

THE ONE WHO MADE THE LOCK ALSO MADE THE KEY: Thomas Hobbes on encryption and decryption in the face of sovereign power and authority

QUIEN CREÓ EL CANDADO TAMBIÉN CREÓ LA LLAVE: Thomas Hobbes acerca de la encriptación y la encriptación ante el soberano, el poder y la autoridad

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Abstract:

In this essay, I look at the way that Thomas Hobbes offers not only the building blocks for state power and sovereignty (as he is so famous for doing) but also a basis by which to resist those very things. Even as Hobbes constructs a vast and awe inspiring network of sovereign forms of authority, he shows how those forms are produced, in a sense, out of thin air. Hobbes' understanding of language as a series of decisions that are made in ways that render the sovereign's own decision derivative, as well as his understanding of theology as offering us a vision of a human community who must collectively decide on things in the absence of God's ongoing instruction both serve to undermine and expose the emptiness of sovereign pronouncements. In this way, Hobbes can be read as a radical theorist and a theorist of resisting the very encryption that he is at the same time responsible for theorizing and producing.

Key words:

Hobbes, encryption, sovereignty, political theology, negative theology, nominalism

Resumen:

En este ensayo, considero la forma en que Thomas Hobbes otorga no solo los materiales con los cuales se ha construido el poder y la soberanía del estado, (por lo cual es afamado) sino también una base para la resistencia ante esas mismas cosas. Incluso cuando Hobbes construye una vasta e impresionante red de formas soberanas de autoridad, muestra cómo esas formas se producen y salen, en cierto sentido, de la nada. La comprensión del lenguaje por parte de Hobbes como una serie de decisiones que se toman de manera que hacen que la decisión del soberano sea derivada, así como su comprensión de la teología como una visión de una comunidad humana que debe decidir colectivamente sobre las cosas en ausencia de la continuidad de las instrucciones dadas por Dios, sirve tanto para socavar como para exponer el vacío de los pronunciamientos soberanos. De esta manera, Hobbes puede leerse como un teórico radical y un teórico que crea las condiciones para resistir la encriptación que él, al mismo tiempo, es responsable de teorizar y producir.

Palabras Clave:

Hobbes, encriptación, soberanía, teología política, teología negativa, nominalismo.

1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I am going to argue that one of the main authors of encryption, Thomas Hobbes, is, at the same time a source for how to think about decryption and resistance. Hobbes is famously a major source of what I like to call archism, a mode of politics that engages in hierarchy, order and taxonomization and which is, at least in its Western mode, highly concordant with the idea of encryption. In saying this, I recognize that Hardt and Negri turn to Hobbes for the idea of the

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multitude and thus suggest a form of resistance within his work as well but I will be making a very different argument from Hardt and Negri (2004). Rather than claiming that Hobbes offers us a model for a kind of mass form of resistance (which Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo tells us has aspects of sovereign coloniality within it insofar as it is insufficiently distinguished from faux formulations of popular power embedded within encryption itself), I will be looking at Hobbes' theory of language and meaning making to argue that Hobbes offers us a key, a way to understand the working of language that produces a myriad—and anarchist—response to the very forms of sovereign power that Hobbes otherwise seems to call for².

I chose to call this chapter “the one who made the lock also made the key,” because I think that Hobbes is doing two things at once in books like *Leviathan*. On the one hand, he is articulating and hence producing some of the key building blocks encryption (at least in its modern form). Yet, as an architect (a term that literally means a maker of archism or perhaps an archist maker) of the modern Western regime of power, Hobbes also places a secret inside each of those building blocks. This secret, what you could call the crypt within in encryption--that is to say—the death that lurks within the source of archist power—can be used to undermine this form of power by its own tools. Let me try to explain how this might be.

2 GENEALOGIES OF SOVEREIGN AUTHORITY

The first important thing to note in this regard is that Hobbes offers not one but two genealogies of sovereign authority in *Leviathan*.³ The first genealogy is well known and does not need much elaboration here. This is the story of the social contract, the rise out of the state of nature and the joining up of human beings under the aegis of a sovereign which is not itself bound by that contract. Everyone except for the sovereign itself gives their rights over to the sovereign, gaining security, a way to avoid being arbitrarily killed by some fellow wild creature in the state of nature in exchange for their obedience to the law and to the state.

As Hobbes famously states:

² See for example Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo, *Decolonizing Democracy: Power in a Solid State*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

³ I discuss this at much greater length in James Martel *Subverting the Leviathan Reading Thomas Hobbes as a Radical Democrat* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

The only way to erect such a Common Power...is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that they might reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will...For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Common-wealth, he hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to conform the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad (HOBBS, 1996).

We see in this narrative a central articulation of the basic form of modern, western archism, and by extension also the genesis of a particular modern form of encryption as well. The story of the state of nature substitutes a form of collective uniformity for a kind of wild immanence, where everyone is different and unto themselves. In the false sense of individualism that emerges as a result of this substitution we see in effect the rendering of the population into one mass (I think for this reason, Hobbes' use of the term "multitude" does not signify radical multiplicity as Hardt and Negri state but the opposite, something that the frontispiece of *Leviathan* can attest to as well). (See Prokhovnik 1991, 198-199; Malcolm 1998, 124-155; Bredekamp 2007, 29-60).

We also see here one of the key promises of archism in its contemporary form, the promise of life or at least the avoidance of death, reiterating the kinds of promises that God made to Isaiah as well.⁴ Submit to archism, Hobbes argues, and you will get to live. The only true danger to your life, barring illness, accident or, of course, the undeniable fact of human mortality (always an inconvenient truth when it comes to archist promises), arises if you move against the sovereign who has both the right to kill you and the means to do so since it maintains a monopoly on violence. The subject has the right to resist at that point, but it is unlikely that he or she will be able to save themselves from such a singular, and powerful, foe. The "terror thereof," the awful spectacle of sovereign authority that is armed with real weapons (and akin to "the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN"), is, for Hobbes, the basis of lasting peace, obedience and authority. (Hobbes 1996, 120). This is a genesis story then—although by no means the only one—for archism itself.

The second origin story starts with the covenant between God and Abraham. This covenant leads to the setting up of what Hobbes calls the "Kingdome of God," a state of affairs wherein the Levite clergy nominally ruled in God's name (Hobbes 1996, 3.42. 357). This was a form of rule that was frequently interrupted by prophets speaking as and by God, effectively bypassing the Levite

⁴ "Isaiah" in the *Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of Philadelphia, 1917), 1:19-21, p. 564.

clergy.⁵ Although Hobbes says explicitly that God's covenant with Abraham, the Kingdom of God that was subsequently produced when God ruled the Hebrews, and the setting up of a human-ruled kingdom in Ancient Israel that eventually replaced it, set the pattern and source of sovereign authority for subsequent human kingdoms and other secular sovereign forms that follow, the way that he describes this period is markedly, even radically, different than the way he talks about the other, secular genealogy.

The most critical difference for the purposes of my argument can be seen in terms of what Hobbes emphasizes in his two origin stories. In the secular genealogy, as is appropriate with archism more generally, the focus is on those things that stand in for and cover over the invisible and intangible power at the center of political and legal rule. The idea of the Leviathan, itself a creature who has no real existence except as a vision that God conjures in the book of Job, serves to distract from the void at the heart of sovereign authority (a void that was perhaps especially legible in Hobbes' time as the traditional theological bases of sovereign rule were being challenged). In this way, we see the origins of modern forms of encryption; a false and fetishistic source of political power is mapped onto the landscape so that the sovereign becomes not the result but the source of political identity.

The Leviathan thus becomes the basis for a subsuming of actual difference; in return for the surrender of their own separate identities, the subjects of the Leviathan effectively get nothing in return but a guarantee—at least in theory—of their life. Yet even this is misleading. What they get is not their life but in effect their death, the negation of their actual life to be replaced by a faux life that exists only at the behest of the state (bringing to mind Foucault's adage that the state, at least in its early sovereign incarnation, served to "make die and let live") (Foucault 2003). Hence my thought that within the reign of encryption—in English, as in Spanish and other Romance languages—you find a crypt, a place of death which poses as the source of life.

The theological origin story that Hobbes tells us is an entirely different matter. In that story, Hobbes focuses, not on the coverups but on the void itself on a form of negation that does not mystify but rather exposes or decrypts itself. When describing original covenant God makes with Abraham, Hobbes tells us that

⁵ I discuss this at length in James Martel, *Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty* (London: GlassHouse/Routledge, 2011).

The Father of the Faithfull, and first in the Kingdome of God by Covenant was *Abraham*. For with him was the Covenant first made, whereby he obliged himself, and his seed after him, to acknowledge and obey the commands of God; not onely such as he could take notice of, (as Morall Laws,) by the light of Nature; but also such, as God should in special manner deliver to him by Dreams and Visions. (Hobbes 1996, 3.40. 322-323)

Hobbes goes on to say that Abraham, just like every other human being, was already bound by natural and moral law prior to the covenant. He tells us that the real basis of the covenant came from and through the “Dreams and Visions” that Abraham had of God (Hobbes 1996, 3.40. 323). Here, we have a critical moment in the theological genealogy of sovereign power because Hobbes specifies that it came, not from something palpably observable or evident but rather through an act of prophetic and appointing sight. The intangible and subjective experiences of dreams and visions serves as the basis for a lasting and binding power and obligation, the basis of politics itself. Critical to this point is that ultimately the interpretation of those visions lay not with God but with Abraham himself, with a human and fallible decipherer of God’s codes and transmissions.

In considering the story of the covenant, Hobbes argues that the power that Abraham was to yield in God’s name is binding on all of Abraham’s descendants even though God spoke only to Abraham (and only in dreams). He writes:

They to whom God hath not spoken immediately [that is to say all of Abraham’s family and descendants, everyone but Abraham himself] are to receive the positive commandements of God, from their Sovereign; as the family and seed of Abraham did from Abraham their Father, and Lord, and Civil Sovereign. And consequently in every Common-Wealth, they who have no supernaturall Revelation to the contrary, ought to obey the laws of their own Sovereign, in the externall acts and profession of Religion (Hobbes 1996, 3.40. 323).

Thus, what is unique to and personal for Abraham becomes transmitted as a generalized and transmissible form of political power via Abraham’s own patriarchal authority. The model of obedience and the authority structure that is set up here is completely different from the one that operates in the secular narrative. It is based (at least initially) on family ties, and vision instead of consent and contract. It binds together a human person or set of persons with an intangible and invisible deity (whereas the terrestrial sovereign is once again not bound by the social contract). Critically too, it does not bind everyone universally and uniformly but rather via existing human networks and connections; rather than erase and blur difference, it preserves these particularities precisely through the kind of bonds that a covenant (as opposed to a contract) serves to form.

One distinctive element of the political model that is set up by the covenant is that it is

characterized by a mode of interruption that can periodically alter or upset the political status, namely the phenomena of ongoing eruptions of prophecy. When Hobbes states that “they who have no supernaturall Revelation to the contrary” are bound forever by this covenant, Hobbes is allowing for an exception to the rule (that is to say, they who *do* have “supernaturall Revelation”). Indeed, his subsequent descriptions of the Kingdom of God--as I will show further-- are full of acts of prophecy that trouble or interrupt the more quotidian forms of authority that follow God’s revelation to Abraham (a state of affairs that I will argue extends into our own time).

Another distinction of the theological origin story is that as a model of transmission of authority, it is far more unstable than the secular model. While the latter insists on a kind of permanent and perhaps even retroactive lastingness once it has come into effect, the covenant flickers in and out of existence as the Hebrews variously abandon or return to it. Hobbes acknowledges that the ongoing bindingness of the covenant faced a major challenge to its promulgation due to the fact that Moses, who renews the covenant between God and the Israelites, is not a direct descendent from Abraham (hereditary descent being the basis for rule up to that point). He writes of this that:

Seeing Moses had no authority to govern the Israelites, as a successor to the right of Abraham, because he could not claim it by inheritance; it appeareth not as yet, that the people were obliged to take him for Gods Lieutenant, longer than they beleaved that God sake unto him. And therefore his authority (notwithstanding the Covenant they made with God) depended yet merely upon the opinion they had of his Sanctity and of the reality of his Conferences with God, and the verity of his Miracles; which opinion coming to change, they were no more obliged to take any thing for the law of God, which he propounded to them in Gods name.(Hobbes 1996, 3.40. 324).

Given the fact that the people have a power to decide for themselves what they think and how they judge, it is vital to note that when they do this they act from their own collective form of political authority (an authority from which Moses derives his own). It appears however, at least in Hobbes’ telling, that no sooner do they find this authority than they try to give it away, offering it Moses. Hobbes says of this that

[Moses’] authority therefore, as the authority of all other Princes, must be grounded on the Consent of the People, and their Promise to obey him. And so it was: *For the people (Exod. 20.18.) when they saw the Thunderings, and the Lightnings, and the noyse of the Trumpet, and the mountaine smoking, removed, and stood a far off. And they said unto Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us lest we die.* Here was their promise of obedience, and by this it was they obliged themselves to obey whatsoever he should deliver unto them for the

Commandement of God.⁶

Here, the link with archism becomes very explicit. The Israelites chose to obey Moses rather than strive to see for themselves what was happening up on Mount Sinai. Not only couldn't they see what Moses saw but they didn't want to; they are sufficiently terrified by the spectacle to seek nothing but obedience and life, the promises of archism. In this way, an invisible power becomes directly translated into a terrestrial authority, not by recognizing it as such but by refusing to do so.

This is part of why, for all of the differences with the secular model, it is very important to Hobbes that this genealogy be read as conferring the same status upon modern day sovereigns as the social contract genealogy does so that the two genealogies that he tells appear to match up and come to the same final point. Thus he writes:

And notwithstanding the Covenant constitueth a Sacerdotall Kingdome, that is to say, a Kingdome hereditary to Aaron [Moses' brother] yet that is to be understood of the succession, after Moses should be dead. For whosoever ordereth, and establisheth the Policy, as first founder of a Common-wealth (be it Monarchy, Aristocracy, or Democracy) must needs have Sovereign Power over the people all the while he is doing it. (Hobbes 1996, 3.40. 325).

Because, unlike the secular contract, the covenant it is not permanent, it is critical for Hobbes to allow the political model that it ushers into the world to survive, as it were, its own abandonment or its universalization to a more general and secular model of political membership. This survival is only possible because of the prophetic nature of the transition from covenant to social contract. Exactly because the sources of authority are not fixed and not determined by some clear and tangible source but rather come from subjective and abstract responses to dreams and visions, there is leeway for Hobbes to insist that there is some kind of transitive principle is at work in his genealogy. It is what allows him to compare fatherhood to prophethood to kingship; each jump that he makes is enabled by the fact that the sources of that authority are invisible and subject to human interpretation (Hobbes' own interpretation very much included).

Yet note that in making this kind of connection, Hobbes has preserved a basis for subjective

⁶ Ibid., 3.40, pp. 324-325. This is a critical moment for Aryeh Botwinick in his own genealogy of Hobbes' understanding of the covenant. See Frank Coleman, "Hobbes's Iconoclasm," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol 1. Issue 4, 1998; J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought in History*, New York: Atheneum, 1971; Patricia Springborg, "Leviathan and the Problem of Ecclesiastical Authority," *Political Theory* 3 (1975), pp. 289-303; Patricia Springborg, "Hobbes on Religion," in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

interpretation rather than some kind of absolute determination into the heart of sovereign authority itself. Because the regime of encryption does not—and cannot—completely cover over the subjective (because prophetic) origins of its own authority, the remnant of the void that is brought along with the attempt to cover it up or encrypt it poses a permanent threat to the very sovereignty that this genealogy nominally supports. Put another way, Hobbes’ understanding of the prophetic transmission of political authority offers a way for the possibility of decryption to be as present, as much of a potential, as encryption itself.

In this way, even if the Israelites seem to have given away their authority to Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, they cannot entirely abnegate this power because their collective and interpretive form of authority is constantly being reasserted each time a political authority is being foisted over them which, insofar as all political power contains at its basis this entry and subjectively interpreted center, effectively means that this power can never not be exercised however much the people want (or do not want) to rid themselves of it.

In this way we can see that for Hobbes the very void that serves as the basis for encryption is itself a source of democratic or anarchist power for human beings. This other power (perhaps counter-power would be the best description for it) is collective and mutual. It comes, not from speaking over and *as* God, but from the way that the void tells us nothing, requiring but also enabling a human response in turn.

2 NEGATIVE THEOLOGY AND HUMAN AGENCY

This source of collective and anarchic interpretive authority for Hobbes can perhaps be seen most clearly by looking one of Hobbes’ most important statements about his political theology. In a statement that is often held to be the acme of what could be called his “negative theology,” Hobbes tells us that:⁷

[T]he nature of God is incomprehensible; that is to say, we understand nothing of *what he is*, but only *that he is*; and therefore the Attributes we give him, are not to tell one another, *what he is*, nor to signifie our opinion of his Nature, but our desire to honor him with such names as we conceive most honorable amongst our selves. (Hobbes 1996, 3.34. 271)

⁷ See Aryeh Botwinick, *Skepticism, Belief and the Modern: Maimonides to Nietzsche* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 11.

In thinking about God in this way, Hobbes seeks, not to discover divine truth (which is impossible) but rather to use God's silence as an opportunity for humans to think about their own power, about what they themselves value the most. Here, God's negativity is not a void to be covered over but a constant source of new ideas, new values and judgments, a shifting and contingent basis for judgment that stems precisely from God's mysterious nature.

When God is used as a basis for determination, when the sovereign is said to speak for or as God, serving as an ultimate and unimpeachable source of truth and determination, what we get is encryption; each subject's own personhood and difference is erased and replaced with a uniform and centralized form of identity. When God is on the other hand exposed as empty and negative, utterly silent, then the power that encryption seizes from the hidden people (to use Ricardo Sanín Restrepo's term, the people in their immanent variety rather than in their uniform subjecthood) is returned to that community.

Given that political subjects of the sovereign state have been effectively written over by the fetishisms of archist power, given that we have become encrypted (so that what is true is hidden and what is false stands in for reality itself), a sense of God as a wholly negative object offers an opportunity to spur humans to reclaim their own collective and multiple forms of judgment. Even when God's silence is breached, such as in a moment of prophecy, for Hobbes, those representations of God's will remain entirely on the level of representation. Human agency and above all the human community's own power of interpretation and judgment therefore remains the basis for interpretation of that will.

3 A COLLECTIVITY OF SPEAKERS

Just as theology itself can be said to be a source of resistance for Hobbes, so too is language itself and by the same principle. Even as the sovereign is often called "the great decider," the ultimate basis for meaning and authority, a closer look at Hobbes's understanding of language shows that the sovereign sits parasitically upon a vast and anarchist network of meaning making.

For Hobbes, the connection between language and theology is critical. He tells us that the original author of language is not human beings (not even sovereigns) at all but God. He writes:

The first author of Speech was *God* himself, that instructed *Adam* how to name such creatures as he presented to his sight; For the Scripture goes no further in this matter. But

this was sufficient to direct him to adde more names, as the experience and use of the creatures should give him occasion. (Hobbes 1996, 1.4. 24).

Here, there is a divine source of human power but once again that power does not eclipse but rather permits and enables human action and judgment (very much unlike human sovereign authority which works quite the opposite way). Showing the same logic as his statements about the way that God's silence effects human beings in general, Hobbes goes on to say that

I do not find any thing in Scripture, out of which, directly or by consequence can be gathered, that *Adam* was taught the names of all Figures, Numbers, Measures, Colours, Sounds, Fancies, Relations, much less the names of Words and Speech (Hobbes 1996, 1.4. 25).

For Hobbes, God may therefore be the source of language but the practice of it is a wholly human phenomenon. God doesn't tell Adam what to name things; that remains something for Adam, Eve and their descendants to figure out on their own. But even as they do this, it is both God's original mandate to name things, as well as God's ongoing silence which both requires and allows for human judgment and decision. Here, God's own ultimate power trumps and undermines that sovereign authority that is nominally issued in God's name leaving the community of language speakers itself the power to determine meaning.

In speaking about the practice of human language more generally, Hobbes writes that:

The generall use of Speech, is to transferre our Mentall Discourse, into Verbal; or the Trayne of our Thoughts, into a Trayne of Words; and that for two commodities; whereof one is, the Registring of the Consequences of our Thoughts; which being apt to slip out of our memory, and put to a new labour, may again be recalled, by such words as they were marked by. So that the first use of names, is to serve for *Marks*, or *Notes* of remembrance. Another is, when many use the same words, to signifie (by their connection and order,) one to another, what they conceive, or think of each matter; and also what they desire, feare, or have any other passion for. And for this use they are called *Signes* (Hobbes 1996, 1.4. 25).

Here we see the way that for Hobbes, language works as a vast anarchic network in which collectivities of people mutually agree on the significance of words and meanings. Signification itself, as Hobbes shows us here, is a form of collective value and judgment making, mutually laying down "Marks, or Notes" that guide people towards common but never uniform decisions (once again unlike sovereignty).

Language facilitates this signage because, even before we can use words to mutually express

our values, we must engage in a prior (and equally anarchic) form of collective work, agreeing on the basic sounds and meaning of words in the first place. The meanings that are agreed upon by a given community are not anchored in some kind of ontological truth but rather reflect the shifting and contingent bases of human judgment.

Thus, Hobbes tells us that

When a man upon the hearing of any Speech, hath those thoughts which the words of that Speech, and their connexion, were ordained and constituted to signifie; Then he is said to understand it: *Understanding* being nothing else, but conception caused by Speech. (Hobbes 1996, 1.5. 30)

Understanding then is for Hobbes only a recognition of some internalized rules of speaking (or “marks”) that have been mutually agreed upon through the use of language and signification as such. In this way, language preserves that original difference of each person as they collectively (and non contractually) attempt to work out their own forms of interaction and communication with one another; whereas all persons within a particular speech community may agree on a common set of sounds and meanings for words, that agreement does not overwrite but preserves their own position as an agreeer (thus the very opposite of the social contract which overwrites each person’s natural or individual autonomy).

While sovereigns may seek to insist that the words they use have a definite and absolute meaning which they and they alone control, Hobbes will never concede this point (even though it would seem to bolster the power of sovereign authority if he did). The power of words lies not in the thing itself (i.e. the actual word as instrument or tool that not only conveys but in some sense constitutes a decision) but rather in its subjective and contingent usage, in what it is decided to mean at some given particular moment, something that is always changing.

4 PROPHETIC SPEECH ACTS

This collective form of interpretation is also present in a particular—and seemingly especially encrypting, because divine, kind of speech act, namely prophecy. Although ordinary language is a case of humans speaking in the face of God’s silence and prophecy is a case of God seeming to break that silence (albeit with human agents), in both cases, such speech acts serve, not to bolster absolute truths but rather once again serve as moments of collective human judgment about what a

community most values (and what it most dislikes). Both speech acts are received into a larger community and that community is the ultimate judge of whether that speech conforms with its own sense of value (or not).

Both speech acts also occur in a community in which speech itself is an ongoing process; to be recognized and understood, it must conform, at least initially, to whatever prior judgments about meaning have been made.⁸ In both *Leviathan* and *De Cive*, Hobbes offers examples of how acts of prophecy worked in practice. He tells us in *De Cive* for instance that “It cannot be known what *God’s word* is before we know who is the true prophet; nor can we believe *God’s word*, before we believe the prophet.”(Hobbes, 1991, 317). Thus, as already noted, the people retain a power (not the Hebrew kings nor the Levite priests) to determine whether a prophet speaks truly for God or not. Hobbes calls the ancient Israelites “a people greedy of prophets” (Hobbes 1991, 323) and I think that part of that greediness came from the fact that in determining both the truth of a given act of prophecy and the meaning of that prophecy, the ancient Israelites had a mechanism by which they could in effect bypass their nominal rulers who ruled with an encrypted form of authority (hence out of reach of the people as such).

5 THE HOLY SPIRIT

In our own time, of course, prophecy is no more but Hobbes retains one key prophetic element in the figure of the Holy Spirit. For Hobbes this figure is a purely interpretive spirit, retaining the decrypting power of making meaning for the people as such even in the face of modern forms of sovereign power. Although contemporaries of Hobbes like the Quakers and many other Puritans believed that the Holy Spirit served to send the exact same message into each person’s mind (hence serving as the basis for modern encrypting liberalism via that Puritan thinker John Locke), for Hobbes it meant that each person would interpret as he or she saw fit, retaining once again their original and immanent difference.⁹ Hobbes tells us that

⁸ Gregory S. Kavka tells us that for Hobbes injustice is “‘somewhat like’ absurdity, which involves contradicting what one earlier maintained.” Absurdity then is the danger of violating the decisions about speech and meaning that have come out of the collective process of language and meaning making. Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.306.

⁹ For more on Hobbes and the Holy Spirit as a concept see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1947).

Whereas there be, that pretend Divine Inspiration, to be a supernaturall entering of the Holy Ghost into a man, and not an acquisition of Gods grace, by doctrine, and study; I think they are in a very dangerous Dilemma. For if they worship not the men whom they believe to be so inspired, they fall into Impiety; as not adoring Gods supernaturall Presence. And again, if they worship them, they commit Idolatry; for the Apostles would never permit themselves to be so worshipped. Therefore the safest way is to beleeve, that by the Descending of the Dove upon the Apostles; and by Christs Breathing on them, when hee gave them the Holy Ghost; and by the giving of the Imposition of Hands, are understood the signes which God hath been pleased to use, or ordain to bee used, of his promise to assist those persons in their study to Preach his Kingdome, and in their Conversation, that it might not be Scandalous, but Edifying to others. (Hobbes 1996, 4.45. 451).

Here the focus is on study and thinking, on individual and collective acts of judgment and determination that offers a kind of counter economy of interpretation and hence of decrypting power, all of which is made possible by the Holy Spirit (which otherwise has no power or content whatsoever for Hobbes).

6 CONCLUSION: THE KEY TO ENCRYPTION

Taken as a whole, these forms of collective meaning making are a power that Hobbes will never give over to sovereign authority. While he frequently stresses that the sovereign must have the last word, even that word does not, once again, belong to sovereign authority; the sovereign is merely borrowing that sign from the anarchic network that produced it.

For this reason, I would argue that Hobbes has shown us a key for how to resist sovereignty by and through its own terms and bases. Sovereignty, and I would say encryption more generally, has both a theological and linguistic origin in Western thought and Christian doctrines. When we ignore Hobbes' own theology and also his radical and nominalistic theory of language, we remain spellbound by the specter of the Leviathan itself. As such, we remain subjects of encryption, utterly excluded from the power that has always and only been our own. We become once again a hidden people, our actual lives being overwritten by a false life that is in fact only a form of death, or a waiting for death. In this way, all subjects are waiting for the sovereign to decide if our life is worthy or not (and permitting by this device the basis for colonialism, for racism and misogyny and other archist practices).

But when we remember the theological origins that Hobbes offers us, the origins of language itself, of human decision and the preservation thereby of our immanent differences, we can see that the architect of modern encryption has once again placed a secret key--a secret that works against the

secrecy of encryption, and thus an anti-secret, a form of life that undoes the crypt at the heart of that system of control—at the center of that same basis of authority. In the secularized forms of power that Hobbes helped to inaugurate, we often forget this other genealogy of sovereign power, but we do so at our own peril. Hobbes’s radical negative theology as well as the theory of language that stems from it means that encryption can never be total (insofar as its own sources are also the sources of its undoing) and so we would do well to rethink both the origins and bases of the encrypting power that otherwise holds all of us in its maw.

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