

Hobbes and Hats

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There is no more analyzed image in the history of political thought than the frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), yet the tiny figures making up the giant have largely escaped scholarly attention. So, too, have their hats. This article recovers what men's failure to "doff and don" their hats in the frontispiece might have conveyed to readers about their relationship to the Sovereign and each other. Sometimes big ideas—about the nature of representation, for example, or how to "acknowledge" equality—are conveyed by small gestures. When situated textually and contextually, Hobbes's hats shed important light on the micropolitics of everyday interaction for those who, like Hobbes himself, hope to securely constitute a society of equals.

INTRODUCTION

There is no more analyzed image in political theory and the history of political thought than the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651).¹ For decades, scholars have sought to illuminate its origins—from the artist responsible (e.g., Bredekamp 1999; Brown 1978; Corbett and Lightbown 1979; Skinner 2018), to the extent of Hobbes's involvement (e.g., Berger 2020; Malcolm 2012, 134; Skinner 2018, 271), the context and circumstances of its production (e.g., Berger 2017; Malcolm 2012), and the optical devices and illusions involved (e.g., Bredekamp 1999; Malcolm 2004; Skinner 2018, 289–302). Others have analyzed its every aspect for insight into Hobbes's text—from the colossal central figure (e.g., Dietz 1990; Gamboni 2005; Kristiansson and Tralau 2014; Lloyd 1992), to the scriptural citations above (e.g., Baumgold 1988, 120–3; Farr 1990; Strong 1993), the oppositional emblems below (e.g., Champion 2010; Skinner 2018, 277–81), and the land-, sea-, and cityscapes beyond (e.g., Falk 2011; Kristiansson and Tralau 2014; Scarry 2014).

The result, as Justin Champion once observed, is that "reading the title-page is a minor scholarly industry" unto itself (2010, 259). Given that Hobbes himself foregrounded *Leviathan's* didactic significance—as well as the dangerously persuasive power of images—this surfeit of scholarly attention makes sense (Bejan 2010). As Skinner (2018, 251) reminds us, the term "frontispiece" originated in architecture to describe the face of or entrance to a building. The image is thus, both literally and figuratively, the point of entry whereby generations of readers have accessed the text,

and generations of teachers across the disciplines of politics, history, philosophy, and literature have introduced it to their students.

Most commentary has therefore focused on the gigantic body comprising countless smaller figures in the frontispiece as a visual representation of the book's central metaphor—namely, the "LEVIATHAN" or "COMMON-WEALTH." Skinner (2018) presents this more precisely as a close pictorial rendering of Hobbes's theory of representation, whereby a "multitude" of individuals becomes a "PEOPLE" in virtue of being represented by a Sovereign who "bear[s] their Person" (L II.17.260). Still, differences of interpretation as to the nature of this creature abound. Is the "body politic" so depicted a "natural" person or an "artificial" one (Skinner 2018, 283–4)? Or is it a monster, of land or sea (Kristiansson and Tralau 2014; Smith 2018)? And finally, whose face does it wear—Oliver Cromwell's (Brown 1978, 32), the future Charles II's (Goldsmith 1990, 671–3; Strong 1993, 130), or that of Hobbes, "the Monster of Malmesbury," himself (Martinich 1992, 363)?

And yet, despite this "cottage industry" of commentary (Berger 2020, 331), the miniature figures making up the giant's body have largely escaped scholarly attention.² Skinner (2018) has, however, noted in passing a curious detail: in the crowd of common people constituting this body politic, "no one...has felt obliged to remove his hat" (305, my emphasis). That historians of political thought have hitherto missed the hats is not surprising. Focused, as we so often are, on the Great Men and Minds of Western political thought, we have seen fit to leave small points of haberdashery to the social and cultural historians. But sometimes big ideas can be conveyed by small gestures—including, for example, a male subject's failure to "doff and don" his hat in the presence

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¹ Hobbes (2012) hereafter cited in text as "L" with volume, chapter, and page number. In-text citations to his other works as follows: Hobbes (2008) as "EL" and Hobbes (1998) as "DC."

² For limited discussion, see Bredekamp (1999) and Kristiansson and Tralau (2014, 299) (cf. Brito Vieira 2018; Skinner 2018, 283). I first drew public attention to the hats in my Balzan Skinner Lecture in Modern Intellectual History, entitled "Acknowledging Equality," given at the University of Cambridge on April 22, 2016.

of his Sovereign. The neglect of Hobbes's hats by historically-minded political theorists—many of whom have turned directly to seventeenth-century England for insight into the “expressive demands” of equality as an everyday, embodied social practice—is thus especially unfortunate.³

Certainly, the significance of this sartorial choice was not lost on Hobbes's contemporaries. Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, complained bitterly that *Leviathan* had simply flattered “the delight [the People] have in the word Equality, which in truth signifies nothing more than keeping on their hats” (1676, 59). Taking its cue from Clarendon, then, this article asks how Hobbes himself might have understood the hats in *Leviathan*'s frontispiece, as well as what their presence would have conveyed to early modern readers about their relationship to the Sovereign—and to each other. To this end, it situates the hats both textually and contextually, so as to bring insights from social and cultural histories of “the politics of gesture” to bear on the history of political thought (e.g., Braddick 2009).

In what follows, I begin by evaluating the evidence both for and against the significance of the hats in *Leviathan*'s frontispiece as depicting a *gesture*—specifically, that of a man's refusal to “putteth of his hat” in the presence of a social or political superior (iii.45.1028)—as well as the likelihood of Hobbes's authorship of this visual detail. I then consider the meaning of this gesture in light of *Leviathan*'s arguments for the importance of “civill worship,” or the culturally contingent practices by which Hobbes argues that subjects should “honour” their sovereign and each other, as a corollary of the eighth law of nature against insult (ii.15.234). This presents a puzzle: given that *Leviathan* presented the refusal of hat honor to a social or political superior as a paradigmatic case of contumely, why would its iconic cover image have depicted this gesture? In response, I argue that the hats in Hobbes's frontispiece should be read not as an endorsement of insult, but rather as a cunning illustration of two, novel aspects of his political theory: (1) the idea of representative sovereignty developed in Chapter 17 and (2) the ninth law of nature's injunction “*That every man acknowledgeth other for his Equall by Nature*” (ii.14.234). Evidently, for Hobbes, keeping on one's hat was simply the politically correct form of civil worship among men—but not women—who were one another's equals.

In light of this textual analysis, I then place Hobbes's hats in their social and political context—namely, English controversies over the refusal of hat honor as a form of “gestural dissidence” among radical groups like the Levellers, Diggers, and early Quakers in the late 1640s (Walter 2015, 333). As we shall see, by the time Hobbes published *Leviathan* in 1651, these groups had become notorious for marshaling gestural politics to challenge the established political, social, and

religious orders of their day under the scriptural banner of Acts 10:34—“God is no respecter of persons” (KJV).

For modern readers more attuned to the neo-Kantian formulation “equal respect *for* persons,” this negative injunction can sound jarring. And yet, Acts 10 did the heaviest lifting in disrupting early modern English hierarchies in the name of natural equality (see Bejan 2021)—not only among religious and political dissidents like the Levellers, but for Hobbes himself. Clarendon was clearly onto something when he complained that the publication of *Leviathan* had revealed his former friend to be “a faithful Leveller” committed to “the reduction of all degrees to one and the same...as if the safety of the People require'd an equality of Person” (Hyde 1676, 179).

Hobbes's hats thus not only shed light on several hitherto neglected features of a familiar text. They also reveal that Hobbes had more to say about the micro-politics of everyday interaction—as well as the gestural foundations of a society of equals—than historians and political theorists alike have recognized.

HATS AND CAVEATS

Once noticed, the hats in Hobbes's frontispiece are hard to miss. The giant's right arm positively *bristles* with them (Figure 1). But before the modern reader can assign these hats textual or contextual significance, she must first counter two objections—namely, that the frontispiece was not created by Hobbes, and therefore that one cannot attribute philosophical significance to its every detail.

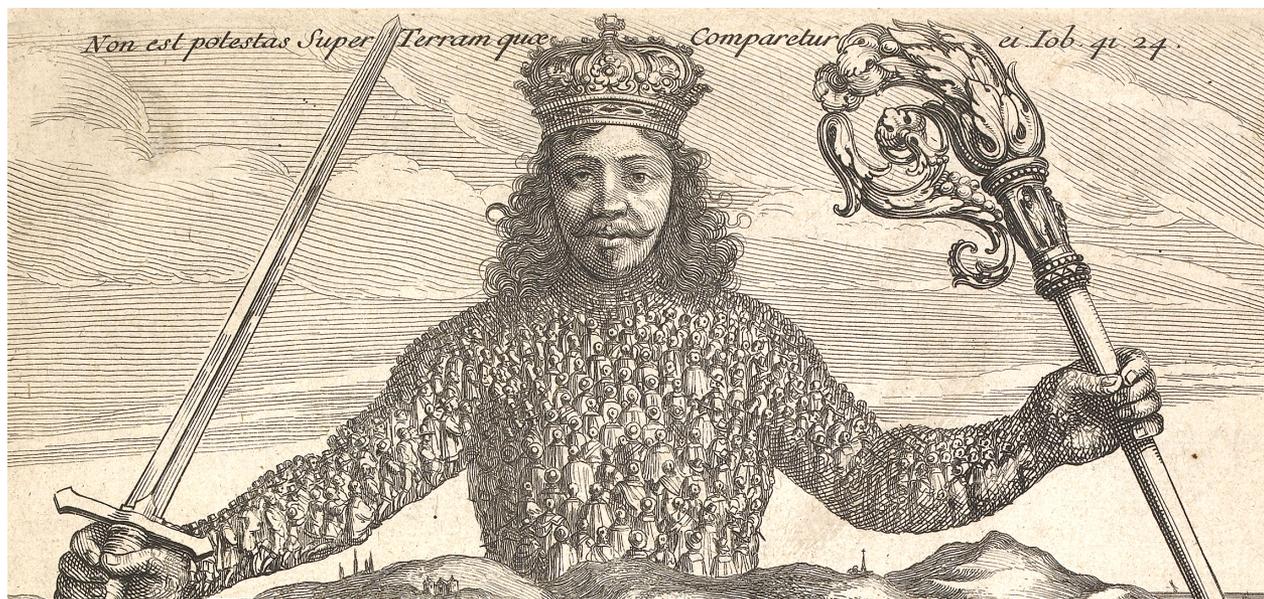
Historians now agree that the artist was the French printmaker, Abraham Bosse (c. 1604–76). In the 1640s, Bosse ran a workshop on rue Harlay in Paris, near to where Hobbes was living in exile and acting as mathematics tutor to the Prince of Wales. As Noel Malcolm notes, their geographic proximity means that Hobbes might well have had a close and ongoing involvement in Bosse's design (2012, 134), and Skinner (2018) makes a strong case for Hobbes's authorship of the frontispiece on this basis. Still, it is impossible to know the full extent to which Hobbes was involved, or for which visual details he may or may not have been responsible (Berger 2020, 10–3). One cannot therefore simply reject the possibility that *Leviathan*'s hats were introduced by Bosse for purely esthetic reasons.⁴

Nevertheless, it is possible to establish the gestural significance of the hats, as well as the likelihood of Hobbes's authorship, through a series of contrastive visual comparisons. Notice, first, that the hats are missing altogether in two other contemporary frontispieces attached to works by Hobbes. The first is the 1651 presentation copy of *Leviathan* given to his pupil, the future Charles II (Figure 2), and the second is the unauthorized French translation of Hobbes's earliest political treatise, *The Elements of Law* (c. 1640), published in Rouen in 1652 as *Le Corps Politique* (Figure 3).

³ The locus classicus for “relational equality” is Anderson (1999), supported by a turn to the seventeenth century in Anderson (2017). Other early modern-minded egalitarians include Pettit (2014) and Waldron (2012a; 2012b; 2017).

⁴ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

FIGURE 1. Detail from the Engraved Frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) by Abraham Bosse



Source: The British Library Board (Shelfmark: 522.k.6 frontispiece).

FIGURE 2. Detail from Manuscript Drawing of the Frontispiece of *Leviathan* by Abraham Bosse



Source: The British Library Board (Shelfmark: Egerton 1910, f.1).

In the first image, also by Bosse, the individuals making up the colossus look outward, away from the Sovereign's face and toward the reader. Their expressions convey awe, even fear, with their mouths open and their heads conspicuously bare. In the second image, the miniature figures are distinguished not only by their headgear (many of the men are bare-headed, whereas others wear helmets and academic

caps), but also by their dress more generally. Male soldiers, merchants, and scholars, as well as women, are readily identifiable by their clothing, which is of a broadly classical design unlike the early modern habits and broad-brimmed hats seen clearly in Bosse's 1651 etching.

These alternative images contrast starkly with *Leviathan's* printed frontispiece, in which a crowd of

FIGURE 3. Detail from Engraved Frontispiece of *Le corps politiques, ou Les éléments de la loy morale et civile, par T. Hobbes, tr. par un de ses amis* (Rouen, 1652)



Source: The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (Shelfmark: Vet. E3 f. 73). Creative Commons license: CC-BY-NC 4.0.

(seemingly) uniformly hatted men stand with their backs toward the reader, looking up toward the “face” of the Sovereign representative. Brown (1978) argued that Bosse’s manuscript image was more consistent with Hobbes’s political theory and concluded that the published image must therefore be a bowdlerization of the former by an ignorant English artist (29). Yet as Hoekstra (2015) observes, the individuals’ different orientations in the manuscript and printed frontispieces simply reflect the different audiences for which the texts were intended—the manuscript for Hobbes’s student and would-be Sovereign, Charles Stuart, and the printed version for subjects themselves. For Hoekstra, this suggests Hobbes’s personal involvement in, even supervision of, the creation of *both* images (241–2).

The visual departures in the 1652 engraving are similarly illustrative. Malcolm (2004) speculates that the “friend” responsible for this translation of *The Elements* was John Davies, not Samuel Sorbière, but in either case it was unlikely to have been authorized by Hobbes (464–5). Its frontispiece was therefore almost certainly a bowdlerization of Bosse’s print, which had been published in London the year before.⁵ While the

individuals in Bosse’s frontispiece are striking in their uniformity, their explicit sartorial differentiation in the 1652 image better reflects traditional, corporate conceptions of the body politic and the social differentiation of its “members.”

Nonetheless, upon closer inspection, there are also important differences to be found among the miniature figures in Bosse’s printed image. Not only are there women and children present, but there are also several adult male figures who are noticeably *not* wearing hats located along the giant’s right elbow, left chest, and shoulder (Figure 4a–d).

On the right-hand side of Figure 4, we see a single, helmeted soldier in profile, standing to the right of a civilian wearing the same flat-topped, broad-brimmed hat as his neighbors. In the center, we see three bonneted female figures behind two smaller, hatless ones, likely children. In the left-most detail, we see several male figures, the first clearly wearing an ecclesiastical surplice, the second and third apparently wearing doublets and hose—but instead of standing, they *kneel*.⁶ These details make the otherwise uniform hats worn by the many male civilians in the crowd more conspicuous by juxtaposing them against identifiably military, feminine, ecclesiastical, and likely aristocratic figures. More striking, still, is the contrast between the kneeling posture of the bare-headed figures at the Sovereign’s elbow and the standing, hatted Commoners beside them. Their subordinate posture would seem to identify the former as “ministers” or servants of Sovereignty (L ii.23.378–80). Bosse’s inclusion of a kneeling priest, in particular, appears to be a clear allusion to Chapter 42 of *Leviathan*, “Of Power Ecclesiastical,” which argues that priests rule as dependent and inferior ministers of the Sovereign “in the same manner as the Magistrates of Towns, Judges in the Courts of Justice, and Commanders of Armies,” and therefore that they also serve at his (not God’s) pleasure and direction (iii.42.840, 850–4).

Here, the contrastive postures of the figures in Bosse’s 1651 print confirm his familiarity with some of the finer points of Hobbes’s theory. Crucially, they also confirm his awareness of the gestural politics involved in constructing the image, including in the presence and position of the hats. In Bosse’s printed image, the *Leviathan*’s civilian subjects appear (in contrast with their ministerial neighbors) as *not* acknowledging their Sovereign’s superiority by baring their heads or bending the knee. The modestly bonneted women in their midst further confirm this as a *refusal* of hat honor, because in early modern Europe a woman honored by covering her head (in keeping with St. Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 11), while a man bared his (Kesselrig 2011). Finally, the absence of hats in the manuscript copy presented to Prince Charles—who would no doubt have been offended at receiving the opposite gesture from a crowd of common people assembled in his presence—further confirms that the hats in the printed image possessed political and social

⁵ Bredekamp (1999) attributes the 1652 engraving to Bosse himself, but I agree with Berger (2020) that this attribution is unlikely (350 n. 36).

⁶ Although Skinner (2018) notes the presence of these kneeling figures, he does not identify their clothing as distinctive (305).

FIGURE 4. Details from (a) Figure 1, (b) the Colossus's Right Elbow, (c) Left Chest, and (d) Left Shoulder



significance as an identifiable *gesture* in 1651, beyond simply an esthetic choice made by the artist.

Settling the hats' significance, however, still leaves open the question of authorship. Given that Bosse was a busy artisan and business owner, it seems likely that any detailed points of Hobbesian political theory would have been made their way into the frontispiece through Hobbes's direct involvement in the design. Yet one cannot simply assume that the hats were introduced in the same way. Bosse regularly showed painstaking attention to sartorial detail in his etchings, with hats figuring prominently in many. In 1629, he issued a series of prints of (mostly) hatted gentlemen "seen from behind" in various scenarios.⁷ These and many

later illustrations feature aristocrats wearing ornately feathered or beribboned, floppy hats,⁸ whereas others show a wide array of artisans, tradesmen, and merchants wearing their distinguishing headgear.⁹ Strikingly, Bosse's 1635 etching, "Burying the Dead" (*Ensevelir les Morts*) depicts a funeral procession in which four laymen wear flat-topped, broad-brimmed hats—similar to *Leviathan's*, but with black ribbons—behind a long train of Catholic clerics wearing *zucchetti* and *birettas*. A fifth layman emerges, hat in hand, from a building in the foreground.¹⁰

Clearly, Bosse was no stranger to the gestural politics of hat honor in ceremonial settings. Still, in his previous

⁷ See, e.g., "A gentleman, seen from behind...with a cane" (1629), "...with his right arm outstretched" (1629), "...walking up a parapet" (1629), and "...wearing a plumed hat" (1629). Unless otherwise specified, all prints by Bosse discussed in this section can be viewed through the Metropolitan Museum's website: <http://www.metmuseum.org> (accessed June 29, 2022).

⁸ See, e.g., "Taste" (c. 1635–8), "The Ball" (1634–5), and "Fortune Favoring France" (c. 1635–7).

⁹ See, e.g., "The Intaglio Printers" (1642), "The Sculptor" (1642), "The Ratcatcher" (undated), and "The Vinegar Merchant" (undated).

¹⁰ As a Protestant, Bosse's attention to the particulars of Catholic prelatical costume is notable. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this print.

depictions of royalty, Bosse had always been careful to represent male inferiors as going respectfully bare-headed among their betters and, where appropriate, on bended knee.¹¹ Such signs became all the more important in France in the 1640s, when issues of precedence and deference between the hereditary *noblesse d'épée* and the *noblesse de robe* created by the Crown finally erupted in the aristocratic rebellion known as the Fronde (1648–53). Accordingly, Bosse's instinct in 1651 would almost certainly have been to depict male subjects in the presence of their Sovereign as hatless, at the very least—as, indeed, he did in the *Leviathan* manuscript drawing.

Likewise, crowds of common people like that in the printed frontispiece are conspicuously absent in Bosse's other prints. One such crowd *can* be found, however, in a different Hobbesian frontispiece. In the engraving for Hobbes's translation of Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1629), the English artist Thomas Cecil depicted a crowd of men without hats (labeled *hoi polloi*, or “common people” in Hobbes's Greek), their upturned faces visible in profile, hanging on an orator's every word (reprinted in Berger 2020, 336). This visual detail evokes Hobbes's (1629) claim in the introduction to his translation, that Thucydides “least of all liked the *Democracy*...[due to] the emulation and contention of the Demagogues...[and] the desperate actions undertaken upon the flattering advice of such [Orators] as desired to attaine...authority and sway amongst the common people” (3–4).

On balance, then, it seems much more likely that Hobbes, not Bosse, was responsible for the introduction of a crowd of common people into the printed frontispiece of *Leviathan* published in London in 1651. And then, perhaps, having found an artist who specialized in drawing hats (from behind!), Hobbes convinced him to include a significant—and provocative—sartorial detail.

REPRESENTING SOVEREIGNTY

If indeed the hats were Hobbes's idea, they still present a puzzle. In early modern England, as in France, a man's refusal to doff and don to his Sovereign was a sign of disrespect, at best, and a treasonous act of *lèse-majesté*, at worst. Given this, why on earth would Hobbes, of all people, depict it? Surely, a man so dedicated to arguing for the absolute and even sacred nature of sovereignty would insist that the “Mortall God” depicted in the frontispiece receive all due honor from his subjects (L II.17.260)?

Here, however, a social historian might rightly remind us that a gesture's meaning depends always on the circumstances under which it is performed—in

this case, *by whom and to whom* (Braddick 2009, 12; see also L i.31.562). Even if we could be certain, then, that Hobbes intended the hats in the 1651 printed frontispiece to represent a gesture—namely, a refusal of hat honor—what that gesture would have *meant* in the context of the image is not self-evident. To understand fully the social and political dynamics at work in the frontispiece, we must turn to the text itself.

As noted earlier, a comparison between the published and presentation frontispieces of *Leviathan* suggests that early modern readers would have seen the former as depicting a group of inferior subjects refusing to “doff and don” in the presence of a superior. At first blush, the text itself supports this interpretation. Chapter 45 of *Leviathan*, “Of *Daemonology* and other Relics of the Religion of the Gentiles,” explores the practices of “worship”—both “civil” and “divine”—by which men express “honour,” as their opinion of another's superior power or worth (iii.45.1028). It explicitly identifies both “fall[ing] prostrate before a king” and “put[ting] off his hat in the church” as signs of civil and divine worship, respectively. For Hobbes, however, the kind of worship involved depended on a person's opinion of the nature of the honoree—in the first place, “but a man,” in the second, God himself. In both cases, the particular gesture (prostration or hat honor) was simply evidence that one “value[d] highly the power” of the recipient in comparison with one's own.¹²

Hobbes's interest in civil worship predated *Leviathan*. *The Elements* had singled out men's competition for glory—as an effort to extract worship from others in recognition of a mistaken belief in one's own superiority—as turning the state of nature into a state of war (92). This analysis came to the fore once more in *Leviathan*, which identified “contumely, in words, or gesture”—including “trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other signe of undervalue”—as one of the “principall causes of Quarrel” (ii.14.253, 13.192). Insults, whether advertent or in-, were evidently so dangerous that Hobbes went on to proscribe contumely as a matter of natural law: “Because all signs of hatred or contempt provoke to fight...*no man by deed, word, countenance, or gesture, [should] declare hatred or contempt of another*” (ii.15.234).

Accordingly, *Leviathan*'s proscription of insult in the eighth law of nature ended up justifying a vast, absolute, and arbitrary sovereign power over subjects' external actions, words *and* deeds, insofar as they impinged on worship, whether civil or divine (see Bejan 2017, chap. 3). This included the regulation of even “what signes of respect...they shall give to one another” in their “publique or private meetings” (L ii.18.276).¹³ The refusal of hat honor in Hobbes's frontispiece must therefore be read in light of his insistence on the overwhelming importance of

¹¹ See, e.g., “Louis XIII Listens to the Provost of the Merchants of Paris” (1629) and “The Joy of France” (1638). See also Bosse's “La Levée du siege de Casal” (1630), held at the Louvre, and his frontispiece to Charles Drelincourt's *Les Consolations de l'âme fidele* (1651). For the latter, see Figure 10.37 in Skinner (2018, 299).

¹² In a brief aside, Brito Vieira (2018) erroneously suggests that the men wear hats in the frontispiece because they are engaged in civil, not religious, worship (98 n.16; cf. L ii.XLV.1034).

¹³ Here, Hobbes's long-standing interests in glory-seeking and status competition as sources of conflict were surely exacerbated by his own experience of the Fronde. See Newey (2014, 317).

demonstrating all natural and conventional signs of honor to the Sovereign as due recognition of his superiority. Negatively, this meant not calling kings contemptuous names like “tyrant” (ii.29.508), and positively, that subjects “do those things to [him] that he takes for signs of honour, or which the law or custom makes so” (ii.10.138)—including, presumably, “put[ing] off the hat.”

Here, however, it would be wrong to interpret the colossus in *Leviathan*'s frontispiece as *itself* a Sovereign monarch—that is, as “a natural person,” to whom the subjects depicted might be expected to display all appropriate signs of civil worship (Skinner 2018, 283–4). Rather the point of Hobbes's theory of representation—as well as the image thereof in the frontispiece—is that the state is an *artificial* person, in which a collective (the People) acts “as one” only in virtue of being represented by the “one man, or...assembly of men” authorized to “bear their person” (L ii.17.260). On this theory, “SOVERAIGNE” is simply the name given to “he that carryeth this Person...and [is] said to have *Soveraigne Power*; and every one besides, his SUBJECT” (ii.17.262). According to the miracle of representation, then, the Sovereign effectively *becomes* the People—which has no independent existence—by bearing their person (ii.16.248). This relationship of personal identity is captured in the frontispiece through its depiction of the corporate body politic wearing “the face, as a Mask or Visard”—in Latin, the *persona*—of a particular person (ii.16.244; see also Skinner 2005). In other words, the Sovereign wears *the People's* face.

On this point, Skinner (2005) and Tuck (2016) have read *Leviathan*'s theory of representation in the context of other, contemporary theories of parliamentary sovereignty, such as those put forward by the Parliamentary polemicist Henry Parker. Parker had argued that it was Parliament (and more particularly, the House of Commons), not the King, who represented the People, and therefore in which sovereignty properly resided. According to Parker (1642), therefore, “the King[,] though he be *singulus maior*, yet he is *universis minor*” not only to the People (as in the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* [1579], from which Parker derived this Latin dictum), but also to the Parliament that represented them (15). In other words, a king was *superior* (*maior*) to individual members of Parliament, as well as to his subjects, when taken individually; but taken collectively, he should be viewed as rightly *inferior* (*minor*) to the body of “the People” as represented in Parliament assembled.

To return to the hats in Hobbes's frontispiece, a Parliamentarian like Parker might well have read the refusal of hat honor depicted as a reassertion of the People's superiority over both Parliament *and* the exiled Prince, who alike in 1651 claimed to represent them. But in *Leviathan*, Hobbes rejected the *maior singulis sed minor universis* doctrine explicitly:

[T]here is little ground for the opinion of them, that say of Sovereign Kings, though they be *singulis majores*, or greater Power than every one of their Subjects, yet they

be *Universis minores*, of lesse power than them all together. For if by *all together*, they mean not the collective body as one person, then *all together*, and *every one*, signifie the same; and the speech is absurd. But if by *all together*, they understand them as one Person (which person the Sovereign bears,) then the power of all together is the same with the Sovereigns power; and so again the speech is absurd. (ii.18.280)

Again, the relationship described by Hobbes and carefully depicted in the frontispiece is rather one of “personal” identity between representer and represented, and hence of their equality (ii.16.248). Sovereigns were *singulis maiores*, to be sure, but they were also strictly speaking *universis aequales*, not *minores*. And if, as Hobbes's theory insisted, the Sovereign wears the People's “face” when he bears their Person, why would or should its (male) members, when collectively assembled, doff their hats to themselves?

Here again, Hobbes's hats alert us to a neglected aspect of his political theory—namely, *Leviathan*'s insistence that the Sovereign representative could itself be a corporate body (i.e., an assembly), as well as a monarch or other natural person. After all, “men who are in absolute liberty, may, if they please, give Authority to One man, to represent them every one, as well as to give such Authority to any Assembly of men whatsoever” (L ii.19.286). And indeed when *Leviathan* was published in 1651, the English Sovereign was an assembly—namely, the Rump Parliament—as Hobbes was well aware.

Remembering the Rump highlights another, key aspect of the political context in which Hobbes introduced his hats in 1651. Before the abolition of the House of Lords along with the Crown in 1649, members of the House of Commons had been expected to bare their heads upon their ceremonial visits to the Lords' chamber to be addressed by the King, as the Sovereign Crown-in-Parliament. After the Regicide, as Kelsey (1997) reminds us, the iconography of hats became central to the self-presentation of the republican regime. When the Great Seal of the Commonwealth was first cast in 1649, it replaced the traditional image of the King enthroned with one of the new Sovereign representative, the Rump Parliament, in session (Figure 5). The presence of hatted MPs in the Seal was thus a deliberate sign of Commons' newfound and unchallengeable (for now) supremacy, including over the executive Council of State chaired by the Army's then Commander-in-Chief, Oliver Cromwell.

The Seal's resemblance to Hobbes's hats is remarkable and thus offers further contextual evidence for their significance.¹⁴ The Savillian Professor of Geometry at Oxford, John Wallis, was wrong when he accused Hobbes of writing *Leviathan* “in defense of Oliver's title”; Cromwell would not be named Lord Protector

¹⁴ I thank Paul Seaward for first drawing my attention to the resemblance.

FIGURE 5. Second Great Seal of the Commonwealth (Reverse), Recast in 1651 after the 1649 Original, Showing the Rump Parliament in Session



Source: The Society of Antiquaries of London (Shelfmark: LDSAL A32).

until 1653 (Wallis 1662, 4–6; see also Collins 2005, 276). But Wallis was surely right to connect the book, both visually and intellectually, to the very present controversies over Sovereignty and representation roiling England at the time of its publication. The hat-wearing men in Bosse's image would have reminded readers that there were at least two, conflicting claims to "represent" the English People in 1651—that of Charles Stuart, the exiled prince, and that of the increasingly narrow subset of Commons still sitting (or standing) in Parliament.

Yet while the Great Seal presented its hat-wearing Commons as sovereign and generally superior, in Hobbes's image, the hat-wearers remain, as individuals, clearly subjects of sovereignty—as indicated both by their size (small) and orientation (under) the artificial person of the state. According to *Leviathan*, the body of hatted men could collectively, in theory, regard itself as Sovereign, and hence as equal (and no more than equal) to the People it claimed to represent. However, the generic kingly visage topped not by a hat, but a crown, in the frontispiece suggests that Hobbes himself preferred a monarchical arrangement. Its overall visual effect was to remind the hatted men that they were still but a part of the People—and so to put Parliament in its place.¹⁵

¹⁵ Skinner (2005) argues that Hobbes's preferred representative arrangement was that of a Sovereign monarch, supported by Parliament as a ministerial, consultative, and emphatically inferior body (176).

ACKNOWLEDGING EQUALITY

Thus far, my analysis of *Leviathan's* hats has focused on the vertical relationship between the individuals making up the People and their Sovereign representative. But what about the horizontal dimension of Hobbes's theory? After all, the eighth law of nature's proscription of contumely gave Hobbes's Sovereign the power to regulate even the public and private "signes of respect" that individuals gave to one another. What, then, would Hobbes's hats have communicated to early modern readers about how they should relate to one another?

As Clarendon suspected, the relevant precept on this point was not *Leviathan's* eighth law of nature, but the ninth, which began with one of Hobbes's many refutations of Aristotle:

The question who is the better man, has no place in the condition of meer Nature where...all men are equall. The inequality that now is, has bin introduced by the Lawes ... And therefore for the ninth law of nature I put this, *That every man acknowledgeth other for his Equall by Nature.* (ii.14.234)

Here, Hobbes sought, as Clarendon recognized, to deprive aristocrats in England and elsewhere of the claim that their social distinction derived from any natural superiority. *Leviathan* signaled clearly, through its appeal to the Book of Job, its determination "to humble the children of pride"—namely, the myriad self-styled aristocrats (spiritual, as well as hereditary) and "Democrat-cally Gentlemen" that Hobbes blamed for causing the Civil War (see Baumgold 1988, 120–3; Skinner 2008, 139–40). To this end, he drew directly on John Selden's *Titles of Honor* (1614) to argue that titles and other signs of dignity were merely discretionary civil honors bestowed by the Sovereign (who could also remove them) on those who had distinguished themselves in service to the state.¹⁶

Still, throughout these discussions, Hobbes also suggested that subjects in a well-constituted commonwealth must be treated as equals by law, as well as by nature. As *Leviathan* put it:

As in the presence of the Master, the Servants are all equall, and *without any honour at all*; So are the Subjects, in the presence of the Sovereign. And though they shine some more, some lesse, when they are out of his sight; yet in his presence, they shine no more than the Starres in the presence of the Sun. (L ii.18.280, my emphasis)

Here, the sovereign's presence serves to reveal an important truth—namely, that despite their differences, all subjects are *equally* without honor, enjoying what *The Element's* described as a low but "equal

¹⁶ Clarendon described Hobbes's tracing "the Pedegree of those pretences" and the origins of titles to feudal Germany—a discussion wholly new to *Leviathan*—as "one of those dreams which [Hobbes] falls into, when he invades the quarters of History to make good his assertions" (Hyde 1676, 184).

estate” of subjection “no less absolute, than the subjection of servants” (132).

To return now to the frontispiece: Bosse’s image ingeniously captures this subtle point of Hobbesian perspective. In it, we see a mass of subjects assembled in their Sovereign’s presence. Their roughly equal size and uniformity make the differences between them barely distinguishable; they blend into the background. The point, pictorially as well as textually, is that individuals are fundamentally equal in the sense of being *indifferent* from the perspective of sovereignty, no matter how large they might loom in their own eyes due to the “multiplying glasses” of self-love (ii.18.282). Any differences in status, posture, or dignity among them become visible only when this Sovereign perspective is abandoned. To see the hatted men, bonneted women, and kneeling ministers, one must zoom into the level of fine detail (as in Figure 4) and look, as it were, horizontally at the relative position of the individuals.

This idea of “equality-as-indifference” is in keeping with Hobbes’s infamous defense of natural equality in Chapter 13 of *Leviathan* on “Of the Natural Condition of Mankind.” There, men’s equality appears as a matter of their roughly equal powers: “Nature hath made men *so equall*, in the faculties of body, and mind...[that] when all is reckoned together, the difference between man and man is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon *claim to himselfe any benefit*, to which another may not pretend, as well as he” (L ii.13.188, my emphasis). In other words, men are *not* in fact equal in their abilities; nevertheless, those differences should be viewed as matters of indifference in light of our strictly equal propensity to claim or “pretend” superiority on that basis (see Hoekstra 2012). Turning then to intellectual equality, Hobbes offers a joke rather than an argument. The fact that men are not willing to believe that “there be many so wise as themselves” is itself proof “that men are in that point equall.” “For there is not ordinarily a greater signe of the *equall distribution* of any thing, than that every man is contented with his share” (ii.13.188, my emphasis).¹⁷

As Hoekstra (2012) has shown, this discussion reveals that Hobbes regarded the idea of natural equality as neither new nor, strictly speaking, *true*. Not new because, by the seventeenth century, the idea that human beings were *aequales* by nature had been a Christian and natural law commonplace for over a millennium.¹⁸ And not true, because Hobbes would always insist that men’s natural equality was a principle to be “admitted,” rather than an empirical fact. There thus remained an important sense in which individuals were not born but *created* equal for Hobbes. Only unlike Locke, this creation was accomplished by human beings

themselves, not God, through a process of their mutual “acknowledge[ment]” (L ii.14.234.)

Hoekstra interprets acknowledgement—derived from the Latin *agnoscere*—in its early modern legal sense, as “to declare, announce, allow, or admit a thing to be one’s own” (102). Certainly, Hobbes wanted citizens to affirm a belief in natural equality, whether they really believed it or not (Bejan 2022b, 13). Yet *Leviathan* made clear that “acknowledgement” was also a social practice. While previous commentators have focused on the negative dimension of the eighth and ninth laws of nature as proscribing incivility (see Bejan 2017; Mark 2018), the ninth also introduced the *positive* demand that “every man acknowledgeth other for his Equall.” This meant that those who were “equals” by nature should not only profess a belief in others’ equality when asked, but also perform the civil worship and signs of respect appropriate to equals among themselves. Whereas hat honor (say) might be demanded from a social inferior to a superior, among equals there would be no such expectation. Once again, the frontispiece illustrates what this might look like in practice, with the male Commoners’ hats appearing as an effective emblem of their natural, civil, and social equality.¹⁹

Of course, Hobbes developed his relational sense of equality as something men *do*, and do together, through a complex constellation of natural laws—not only the eighth and ninth (“against Contumely” and “Pride”), but the tenth (“against Arrogance”), the eleventh (on “Equity”), and the twelfth (of the “Equal use of things Common”). *Leviathan*’s explication of the eleventh law of nature is particularly important for our purposes: “[Equity] is a precept of the law of nature,” that a judge “*deal equally between [man and man]*,” and its violation “is called *acceptation of persons* (προσωποληψια)” (ii.15.236).

Here, Hobbes’s appeal to the Greek term, *prosopelepsia*, reveals this to be a biblical allusion to Acts 10:34, in which God is declared to be *οικεστιν προσωποληπτης* or *non est personarum acceptor*: in English, “God is no acceptor of persons.”²⁰ As *Leviathan*’s discussion of representation emphasized, *persona* was a Latin legal term describing the formal representation of individuals or corporate bodies in a court of civil law (ii.16.244). But according to Acts, one’s acceptability to the Christian God did not depend on one’s worldly status or “face” but on one’s spiritual merit. Despite individuals’ many differences of external “person”—that is, their age, sex, race, wealth, social status, or condition—in His eyes, all were equal. In *Leviathan*, then, text and image worked together to insist that they remain equal in the eyes of the Mortal God, as well—as, for instance, in the “Courts of Justice” (ii.30.536).

¹⁷ Given Hobbes’s sensitivity to laughter as among the most egregious forms of contumely, making a joke at his readers’ expense here is a surprising choice (L ii.6.88; see also Black 2019; Carroll 2020).

¹⁸ The Book of Job had been a favored proof text in Christian defenses of natural equality since at least the sixth century.

¹⁹ Here, the difference in headgear between men and women in the frontispiece supports feminist critics, who argue that *Leviathan*’s theory of a natural equality assumed the subordination of one sex to another (e.g., Pateman 2018, 45–7).

²⁰ See also James 2:1, Romans 2:11, and 1 Peter 1:17. For discussion, see Bejan (2021).

DISRESPECTING PERSONS

No wonder that the Earl of Clarendon was annoyed. Not only did the frontispiece offer a galling (if subtly critical) pictorial reminder of the Rump's claim to supremacy in 1651; it also suggested that male subjects ought to observe an egalitarian gestural politics among themselves while depriving aristocrats of their hereditary dignity and privileges. "Like a faithful Leveller," he complained, "[Hobbes] is very solicitous...that no man may have priviledges...by his birth or descent, or have farther honor then adhereth naturally to his abilities" (Hyde 1676, 182–3).

Keeping this in mind, Clarendon's accusation that Hobbes had published his work at a moment when "the reduction of all degrees to one and the same was resolv'd upon, and begun, and exercis'd towards the whole Nobility with all instances of contem[p]t and scorn" makes sense (Hyde 1676, 179). Indeed, by the time *Leviathan* and its frontispiece were published in 1651, a stream of English religious and political radicals had successfully converted their refusal to "doff and don" to their superiors into a conscientious program of social and political reform. Their tagline? None other than Acts 10:34, albeit in its more memorable King James Version: "God is no respecter of persons."

Of course, the refusal of hat honor had been well attested as a form of social protest in England long before the seventeenth century (see Walter 2015, 333). According to one chronicler, the leader of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt had been struck down when he refused the Lord Mayor's command to remove his hat. More recently in 1630, an oatmeal-maker had taken "upon him[self] to be a preacher [and] was called before the High Commission":

Where, keeping on his hat, and being asked why he did not put it off, he answered he would never put off his hat to bishops. "But you will [u]s?" said one of them. "Then as you are privy counselors," quoth he, "I put off my hat, but as ye are rags of the beast, lo! I put it on again!" (Mead 1849, 71–2)

By 1651, such refusals had been taken up by the Levellers and more motley crews of Diggers and proto-Quakers abroad in the New Model Army. Twenty years before William Penn would refuse to remove his hat while on trial in the Old Bailey, the Leveller leader John Lilburne refused to remove his or kneel when hauled in front of the House of Lords.

As I have shown elsewhere (Bejan 2022a), the Levellers' program of what Walter (2015) calls "gestural dissidence" went hand in hand with proposed legal and political reforms in which the language of Acts was also central. In a postscript to *An Arrow Against Tyrants*, Richard Overton pled for legal equality to Parliament as follows:

Care neither for favours nor smiles, and *be no respecter of persons*. Let not the greatest peers in the land be more respected with you than so many old bellows-menders, broom-men, cobblers, tinkers, or chimney-sweepers, who

are all equally freeborn with the hugest men and loftiest Anakims in the land. (1998, 60, my emphasis)

Two years later, the Digger leader Gerrard Winstanley, who also refused to doff and don to General Fairfax, applied Acts 10:34 to the issue of land reform: "For if the Reformation must be according to the Word of God, then every one is to have the benefit and freedom of his creation, without respect of persons" (2006, 105 and *passim*).

While the pejorative "Quaker" was first used in print in 1650, George Fox began his ministry in 1646. "When the Lord sent me forth into the world," he wrote, "he forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low; and I was required to Thee and Thou all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small...and this made the sects and professions to rage" (Fox 2010, 20). While his Gospel of the Inner Light was not original, Fox's elevation of uncivil social practices to central tenets of his faith—such as refusing to doff and don and using the familiar "Thee" and "Thou" with strangers—*was*. "God is no respecter of persons" remained the defining Quaker slogan for decades (see, e.g., Furley 1663).

The violence with which the early Quakers were met reflects just how central the performance of civil worship was to the maintenance of social hierarchies. In early modern England, respectful behavior toward one's "betters" was seen as a corollary of the fifth commandment, "Honor thy Father and Mother." In the *Larger Catechism* issued in 1648, "the honor inferiors owe to superiors" included "all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior... and maintenance of their persons and authority according to their several ranks and...places," while any "contempt of...their persons and places...cursing, mocking, and all such refractory and scandalous carriage" was a sin (see Sharp 1998, xx–xxi). This cultural awareness of the social importance of gestures of respect, in turn, lent the refusal of hat honor its power as a form of protest.

Decades later, Clarendon's *Brief View and Survey* would link Hobbes's project with the Levellers explicitly (Hyde 1676, 181–2). Given *Leviathan*'s invocation of Acts 10:34 in the context of its discussion of equity and legal justice, this makes sense. Leveller leaders had also combined hats and Acts in calling for impartial treatment (e.g., Sharp 1998, 35–6). Lilburne and William Walwyn, for instance, regarded the refusal of hat honor in the courtroom as an appropriate acknowledgement of the natural equality of "freeborn Englishmen," whether they be Commoners or Peers, jurors or judges (see Walwyn 1651, 3). Their critics, however, were unconvinced. None other than Henry Parker complained that "the substance of [this] Levelling philosophy" was that "Judges because they understand the law, are to be degraded...[and] Jurors, because they understand no Law, are to be mounted aloft" (1649, 21).

On this point, at least, Parliamentarians like Parker and royalists like Clarendon could agree: the gestural politics in play when crowds of common people insisted

on keeping on their hats would turn the world upside down.

LEVIATHAN, LEVELLER?

Like Wallis, Clarendon's timing was off when he accused Hobbes of publishing *Leviathan* "in a conjuncture when the Levellers were at [their] highest" (Hyde 1676, 181). Hobbes began writing the book in Paris sometime after the Regicide in early 1649, only a few months before the final Leveller mutiny was suppressed at Burford (Malcolm 2012, 1–12). Nevertheless, in 1651, the Levellers were still an uncomfortably recent memory, and Clarendon was right to point out how little Hobbes sought to distance himself from them in his work. Instead, *Leviathan* enthusiastically embraced the image of levelling, both in its title and its striking cover image of a host of hatted Commons.²¹ Indeed, given the social and political context, one might wonder how an English reader could fail to see the hats in the frontispiece—or forget their radical associations?

Of course, by the time he published *Leviathan*, Hobbes had not been in England for a decade. Still, Richard Tuck argues that there is good textual and contextual evidence for thinking that Hobbes was nonetheless aware of the Levellers, and their activism around judicial reform, in particular.²² Moreover, even though his analysis of contumely might lead one to expect Hobbes to share Parker's concerns about withholding hat honor in the courtroom, certain features of *Leviathan* suggest that he took the Levellers' side.²³

While *The Elements* had singled out the contempt shown by the rich toward the poor and by judges toward defendants as key examples of contumely (EL 92; see also DC 49), *Leviathan* expanded this discussion considerably. In Chapter 30, "On the Office of the Sovereign Representative," Hobbes now reminded his readers that, "The Inequality of Subjects, proceedeth from the Acts of Sovereign Power," and therefore:

[It] has no more place in the presence of the Sovereign; that is to say, in the Courts of Justice, then the Inequality between Kings, and their Subjects, in the presence of the

King of Kings. The honour of great Persons, is to be valued for their beneficence, and the aydes they give to men of inferior rank, or not at all. And the violences, oppressions, and injuries they do, are not extenuated, but aggravated by the greatnesse of their persons...the consequences of this partiality towards the great, proceed in this manner. Impunity maketh Insolence; Insolence Hatred; and Hatred an Endeavour to pull down all oppressing and contumelious greatnesse, though with the ruine of the Common-wealth. (ii.30.536)

Clarendon would also single out this passage as evidence of Hobbes's Levelling sympathies, as "language lent to, or borrowed, from the Agitators at that time" (Hyde 1676, 182–3). Perhaps Hobbes also endorsed the withholding of hat honor in the courtroom to remind judges of their inferiority as public ministers, as cunningly illustrated in the frontispiece by the kneeling figures at the giant's elbow. After all, ministers are but "servants" of the Sovereign—and, by extension, of the People he represents.

Here, however, one must resist assimilating *Leviathan's* commitment to judicial "equity" with the ostensibly egalitarian sensibilities of the Levellers (Hoekstra 2012, 99; cf. Bejan 2022a). The difference in perspective noted above and deftly captured by Bosse is once again germane. All subjects would be rightly regarded as "indifferent" from the perspective of the Sovereign and his ministers, including judges. Nevertheless, individual subjects should respect whatever horizontal distinctions in status—or more precisely, of *person*—the Sovereign saw fit to impose upon them. Crucially, in embracing Selden and rejecting Aristotle, Hobbes did not therefore reject all social (as opposed to natural or civil) inequalities. "Sawcie behaviour towards their betters" shown by "men of low degree" and "the barbarous state of men in power, towards their inferiors" were equally objectionable (ii.intro.18). His point was rather that when subjects honored the persons set above them by law, they were really honoring the Sovereign as the "fountain of all Honour"—and through him, in a way, themselves. Accordingly, the men refusing to doff and don in the frontispiece have their attention firmly fixed on the Sovereign, thus avoiding the destructive interpersonal comparisons that might arise from looking directly at each other.

Finally, *pace* Clarendon, there is some textual evidence to suggest that Hobbes did seek to distance himself—at least somewhat—from the radicals in 1651. Take, for example, *Leviathan's* evolving scriptural citations. As we have seen, Hobbes's idea that men "ought to admit" equality among themselves dates from *The Elements*, his first and most conventionally aristocratic work (73). There, Hobbes specified that one must "allow" others equal right by distributing *aequalia aequalibus* and "weighing" their interests as one would one's own, a principle supported with reference to the Golden Rule (EL 95–6, 100–1).

The first edition of *De Cive* (1642) expanded upon this discussion. Written in Latin for a European audience, *De Cive* redefined the principle of equal or impartial distribution as "equity" (*aequitas*), and its

²¹ Strikingly, the giant in the frontispiece also evoked a famous incident from Spenser's *Fairie Queene* (1596), in which "a mighty Gyant," promises to restore "ballaunce" to the world "and all things...reduce unto equality" (Spenser 1979, 742; cf. Isaiah 40:4 KJV). An anonymous pamphlet published during the Civil War reprinted Spenser's verse as a "lively representation of our times," identifying Cromwell as "the Gyant Leveller" (Anonymous 1648, 4).

²² In an unpublished paper, "Hobbes and the Jury," Richard Tuck (2018) argues that Hobbes kept up with Lilburne's trial specifically, through the royalist newsletter *Mercurius Pragmaticus*. Cited by permission.

²³ Tuck (2018) also notes that when hat honor came to the fore again in the Penn-Mead trial, the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas was Hobbes's friend, John Vaughan. What would come to be known as Bushell's Case (1670) centered on jury nullification and became a hallmark judgment for the modern doctrine of trial by jury ("Hobbes and the Jury").

violation as “acceptio of persons” (*acceptio personarum*) (62–3). Moreover, Hobbes’s chosen scriptural supports were now much more incendiary, including Isaiah 40:4 (“*Every valley shall be raised, and every mountain and hill made low...where assuredly the reference is to men, not mountains*”), Colossians 3.11 (“*There is not Gentile and Jew, Barbarian and Scyth, slave and free, but Christ is all things and in all*”), and finally Acts 10:34 (“*God is no acceptor of persons*”). In *Leviathan*, however, only the allusion to Acts remained; the scriptural citations were removed. Nor did Hobbes update his phrasing from the Vulgate to the more familiar and colloquial English of the King James (“*God is no respecter of persons*”)—as, indeed, the unauthorized English translator of *De Cive* would do in the so-called *Philosophicall Rudiments Concerning Society and Government*, also published in 1651.²⁴ When Hobbes finally published his Latin *Leviathan* in 1668, the entire discussion was dropped.²⁵

Taken together, these changes—and lack thereof—can no more than hint that Hobbes was aware of the claims an increasingly rambunctious set of political and religious dissidents were making in the late 1640s. But they certainly *do* hint that Hobbes, too, understood the power of Acts 10:34’s injunction to divinely inspired disrespect when it came to leveling existing social hierarchies.

CONCLUSION

Despite the surfeit of scholarly commentary on *Leviathan*’s frontispiece with which we began, it appears there is meaning to be mined from it yet. This article has argued that its sartorial details, in particular, shed important light on the theories of representation and equality Hobbes developed in that work.

While the failure of historians of political thought to recognize the hats’ significance is unsurprising, the continued neglect thereof by historically-minded political theorists—many of whom have sought egalitarian inspiration elsewhere in early modern England—is disappointing. For instance, Anderson (2017), Pettit (2014), and Waldron (2012a; 2012b) have drawn alike on seventeenth-century English sources to argue for the importance of postural politics for relational equality. In a just society of equals, they argue, every individual should be able to stand “upright,” look others “in the eye,” and tell them “to get lost.” On this point, they often cite Levellers like Lilburne while rejecting Hobbes as a source of egalitarian insight (Pettit 2014, xxvi–ii; Waldron 2012a, 21).²⁶

²⁴ Unfortunately, the significance of Hobbes’s language choices has been obscured through modern translation. Michael Silverthorne uses the anachronistic “discrimination” in his translation of *non acceptio personarum* in *De Cive* in order to evoke its modern sense as a violation of egalitarian norms (DC 63).

²⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

²⁶ Pettit (2014) credits Lilburne and John Milton for what he calls the “eyeball test” of social justice, arguing that a just society is one

It is safe to say, however, that Hobbes considered the problem of how to equalize honor—as a distributive good making demands not only on the state, but every individual—more seriously in *Leviathan* than any philosopher before or since. Accordingly, he realized that equalizing honor effectively through interpersonal displays of respect alone would be difficult. If the Levelers thought equality might be achieved by elevating everyone to the status of Peers by virtue of their equal birth as freeborn Englishmen, Hobbes knew that competition and conflict would not end once men (and only men) recognized one another as equals. In the Levelers’ language of birth and blood, Hobbes would have seen a recipe for an even more unstable society—one of equally arrogant aspirants to honorable status keen to overturn and displace the old “contumelious greatness” of aristocrats.

To political theorists determined to see the progress of equality as a process of “leveling up” through the democratization of aristocratic dignity, Hobbes’s fears about “the logic of warring equals” appear unfounded (e.g., Waldron 2012a; cf. Hoekstra 2012, 109). Waldron (2012a, 145) insists that the problem is illusory because “the generalized noble privileges that arise out of human dignity” and “the old arrogance of nobility” need not go hand in hand (see also Walzer 1983, 254–5). Pettit (2008) likewise complains that Hobbes makes “use of an unargued assumption...that people can only be satisfied with superiority and the recognition [thereof], and that they cannot settle for the positional good of equality in standing with others” (96).

But this was not Hobbes’s point. Rather the precarity of equal respect in his theory arose from the ease and ubiquity of *perceptions of contempt* in a society built on equal respect, wherein everyone would be on the lookout for affronts to their equal dignity.²⁷ After all, most men are content not to be first, so long as they are confident that they will not be last, either. The way to do this historically has been to insist on the inferiority of women, whose bonnets in the frontispiece make the men’s indifference in the Sovereign’s eyes nevertheless *feel* like superiority.

Whatever Hobbes’s disagreements with the Quakers—and they were undoubtedly numerous—he surely agreed with them on two things. First, he shared their contempt for the credentialed classes, including the clergy and professors, who had been elevated to the status of gentlemen by their University Degrees and so comported themselves as an aristocracy of the educated. And second, Hobbes shared the Quakers’ appreciation for the profound importance of contempt, as well as respect, in the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies. Today, we often lose sight of the fine seventeenth-century distinction between “contemning” and “condemning,” but *Leviathan* treated it with characteristic attention to definitional detail

wherein “you can walk tall and assume the status of an equal with the most powerful in the land” (57–8).

²⁷ Although he rejects aristocratic arrogance, Waldron (2012a, 145) endorses “something like haughtiness...formality and even ritual” in the way that individuals comport themselves in a society of equals.

(L ii.6.80; see Carroll 2019). Whereas one honored the object of hatred by condemning it, one demeaned the object of contempt by designating it as “Vile and Inconsiderable.” The danger, then, in *contemning* others in order to bring the high low—as the Quakers did as a matter of religious principle—was that one thereby also *elevated* oneself.

Here, Hobbes’s concerns about contumely went beyond a fear of fighting words to the role that expressions of contempt played in the creation of new social hierarchies, in addition to the destruction of existing ones (see Bejan 2022b; cf. Waldron 2012b, 231). Accordingly, he feared that today’s egalitarians would necessarily become tomorrow’s spiritual aristocrats. Thus, a corrective contempt on the part of the Sovereign had an essential and ongoing role to play, alongside interpersonal respect, in the secure constitution of a society of equals.

On this point, viewing Hobbes’s images and arguments in light of the politics of gesture encourages us to look past the pieties that structure so much historical writing on the “invention” of equality in early modern Europe in order to recover a more detailed picture (e.g., Stuurman 2004). However, to appreciate the weird, wide world of equality *before* modern egalitarianism—as well as to see the depth of *Leviathan*’s commitment to acknowledging equality both in theory and practice—political theorists and historians must first learn to appreciate small gestures. There is no better place to start than Hobbes’s hats.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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