the ignorance of what those things are which are called spectra, images that appear in the dark to children, and such as have strong fears, and other strong imaginations […] For taking them to be things really without us, like bodies, and seeing them to come and vanish so strangely as they do, unlike to bodies." Unfortunately, many conclude such fancies to be spirits, "which is not the acknowledging of this truth: that spirits are; but a false opinion concerning the force of imagination" (Hobbes 2008, 66-67).

We thus learn that Hobbes viewed the faculty of imagination as having the potential of making humans more susceptible to deception. As such, it played into the hand of various seditious forces, especially religious institutions and figures. For example, Hobbes argues that "from this ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense, did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in time past" (Hobbes 1968, 92). Accordingly, Hobbes's account of natural religion implies that the imagination has an important part in planting the "natural seeds" of religion in human nature and psychology. This is because at least two of the four natural seeds of religion—"opinion of ghosts" and "ignorance of second causes" (Hobbes 1968, 172)—owe their origin to the imagination.

At the same time, imagination is the source of men's natural prudence and wit: two mental traits that will prove to be important to their capacity to leave the state of nature. Prudence is defined as a product of experience and of multiple observations of past occurrences, that allows for an approximation of the future, whereas "the *Future* being but a fiction of the mind, applying the sequels of actions Past, to the actions that are Present; which with most certainty is done by him that has most Experience" (Hobbes 1968, 96). Men's 'natural wit' is also closely related to

the faculty of imagination, as Hobbes tells us that "this NATURALL WITTE, consisteth principally in two things; *Celerity of Imagining*, (that is, swift succession of one thought to another;) and *steddy direction* to some approved end" (Hobbes 1968, 134).

Finally, and importantly, Hobbes adds that the faculty of imagination is the source of all voluntary human motions. Following Hobbes's previous set of definition, we can see that because "voluntary motions depend alwayes upon a precedent thought […] it is evident, that the imagination is the first internall beginning of all Voluntary motion" (Hobbes 1968, 118). The importance of this statement becomes clear when we learn that these small inner voluntary motions, what Hobbes calls "endeavors," constitute men's appetites (endeavor towards something) and aversions (endeavor away from something). Human's appetites and aversions are, of course, two key concepts in Hobbes's philosophical argument, his account of the problem of the state of nature, and his construction of a political solution to them.

We see further that the imagination, as the source of human inner voluntary motions, appetites, and aversions, has a constitutive role in a broad set of feelings. Among them, we learn that imagination is the source of men's feelings of glory and vain-glory. In the *Leviathan,* Hobbes argues that "*Joy*, arising from imagination of a mans own power and ability, is that exultation of the mind which is called GLORYING; but if grounded on the flattery of others; or only supposed by himself, for delight in the consequences of it, is called VAINE-GLORY" (Hobbes 1968, 125). Similarly, in *The Elements,* glory is defined as "that passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendenth with us." And it is further explained that "the fiction (which is also imagination) of actions done by ourselves, which never were done, is glorying; but because it begetteth no appetite nor endeavour

to any further attempt it is merely vain and unprofitable [...] And this is called VAIN GLORY" (Hobbes 2008, 50-51).

As this first part of the paper demonstrates, the imagination plays a central role in Hobbes's account of epistemology and human psychology. Sense perception, memory, prudence, and knowledge can all be traced to the operation of the imagination. Moreover, the imagination is found to have a constitutive effect over a wide range of human actions and emotions, being the cause of all internal motions and a large part of the formation of fear, glory, and vain-glory. Given the centrality of these and other emotions to Hobbes's political project, his account of the state of nature and his explanation of the causes of conflict among men, we already have good reasons to assume that the role he assigns to the imagination will not be limited to his epistemology and psychology but may very well be part of his political theory as well. In the second part of this paper, I build on this intuition and construct a comprehensive argument for the role of the imagination in Hobbes's political thought.

3. Imagination in Hobbes's Political Theory

Acknowledging the central part of the imagination in the early stages of the *Leviathan*, we may now ask: if imagination is such a central and crucial human faculty, shouldn't we expect it to play a central role in our social-political life, and, accordingly, in Hobbes's construction of his political theory in the *Leviathan*? In the rest of this paper, I will argue that the answer to this question is positive and provide a comprehensive portrayal of the political roles assigned to the imagination by Hobbes. More specifically, I will explore in depth the role of the imagination in Hobbes's account of political stability—one of the most central concerns of his political theory.

As I will argue, the imagination can be both conducive and detrimental to order and stability, and a prudent sovereign will have to learn to deploy it in his favor in order to promote and secure political stability. Based on a further exploration of Hobbes's theoretical explanation of the mental state of sleep and of the operation of the imagination during sleep, I conclude this section and the paper by suggesting that in order for the sovereign to solve the problem of the imagination, he must keep his subjects in a state of political sleep.

Hobbes's account of the imagination suggests that this faculty carries both positive and negative potential effects on political stability. The elements of the imagination that are conducive to political order and stability—those without which no stable sovereignty is possible—were hinted throughout this paper. Fear, pride and other human passions that lead men to accept the political authority and respect the law owe their origin to the faculty of the imagination. Moreover, the longevity of the social contract itself, as any other covenant, depends on the active and continued use of the imagination to reaffirm the social bonds and the artificial unity of the citizens in the state. And similarly, the civic laws, just as artificial as their author, are weak by their nature, and in need of some sort of collective imagination in order to be maintained and kept (Hobbes 1968, 263-264).[4]

This centrality of the imagination in the maintenance of social order may suggest, however, that the monopoly over the means of violence and the ability to threaten subjects with death—the cornerstones of the "standard philosophical interpretation" of Hobbes's political project—are not enough to secure political stability. To do that, the sovereign has to make use of the imagination and utilize its positive potential. An example of this kind of logic can be found in Hobbes's

[4] Given the limited length of this paper and its focus on political stability, I am unable to provide a comprehensive account of the various roles played by the imagination in these parts of the *Leviathan.* For a recent elaboration on the problem of representation in Hobbes's thought, see Skinner (2018, 190-221); For a comprehensive discussion of the meaning of artificial person of the state in Hobbes, see Skinner (1999)

Behemoth. There, speaker *B* expresses his wonder by the fact that the King lost in the Civil War, despite his military superiority. He asks, "how could the Parliament, when the King had a great navy, and a great number of trained soldiers, and all the magazines of ammunition in his power, be able to begin the war?" To this *A* replies that "the King had these things indeed in his right; but that signifies little, when they that had the custody of the navy and magazines, and with them all the trained soldiers, and in a manner all his subjects, were by the preaching of Presbyterian ministers, and the seditious whisperings of false and ignorant politicians, made his enemies" (Hobbes 1990, 27-28).

As is suggested by this quote, the adverse and potentially destabilizing effects of the imagination cannot be ignored. This is made clear by Hobbes on several occasions. For example, in the *Leviathan* he argues that "he that presumes to break the Law upon his own, or another Dream, to pretended Vision, or upon other Fancy of the power of Invisible Spirit, than is permitted by the Common-wealth, leaveth the Law of Nature, which is a certain offense, and followeth the *imagery* of his own, or another private mans brain […] which if every private man should have leave to do […] there could be no Law be made to hold, and so all Common-wealth would be dissolved" (Hobbes 1968, 344 [italics added]). This is a real threat, especially in light of Hobbes's awareness about the ease in which men's imagination is captured by eloquent speakers or charismatic and convincing prophets. The role of the imagination in generating this constant threat of disorder is made even clearer by Hobbes's statement that "if this superstitious fear of Spirits were taken away, and with it, Prognostiques from Dreams, false Prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which, crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted than they are for civil Obedience" (Hobbes 1968, 93). The danger posed by the

imagination is so great that it seems to be responsible for at least a large portion of men's tendency towards political disobedience.

One of the primary reasons for the potential destabilizing force of the imagination is its close association with eloquence, religious doctrines, and prophecy. More accurately, the imagination appears to be the source of men's vulnerability to the kind of sedation used by eloquent figures and religious leaders, which allows them to take advantage of individuals for their own personal gain and ambition. The link between eloquence and the imagination is made clear in *The Elements*. There, Hobbes explains that "another use of speech is INSTIGATION and APPEASING, by which we increase or diminish one another's passions; it is the same thing with persuasion" (Hobbes 2008, 76). This effect of eloquent speech and of the speaker's ability to control and manipulate the audience's emotional response is closely related to the imagination and the making of images. As Hobbes argues, "in raising passion from opinion, it is no matter whether the opinion be true or false, or the narration historical or fabulous. *For not truth, but image, maketh passion*" (Hobbes 2008, 76 [italics added]). Furthermore, Hobbes argues that "eloquence is nothing else but the power of winning belief of what we say; and to that end we must have aid from the passions of the hearer," and that "such is the power of eloquence, as many times man is made to believe thereby, that he sensibly feeleth smart and damage, when he feeleth none, and to enter into rage and indignation, without any other cause, than what is the words and passions of the speaker" (Hobbes 2008, 171).[5]

Among those who are capable and willing to take advantage of the vulnerability of the human imagination, Hobbes finds religious leaders and prophets to be posing the greatest threat to

[5] For a further discussion of Hobbes's complex account of rhetoric in his political writings, see, for example, Skinner (1996) and Johnston (1986)

political stability. The danger that is posed by such individuals is evident through the *Leviathan*[6] but is perhaps most comprehensively explored in Hobbes's account of the reasons for the English Civil War in his *Behemoth*. There, he is extremely concerned with the ways in which the clergy was able to "make the people believe, there was a power in the Pope and clergy, which they ought to submit unto, rather than to the commands of their own Kings." Among the various tactics they deploy to take hold of people's mind, Hobbes highlights the article of transubstantiation. In the dialog, speaker *A* explains that "it has been disputed for a long time before, in what manner a man did eat the body of our Savior Jesus Christ, as being *a point very difficult for a man to conceive and imagine clearly*; but now it was made very clear, namely, that the bread was transubstantiated into Christ's body, and so was become no more bread, but flesh." To underline the potential effect of such doctrine, *B* replies that "for my part, it would have an effect on me, to make me think them gods, and to stand in awe of them as of God himself, if he were visibly present" (Hobbes 1990, 13-15 [italics added]).

Using such methods of sedition, the clergy was able to undermine the sovereignty and authority of the monarch and cause severe political instability. Thus, argues Hobbes, "neither the preaching of friars nor monks, nor the parochial priests, tended to teach men what, but whom to believe. *For the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people*. And the end which the pope had in multiplying sermons, was no other but to prop and enlarge his own authority over all Christian Kinds and States" (Hobbes 1990, 16 [italics added]). In fact, the consequences of the proliferation of such doctrines, and especially the Presbyterian, was so powerful, that Hobbes pessimistically remarks that "The seditious doctrine of Presbyterians has

[6] See, for example, the discussion on chapter XXIX, "*Of those things that Weaken, or tend to the* DISSOLUTION *of a Common-wealth"* (Hobbes 1968, 363-376)

been struck so hard into people's heads and memories […] that I fear the commonwealth will never be cured" (Hobbes 1990, 57).

As part of his general concern with the adverse effects of religious doctrines, Hobbes seems to be especially worried about the destabilizing potential of prophets and prophecy, and with what he considers to be false prophecies. In fact, he counts the belief in "supernatural inspiration" among the reasons for the dissolution of government, as it necessarily implies the problem of private judgment (Hobbes 1968, 366). Accordingly, Hobbes devotes a large part of his *Leviathan* to discredit the political and religious legitimacy of prophets, and even devise a series of tests (namely, the performance of miracles and not teaching against the sovereign's religion) that allows us to validate the authenticity of the prophet (Hobbes 1968, 411-412).[7] While this point is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that the relationship between the imagination and prophecy has a long intellectual history, one that Hobbes was surely aware of. This association can be traced back at least to the work of Alfarabi, and his argument that the prophet gains direct access to divinity by his power of imagination (Alfarabi 2015).[8] Even if Hobbes did not read Alfarabi, the association between the imagination and prophecy was transmitted by major figures such as Maimonides[9] and was widely accepted in the scientific community of 17th century England (Vermeir 2004).

Hobbes's concern with the destabilizing potential of religious teachings and prophecies was discussed in a number of scholarly works, that also pointed out the relationship between this aspect of his thought and the imagination. According to Holmes, for example, Hobbes came to

[7] For a further exploration of Hobbes's conception of prophecy as part of his broader religious and scriptural argument, see Kateb (1989) and Jones (2017).
[8] For a detailed discussion on the conceptual history of the imagination in Alfarabi's work in particular, and in Muslim Medieval thought in general, see Cocking (1991, ch. 6).
[9] On the relationship between the imagination and prophecy in Maimonides, and on his influence on Spinoza—Hobbes's contemporary—see Ravven (2001).

realize that "the ultimate source of political authority is not coercion of the body, but captivation of the mind." Thus, he argues that for Hobbes "the struggle for sovereignty is fought on a battlefield of wholly unreal imaginings or rationally unjustifiable assumptions about the future. Whoever controls the future (or the idea people have of the future) has unstoppable power" (Holmes 1990, xi-xiv). Similarly, McQueen's recent work demonstrates Hobbes's grave concern with the challenges that religion and the religious imagination pose for political stability and order (McQueen 2017, 84, 94). Situating Hobbes's work within the context of the proliferation of prophetic and apocalyptic imageries before and during the English Civil War, she points to Hobbes's insight that the power of prophets comes from their ability to capture the imagination of the citizens and to provoke both beliefs and fears. In particular, the prophets—just like the sovereign—appeal to human's anxiety about the future in order to secure their adherence. This creates a severe problem for the sovereign because he can only secure his authority and legitimacy by the threat of death as a punishment for disobedience, whereas the prophet, or the religious leader, threaten their believers with the infinitely greater punishment of internal death and incentivize them with the reward of salvation in the afterlife (McQueen 2017, 99-103).

Thus understood, the human imagination and the ability of eloquent individuals to take advantage of it pose a serious challenge to the Hobbesian sovereign and to his ability to provide stability and security. This challenge is summarized well by Johnston, who formulates the problem of the *Leviathan* as follows: "Fear of death is the ultimate basis of sovereign power and the ultimate inducement for men to remain at peace with one another. If men allow their imagination to subordinate their fear of death to any other passion or end, the whole basis of sovereign power and civil peace is destroyed" (Johnston 1986, 121). How did Hobbes attempt to solve this problem? More specifically, if his argument depends so heavily on human fear as the chief motivating force

for obedience, while assuming that the irrational fears have a stronger grip on men's imagination than the rational fear of the earthly punishment of sovereign, how can we view his political conclusions as providing us with a plausible solution to the endemic problems they aim to solve?

According to scholars such as Johnston and Lloyd, the answer to this question is education. Johnston holds that "Hobbes believed actual human behavior might, in time, come to resemble the pattern described by his model" (Johnston 1986, 121), and that their irrational fears from the creation of their imagination will be replaced by a rational fear that is dictated by reason. Thus, argues Johnston, "Hobbes was proposing nothing less than a transformation of the human psyche, an uprooting of those weeds of error and superstition that had hitherto held the human imagination in their tight, almost hypnotic grip" (Johnston 1986, 188). Lloyd reaches a similar conclusion. According to her, Hobbes attempts to solve the problem of social and political instability by process of reeducation, "one that begins from the true beliefs a man holds, and uses these to show the falsity of his disruptive beliefs." Furthermore, she suggests that "if we can get him to hold true beliefs as passionately as he held his false and disruptive beliefs, we will have passion working for, rather than against, the maintenance of peace" (Lloyd 1992, 43).

While this explanation is certainly plausible, and while education surely plays an important role in Hobbes's political solution to the problem of instability, I believe that we nonetheless have some good reasons to doubt these conclusions. As I demonstrate throughout this paper, the imagination appears as an inherent part of Hobbes's account of human epistemology and psychology and an inextricable aspect of what he thought to be human nature. Sense, thoughts, conceptions, fears, and desires, are all so strongly affected and determined by the imagination, that it seems hard to picture a human being that will be able to "free" himself from its grip. This claim

can be supported, for example, by Hobbes's account of the collapse of social order in *Behemoth*. He explains that

> "the rules of *just* and *unjust* sufficiently demonstrated, and from principles evident to the meanest capacity, have not been wanting […] But they are few, in respect of the rest of the men, whereof many cannot read: many, though they can, have no leisure; and of they that have leisure, the greatest part have their mind wholly employed and taken up by their private business or pleasures. So that it is impossible that the multitude should ever learn their duty, but from the pulpit and upon holidays; but then, and from thence, it is, that they learned their disobedience" (Hobbes 1990, 39).

Here we see a stance that is quite far from optimistic. Not only are the hopes for enlightenment limited, but even given an enlightened public, the potentially harmful effect of eloquent speakers on the human imagination cannot be underestimated.

How should we, then, think of Hobbes's solution to the problem posed by the imagination, given that changing the nature of men does not seem to be a feasible option? One potential solution is found in McQueen's analysis of Hobbes's treatment of the English apocalyptic imaginary. According to her, "Hobbes responds to this imaginary not by condemning it, but by redirecting it in the service of sovereign power and civil peace. He fights apocalypse *with apocalypse"* (McQueen 2017, 106). Instead of fighting the political dangers of the apocalyptic imaginary by rejecting or condemning it, she finds that Hobbes redirects it and attempts to contain and safely store it in the hands of the sovereign. Hence, McQueen argues that "Hobbes's innovation was to redeploy this antinomian imaginary in the service of sovereign power and civil peace. He does this by offering a captivating vision of a secular apocalypse in which the terror of the state of nature is the narrative prelude to an enduring commonwealth. Hobbes redirects the stunning visual and rhetorical resources of apocalypticism to secure belief in and obedience to the Leviathan state" (McQueen 2017, 133).

This framework provides us with a strong alternative to Johnston's and Lloyd's argument and captures a significant insight that can be generalized and applied not only to Hobbes's treatment of the religious or apocalyptic imaginaries but also to his approach to the broader problem of the imagination. Hobbes acknowledges the intrinsic role played by imagination in every basic human behavior, and the potentially destabilizing effects that it might have, especially when paired with manipulation attempts made by religious leaders, prophets, and other charlatans. At the same time, he does not seem to think that these conditions are changeable. The solution to this problem, it seems to me, is to try to contain the imagination by utilizing the qualities of the imagination that are conducive to order, while attempting to control those that pose a potential threat to political order and stability.

However, this explanation still fails to provide us with a comprehensive solution to the problem of the imagination. Specifically, we can find at least two difficulties that may challenge the idea that the sovereign will indeed be able to fight the imagination with imagination and contain its dangerous and destabilizing potential. First, for this solution to hold, we have to assume that the sovereign will be able to constitute an alternative imaginary that will be powerful enough as to capture the minds of the citizens. But can the sovereign do that? Would he be able to produce imagery that will compete with the captivating force of the religious and prophetic imagination, and with the eloquence of experienced public speakers? Second, even if we assume that the sovereign will have the ability to do so, how can he make sure that this imaginary and its hold over his subject's imagination will remain alive and effective throughout time? How can it endure in the face of the constant threat of alternative subversive imaginaries?

I believe that Hobbes's vivid and terrifying imagery of the state of nature represents his attempt to deal with the first challenge. This is very much in line with McQueen's interpretation

of the state of nature in the context of the apocalyptic imaginary. According to her, "Hobbes's own terrifying description of the state of nature might serve as a model for harnessing the apocalyptic imaginary to elicit the salutary fear required to secure obedience and maintain the commonwealth" (McQueen 2017, 142-143). In one of his examples for the working of the imagination early in the Leviathan, Hobbes writes that "[as] from being long and vehemently attest upon Geomertricall Figures, a man shall in the dark, (though awake) have the Images of Lines, and Angles before his eyes" (Hobbes 1968, 90). Following McQueen's argument, I believe that this is an analogy for the type of political imagination that the sovereign will need to apply—and that Hobbes's *Leviathan* aims to construct—in order to achieve stability and peace. "Vehemently attest upon" the hypothetical yet vivid conclusions of the state of nature, the sovereign may hope, will burn these imaginaries in the minds of the subjects, forcing their application to the concrete political reality.

As for the second challenge, and for the problem of maintaining the vividness of this imagery, I believe that Hobbes's solution is, simply put, to keep his subject in a state of "political sleep," thus constituting them as the "sleeping subjects." This concept draws from Tuck's recent work *The Sleeping Sovereign*. his concept of the "sleeping sovereign" highlights the Hobbesian distinction between the sovereign and the government, and the proto-democratic elements in Hobbes's political thought. By allowing a representative to govern in its name, argues Tuck, the people in their capacity as the sovereign body can be viewed as if they are in a state of "sleep," a temporary state of passivity (Tuck 2016). While Tuck is right to highlight the metaphor of sleep in the Hobbesian context, I believe that his theoretical conception of the "sleeping sovereign" does not capture the full power of this metaphor in Hobbes's political thought. What it lacks is a more comprehensive account of the epistemological roots of Hobbes's understanding of the mental state

of sleep. By accounting for these roots and the operation of the imagination during sleep, we see that the "sleeping sovereign" is, in fact, a "sleeping subject."

To understand this, we first need to reconstruct Hobbes's account of the mental state of sleep and the working of the imagination during sleep. In the *Leviathan,* Hobbes's argues that since our sense perception is inactive in our sleep, dreams must be a sort of passive imagination: a reappearance of our waking impressions that results from an agitation of inner organs (Hobbes 1968, 90). This process is explained in more details in *The Elements,* where we are told that "when present sense is not [active], as in SLEEP, there the image remaining after sense (when there be any) as in dreams, are not obscure, but strong and clear, as in sense itself. The reason is, because that which obscured and made the conception weak, namely sense, and present operation of the objects, is removed. For sleep is the privation of the act of sense, (the power remaining) and dreams are the imaginations of them that sleep" (Hobbes 2008, 27).[10] Recalling Hobbes's account of sense perception, we know that the only source of the production of fancies by the imagination is the movement of an external material object. Thus, the fact that we experience similar fancies in our sleep cannot be explained by Hobbes's account in any way other than the human mind's capacity to retain the last fancies that were produced while the senses were awakened.

Interestingly, however, the fact that we are asleep does not make these fancies and imageries less vivid. Indeed, we might experience them as clearer and more real-like than we do when we are awake. Thus, argues Hobbes, "a man can never know he dreameth; he may dream he doubteth, whether it may be a DREAM or no: but the clearness of the imagination representeth

[10] In fact, Hobbes goes as far as arguing that given some sort of original sense impression, we are able to maintain the original fancy in our imagination completely independently of the material world: "there be in our minds continually certain images or conceptions of the things without us, insomuch that if a man could be alive, and all the rest of the world annihilated, he should nevertheless retain the image thereof, and of all those things which he had before seen and perceived in it" (Hobbes 2008, 22).

everything with as many parts as doth sense itself, and consequently, he can take notice of nothing but as present" (Hobbes 2008, 30). The reason for that is that while we are awake, our mind and imagination are constantly pressured by an innumerable array of external motions. Since each of these external motions leads to an internal endeavor and the production of another fancy, this constant stream of external inputs means that a vivid fancy or imaginary are hard to maintain. In Hobbes's words, "though the sense be past, the image or conception remaineth; but more obscurely while we are awake, because some object or other continually plieth and soliciteth our eyes, and ears, keeping the mind in a stronger motion, whereby the weaker doth not easily appear" (Hobbes 2008, 27). When we are asleep, however, our senses are inactive and thus do not react to external inputs. And, as Hobbes concludes in the *Leviathan*, "saving that the Organs of Sense being now benummed, so as there is no new object, which can master and obscure them with a more vigorous impression, a Dreame must needs be more cleare, in this silence of sense, than our walking thoughts" (Hobbes 1968, 91).

We can now utilize our understanding of Hobbes's conception of the state of sleep and the working of the imagination during sleep to draw a political analogy to these conditions, one that can provide us with a solution to the problem of maintaining the vividness of the sovereign's imagery. To solve this problem, the sovereign will first have to produce a powerful imaginary, one that will be able to capture the mind of his subjects. As discussed above, the state of nature can be viewed as such a powerful imaginary. Then, to ensure that this imaginary will remain vivid and stable in the subjects' minds, and will withstand the potential effect of competing imaginaries, that sovereign ought to keep his subject in a state of *political sleep*. As we learned, Hobbes's conceptual framework of sleep amounts to the benumbing of senses that prevents any *new inputs* from

reaching the mind. Accordingly, to induce a state of political sleep, all the sovereign needs to do is to prevent the appearance of any kind of external political inputs.

This theoretical framework and understanding of political sleep as the lack of external political inputs allow us to reconceptualize some of Hobbes's prescriptions for what the sovereign ought to do in order to maintain order. Specifically, it provides us with an alternative account to the limits that Hobbes requires over the proliferation of religious doctrines and his insistence on the idea of the law as a "publique Conscience" that must not be challenged (Hobbes 1968, 366). Even more so, it accounts for Hobbes's strong stance on the need for strict censorship. He argues that "as to Rebellion in particular against Monarchy; one of the most frequent causes of it, is the Reading of the books of Policy, and Histories of the antient Greeks and Romans." These books cause the subjects to "*imagine* their great prosperity, not to have proceeded from the æmulation of particular men, but from the vertue of their popular forme of government," and accordingly are denounced by Hobbes as nothing less than "Venime" or the "biting of a mad Dogge" (Hobbes 1968, 369-370).

Finally, Hobbes's account of the mental state of sleep also suggests that in order for the sovereign to maintain his subject in a state of political sleep, he ought to limit not only external inputs but also internal movement. In *The Elements,* he explains that "The cause of DREAMS (if they be natural) are the actions or violence of the inward parts of a man upon his brain, by which the passages of sense, by sleep benumbed, are restored to their motion" (Hobbes 2008, 27). The political analogy is drawn clearly in the *Leviathan*, where Hobbes argues that "For as in this Disease, there is an unnaturall spirit, or wind in the head that obstructeth the roots of the Nerves, and moving them violently, taketh away the motion which naturally they should have from the power of the Soule in the Brain, and thereby causeth violent, and irregular motions […] so also in

the Body Politique, when the Spirituall power, moveth the Member of a Common-wealth, by the terrour of punishments, and hope of rewards." Such a movement, according to Hobbes, "must needs thereby Distract the people, and either Overwhelm the Common-wealth with Oppression, or cast it into the Fire of a Civil Warre" (Hobbes 1968, 371-32). In short, to maintain the subject's state of sleep, the sovereign ought to prevent any kind of movement—either internal or external—that may cause agitation, disturb their sleep and form alternatives to the sovereign's imaginary.

Combining these insights provides us with a formulation of Hobbes's political solution to the problem of the imagination. Replacing the 'wishful-thinking' kind of expectation that men will suddenly change their fundamental nature with a firm sense of realism, Hobbes takes the human imagination as a given, and shapes and structures his political theory in a way that will reflect it and deal with its effects. As this section demonstrated, Hobbes's solution is comprised of two important ideas: first, the importance of creating and maintaining a strong political imaginary that will capture the minds of the subjects and will serve as a continuous source of legitimacy; and second, the complementary necessity to combat and silence any alternative imaginaries that may compete against and undermine the sovereign, and that may endanger social unity, peace, and political stability. Controlling both the material means of coercion and the power of the imagination, Hobbes's might have constructed an unchallenged political authority and truly absolute sovereignty.

4. Summary

At the beginning of this paper, I argued that our traditional reading of Hobbes prioritizes the role of reason and rationality, and thus misses the critical role played by imagination in his

political theory. As showed throughout this paper, imagination is found at the very heart of Hobbes's human epistemology and psychology, as our sense perception, knowledge, understanding, desires and aversions all owe their origins, in one way or another, to this faculty. Once we take this insight into account, we find that political stability may be impossible to achieve or maintain without the help of the imagination, or without utilizing its benefits while suppressing its subversive potential. Thus, this paper contributes to the literature on Hobbes by demonstrating the value of taking his conception of imagination seriously and combining it with our existing knowledge of the role played by reason in his theory.

At the same time, the conclusions of this paper may also challenge some of the recent scholarly work on Hobbes that highlight the more tolerant and liberal aspects of his political doctrine.[11] In fact, the idea of the "sleeping subject" seems to resemble a totalitarian political order rather than a proto-liberal constitutional arrangement. The important idea here is that within the strict limitation imposed by the forced state of political sleep, the subjects may be absolutely free to act as they wish. By limiting the external and internal sources that can potentially disrupt the sovereign's imagination and take hold of the subject's mind, and given the well-established monopoly over the means of violence, it is hard to think of any additional dangers to the stability of the common wealth. Thus, very much in line with Skinner's reconstruction of Hobbes's concept of liberty as freedom within the boundaries of the law (Skinner 2008), we may conclude that the sleeping subject may enjoy a large measure of liberty, but this liberty is well confined *within the boundaries of the sovereign's imaginary*.

[11] A very short list of those includes Tuck (1990), Rayn (1983, 1988), and Curley (2007).

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