Imperial Leviathan?
The constitution and artificial personality of
Hobbes’s commonwealth

Jonathan A Boyd
PhD Candidate
University of St Andrews
jab57@st-andrews.ac.uk

Please note that in its present form this article is in the early draft stage and the author requests it not be cited.

Abstract

Determining how a Hobbesian commonwealth would hypothetically act internationally has been a preoccupation within international relations theory for some time. However, while most commentators have focused on the influence of his state of nature on state behaviour, Hobbes himself, this paper will argue, also focused on how the constitution of his commonwealth would determine its actions. This interpretative notice and approach, and the two competing conclusions they lead to, were heralded by Friedrich Meinecke and Hannah Arendt. Arendt’s interpretation has become the more or less ‘official’ classical realist interpretation—popularized by Morgenthau’s inaccurate appropriation of it—yet I will argue that Meinecke’s neglected interpretation is far and away the more accurate. As Hobbes conceived of it, human nature neither describes nor predicts the international actions of a commonwealth. Arendt, I will argue, mistakenly interprets the implications of the artificial quality of Hobbes’s commonwealth, and many contemporary IR theorists have failed to see that the “Hobbesian man writ large” was not intended by Hobbes to be a ‘natural’ person at all, but rather a personification: a civil person whose actions are willed independently of human nature.
Imperial Leviathan?
The constitution and artificial personality of Hobbes’s commonwealth

Introduction

This paper seeks to refute an entrenched interpretation of Hobbes in international political theory which rests on a rather selective reading of his *Leviathan* and which characterizes his commonwealth as being constituted in such a way, or interprets its nature in such a way, so as to inherently possess imperial ambition. Hobbes’s commonwealth, it argues, represents a danger to other commonwealths; it would be aggressive, bellicose, expansionist and express imperialist tendencies.¹

While I’m ultimately critical of the usual conclusions of this interpretative tact, what is so unique about it, and what warrants sustained attention to it, is that it pays virtually no mind to Hobbes’s state of nature.² Unlike much of the recent literature on Hobbes, this approach maintains it is not simply a potential danger, nor claims that it is merely capable of being a threat to other commonwealths. Nor does the argument attribute his commonwealth’s dangerousness to be a reaction to its environment: it is not merely a response by the commonwealth to its dangerous surroundings, perceived or otherwise. Rather, it insists that its dangerousness is inherent in its constitution or nature. Although I’ll ultimately critique

---


² It may indeed be labelled a realist interpretation, but it more closely resembles a ‘classical realist’ appropriation of Hobbes than a ‘structural realist’ one. The conflation is most likely due to the fact that the predominant and entrenched interpretation of both broadly ‘realist’ readings describe the expected behavioural implications in near-precisely the same terms: ie/ as expansionist. However, while the ‘structural realist’ account focuses on Hobbes’s state of nature and the implications of his commonwealth’s behaviour as being a reaction to its environment, this ‘classical realist’ appropriation ascribes his commonwealth’s behaviour to the very nature or constitution of it.
this conclusion, I do wish to assert that the interpretive approach is fruitful because it raises the now largely ignored interpretative question: what is the intended purpose of the instrumental power of Hobbes’s commonwealth? At stake is its unique approach to Hobbes which emphasizes an important yet overshadowed dimension of Hobbes’s thought: the international implications of the constitution of Hobbes’s commonwealth.

Traditionally there are two responses to this question. The first, and the prevalent answer amongst early international relations theorists, is that Hobbes’s commonwealth would be aggressive and represent a real danger to other commonwealths. Since instrumental sovereign power uses the natural power of subjects, it is mistakenly assumed that the instrumental power of the sovereign would be used to attain those goods desired by subjects. It is assumed, in other words, that the sovereign’s instrumental power would be used to the same effect as an individual’s natural power.

This interpretation can be traced to Hannah Arendt; she argues that Hobbes’s commonwealth is constituted in such a way as to project the self-interest—broadly conceived—of its subjects’ outside of its borders, thereby making it a real danger to its neighbours. Sovereign instrumental power, in other words, is perceived to be a tool to attain the temporal interests of each and every subject. The will of each subject is channelled to enable and utilize the natural power of each subject, in order to attain the objects of their individual interests. Subjects’ interests, in other words, are attained through their contribution to sovereign instrumental power. Accordingly, to prevent the commonwealth’s decay as a result of a failure to satisfy its subject’s insatiable appetites, Hobbes’s

---

3 Sovereign instrumental power, or the sovereign power which is the outward force of the commonwealth, is described by Hobbes as a tool at the sovereign’s disposal, to be used or abstained from using at the sovereign’s discretion. However, there is confusion in the literature about what that purpose is, which results in a misconception of what Hobbes’s commonwealth would act like independently of its environment. Its use beyond its intended purpose may be at the sovereign’s discretion, yet determining what its intended purpose is would surely lead to a more accurate description of its use.
commonwealth would ceaselessly seek to accumulate power as a necessary measure. Arendt thereby characterizes Hobbes’s commonwealth as imperialist or expansionist.

Hans Morgenthau compounds Arendt’s error by agreeing with her conclusion—that Hobbes’s commonwealth would act inherently imperialistic—but by offering an interpretation which differs significantly from Arendt’s. Hobbes’s commonwealth, for Morgenthau, expresses its own nature, resembling what has been referred to as ‘true’ raison d’état. Morgenthau interprets Hobbes’s analogy between individual and commonwealth as an ascription of a common nature: self-interested, bellicose, and expansionist. Whereas Arendt argues that Hobbes’s commonwealth will act like, or as if it is, a Hobbesian individual, Morgenthau argues that Hobbes’s commonwealth has the same essential nature as a Hobbesian individual.

The conclusion that Hobbes’s commonwealth would act inherently expansionist is residual in international political theory, yet the two predominant arguments for conceiving it as such—offered by Arendt and Morgenthau—are clearly refuted by examining Hobbes’s statements on imperialism, by his theory of sovereignty, and by his own use of the individual-commonwealth analogy. Hobbes does not describe nor predict a commonwealth which will act as if it has ‘true’ raison d’état, or as if it had a ‘human nature’. His commonwealth, rather, would act internationally to protect the security of the individuals which comprise it (and not to project their individual interests). Hobbes does not describe his commonwealth as acting dangerously, nor as threatening to other commonwealths.

This brings us to the second traditional answer as to how a Hobbesian commonwealth would act based on its constitution, and to the answer that my interpretation supports. First argued by the German historian Friedrich Meinecke, Hobbes’s commonwealth’s use of sovereign instrumental power is only justified when employed according to the principle of
salus populi. The intended limited purpose of the sovereign’s instrumental power, in other words, is for that which protects the safety of subjects.

Meinecke is the first of modern interpreters of Hobbes to support my interpretation descriptively. Others lend support for my interpretation along evaluative grounds—arguing that Hobbes prescribes and sanctions the use of instrumental power in a restrictive sense—yet Meinecke describes the way a Hobbesian commonwealth would act according to its very purpose. Whereas Arendt describes a Hobbesian commonwealth, acting according to its constitution, as bellicose and expansionist, Meinecke describes a Hobbesian commonwealth, acting according to its constitution, as defensive; as, if you will, a reactive, sleeping giant. The purpose of the instrument will determine its use, both claim; what they differ on is what that purpose ultimately is. This is not a prescriptive question; this is not an issue of already decisively knowing what a tool is intended for, acknowledging that it could be used for purposes aside from those intended, and prescribing rules for its use. Rather, their respective interpretations seek to discover what the very purpose it was generated to achieve is, and from its intended function they seek to derive an accurate description of how a Hobbesian commonwealth would hypothetically act.

**Meinecke, Hobbes, and raison d’état**

Any conscientious account of Hobbes’s theory, whether focused on the domestic or international aspects, must first recognize and acknowledge that it is constructed to ensure the security of individuals. The first to ascertainably do so with a focus on the international implications of Hobbes’s thought was Friedrich Meinecke. His professed ‘glance’ interpretation of Hobbes in *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte (1924)* is the first to both acknowledge the fundamental purpose of Hobbes’s commonwealth as providing

---

4 This particular approach to how a Hobbesian commonwealth would hypothetically act must be distinguished from more evaluative arguments which emphasize the restrictions placed on the sovereign by an obligation to the natural laws.

security for individuals, while also discussing the implications of that specific purpose for the relations between commonwealths. Although now largely ignored by IR theorists, Meinecke’s reading of Hobbes is an essential starting point around which to discuss this issue of descriptive behaviour.  

Meinecke begins the introduction of his study on raison d’état with an observation that the “health and strength of the State” is “... restricted by the particular nature of the State and its environment”. This attitude takes into account not only the environment in which the state must act, but also the nature of the state. Interestingly, however, Meinecke’s discussion of Hobbes makes nearly no mention of the international factors and external environment under which sovereigns must make decisions. This is atypical; nearly all later commentators focusing on Hobbes’s theory of, or implications for, international relations draw a parallel between not simply individuals and states, but between individuals in a state of nature and international actors in an international state of nature. Considering, moreover, Meinecke’s general pronouncement that raison d’état must face and account for environmental demands, the lack of attention he pays to this element in Hobbes’s thought is made even more puzzling.

The answer as to why lies in what Meinecke believed to be the nature, and consequently the motivation, of Hobbes’s commonwealth. To reveal this nature, Meinecke draws on the analogy between individuals and commonwealths. For Hobbes, according to Meinecke, the right of nature is shared in common: “The right of nature ... is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, that...
is to say, of his own life, and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.”

Indeed, Hobbes himself explicitly draws this parallel: “And every sovereign hath the same right, in procuring the safety of his people, that any particular man can have, in procuring the safety of his own body (L, 233”).

Meinecke points out, however, that although the sovereign possesses this liberty, expediency limits its exercise: Hobbes’s sovereign is advised, for its own interest, to treat its subjects with care, to rule reasonably, and to promote the salus populi. The extent of the liberty granted may in theory be called despotism, he notes, but in practice, it is meant to be an enlightened despotism. Importantly, then, Meinecke infers that the interest of Hobbes’s sovereign, when sought in practice, necessitates providing for the interests of its subjects. The sovereign’s interests are, in effect, one and the same as its subjects, for the sovereign’s self-preservation is ensured by its ability to preserve its subjects.

While Miehecke argues, therefore, that common to both individuals and states in Hobbes’s theory is the right of nature, behaviourally, the individual’s mandate to preserve oneself differs from the Hobbesian commonwealth’s raison d’état in the important sense that the state is constrained by a prudential requirement to preserve its subjects. Raison d’état for Hobbes, according to Meinecke, was therefore formed not in response to the commonwealth’s external environment, but rather reflected its own nature. The fact of possessing sovereignty, of possessing the right of nature, does not condition a commonwealth’s nature, it permits its expression. This is clearly the reason why Meinecke, although generally asserting that raison d’état must face and account for environmental demands, pays little attention to it while specifically discussing Hobbes.

---

10 Meinecke, p. 212.
Meinecke then turns to examine what precisely a Hobbesian commonwealth’s nature is. He considers a second commonality between individuals and states: personality. In using the word “personality”, Meinecke is referring to its particular usage by Hobbes: “A person is whose words or actions are considered either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed ... (L, 101)”. Importantly also, “When [words or actions] are considered as his own, then is he called a natural person; and when they are considered as representing the words and actions of another, then is he a feigned or artificial person (L, 101)”.

For Meinecke, to understand what ultimately informs the content of the *raison d’état* of Hobbes’s commonwealth, the question of whether or not Hobbes’s commonwealth is considered to be a “living and important personality” is paramount. The question Meinecke asks of Hobbes’s state is whether or not it is “... infused with the spirit of the most genuine *raison d’état*.” This genuineness is present if “ ... the State itself was felt as a living and important personality, which had a value and a purpose of its own and which possessed, in *raison d’état*, a law laying down the lines along which it should live and perfect itself ...”.

According to Meinecke, however, Hobbes’s commonwealth merely possesses artificial personality. The commonwealth has no purpose or worth *independent* of its subjects. As Meinecke explains: “So Hobbes’ Leviathan ... does not really serve the absolutist idea of the State for the sake of that idea itself, but rather for the sake of those advantages which the mass of individuals are expected to derive from it. The Leviathan has no individual soul ... It is in fact an artificial soul, a clockwork spring”.

Meinecke continues:

... it was an artificial [personality], a *homo artificialis*, fundamentally a piece of clockwork machinery, manufactured by human ingenuity, in order to promote the objects of men, i.e. of individual men. For, if once one analyses

---

11 Meinecke, p. 213.
12 Ibid.
13 Meinecke, p. 215.
it, one sees that a completely individualistic and eudaemonistic spirit pervades everything that he has to say on the subject of the final purposes of the State.\textsuperscript{14}

This affects its path and goal; while Hobbes’s commonwealth may be autonomous, its priorities are nonetheless fundamentally different than those of an individual. For Hobbes’s commonwealth, its goal is to preserve individuals. It is an artifice erected to do so. It is not, therefore, a natural personality, which is infused with, in Meinecke’s terms, the spirit of the most genuine raison d’état.

It is helpful to compare this to a statement of Meinecke’s made while Hobbes was not on his mind: “The well-being of the State and of its population is held to be the ultimate value and the goal; and power, maintenance of power, extension of power, is the indispensable means which must—without any qualification—be procured”\textsuperscript{15}.

This is what Hobbes’s commonwealth, for Meinecke, does not conform to. The differences between an individual’s right of nature and a commonwealth’s sovereignty, and between an individual’s personality and a commonwealth’s personality, reflect Hobbes’s commitments on these points. According to Meinecke, the value and goal of Hobbes’s commonwealth is the well-being of the population. However, as for the maintenance and extension of sovereign power, there is for Hobbes a qualification, and that qualification is, again, ultimately the well-being of the population. Whereas, then, a Hobbesian individual’s chief concern is the preservation of one’s own life, a Hobbesian commonwealth is not ultimately concerned with defending its own existence; it is so only insofar as, and as a consequence of, its mandate to preserve the lives of the individuals which constitute it.

The consequences of this are evident in the way a Hobbesian commonwealth would be observed to act. Although a Hobbesian commonwealth possesses sovereignty, prudential

\textsuperscript{14} Meinecke, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{15} Meinecke, p. 3.
limitations—guided by the need to preserve the well-being of its subjects—would limit the exercise of that liberty.

To summarize, the individual-commonwealth analogy as explored by Meinecke, therefore, is premised on their shared autonomy. Strictly speaking in terms of behaviour, in terms of observable conduct, Meinecke notes two points of comparison: the right of nature and personality. Although, he argues, both Hobbesian individuals and commonwealths possess the right of nature, only the state’s right is prudentially, and will therefore be in practice, limited by its *raison d’état*. The second point of comparison is personality: although both the Hobbesian individual and commonwealth may be said to be a personality, the commonwealth’s is artificial, whereas the individual’s is natural.

**Hannah Arendt and the Imperial Leviathan**

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt’s discussion of Hobbes shares much in common with Meinecke’s: (i) Arendt implicitly agrees with Meinecke that a Hobbesian commonwealth’s *raison d’état* and its nature or constitution will determine its behaviour; (ii) both are in agreement that, generally speaking, self-preservation is Hobbes’s commonwealth’s *raison d’état*; and (iii) both agree that Hobbes’s commonwealth is an artificial, rather than a natural, personality. Where she differs from Meinecke is how she interprets the particulars of Hobbes’s commonwealth’s *raison d’état* and its behavioural implications.

What is unique about the nature of Hobbes’s commonwealth, according to Arendt, is that it “… is based not on some kind of constituting law … which determines the rights and wrong of the individual’s interest with respect to public affairs, but on the individual interests themselves, so that ‘the private interest is the same with the publique’”\(^\text{16}\). Arendt further

attributes to Hobbes the following depiction of human nature: “... if man is actually driven by nothing but his individual interests, desire for power must be the fundamental passion of man”. Accordingly, Hobbes “... attempted to derive public good from private interest and ... for the sake of private good, conceived and outlined a Commonwealth whose basis and ultimate end is accumulation of power”.

Like Meinecke, Arendt describes Hobbes’s commonwealth as an artificial personality. Unlike Meinecke, however, Arendt argues that its mandate to fulfil the needs of individuals’ self-interest is precisely why Hobbes’s commonwealth would be imperialistic. What they interpret differently therefore is what a commonwealth’s self-preservation meant for Hobbes. Although Arendt claims that “the raison d’etre of the state is the need for some security of the individual”18, she does not conclude, like Meinecke, that this would limit the commonwealth’s accumulation of power. Rather, since power is essentially only a means to an end a community based solely on power must decay in the calm of order and stability; its complete security reveals that it is built on sand. Only by acquiring more power can it guarantee the status quo; only by constantly extending its authority and only through the process of power accumulation can it remain stable. Hobbes’s Commonwealth is a vacillating structure and must always provide itself with new props from the outside; otherwise it would collapse overnight into the aimless, senseless chaos of the private interests from which it sprang. Hobbes embodies the necessity of power accumulation in the theory of the state of nature, the ‘condition of perpetual war’ of all against all, in which the various single states still remain vis-a-vis each other like their individual subjects before they submitted to the authority of a Commonwealth. This ever-present possibility of war guarantees the Commonwealth a prospect of permanence because it makes it possible for the state to increase its power at the expense of other states.19

Thus, whereas Meinecke interpreted Hobbes’s commonwealth as being concerned with defending its existence only as a consequence of its mandate to preserve the lives of the individuals which constitute it, Arendt argues that the ceaseless accumulation of power is

17 Arendt, p. 139.
18 Arendt, p. 140.
19 Arendt, p. 142.
necessary to prevent the decay of Hobbes’s commonwealth that would result from failing to satisfy its subjects’ interests.

However, a glaring rebuttal to Arendt comes in the form of Hobbes’s numerous protestations against imperial ambition.

In De Cive Hobbes speaks at length of the sovereign’s duties, or the ways in which sovereign authority is to be exercised (as apart from the right of sovereign authority). It is quite clear that Hobbes did not intend, as Arendt claims, his sovereign to act in an imperial manner. Hobbes repeatedly states in De Cive that salus populi, and not expansion of power, is the principle by which the sovereign will conduct international affairs: “All the duties of sovereigns are implicit in this one phrase: the safety of the people is the supreme law”\(^\text{20}\). He continues: “And since governments were formed for the sake of peace, and peace is sought for safety, if the incumbent in power used it otherwise than for the people’s safety, he would be acting against the principles of peace ... (DC, 143)”. As Meinecke and Arendt also note, Hobbes writes that “For a commonwealth is formed not for its own sake but for the sake of the citizens (DC, 143)”.

Whereas Meinecke notes that the sovereign will act according to salus populi, Arendt argues that the sovereign will act to facilitate the self-interest of the citizenry. What they differ on precisely, then, is what acting to preserve the safety and self-interest of the citizenry actually entails.

Hobbes allays any doubt whatsoever: “By safety one should understand not mere survival in any condition, but a happy life so far as that is possible (DC, 143)”\(^\text{20}\). Hobbes also outlines what he conceives to be the interests of the public:

Regarding this life only, the good things citizens may enjoy can be put into four categories: 1) defence from external enemies; 2) preservation of internal peace; 3) acquisition of wealth, so far as this is consistent with public security;

4) full enjoyment of innocent liberty. Sovereigns can do no more for the citizens’ happiness than to enable them to enjoy the possessions their industry has won them, safe from foreign and civil war (DC, 144 (emphasis added)).

While Arendt is therefore correct to include interest as an inextricable element of the sovereign’s mandate beyond ensuring merely the survival of its subjects, this passage shows that Arendt has exaggerated the implications one can draw from equating private interests with the public. Hobbes is adamant in the above passage that acquisition of wealth, which would entail of course the acquisition of power, should only be pursued “so far as this is consistent with public security”. Meinecke is correct, therefore, when he asserts that the fundamental guiding principle of the sovereign’s actions vis-à-vis other sovereigns is his own subjects’ safety.

Nor is this all that Hobbes says on the matter; further evidence of this is found in Leviathan. Of the things that tend to the dissolution of a commonwealth, the first ‘infirmity’ Hobbes lists is a sovereign who is “content with less power than to the peace and defence of the commonwealth is necessarily required (L, 211)”. What Hobbes writes here would seem, at first glance, to support Arendt’s claim that the ceaseless accumulation of power is a sovereign mandate because it is necessary for the pursuit of both the private and public interest. He argues: “... when the exercise of the power laid by is for the public safety to be resumed, it hath the resemblance of an unjust act ... (L, 211)”. Notice, however, that Hobbes here refers not to ‘interest’, but rather to ‘public safety’. Consistent with the principle set out in De Cive, Hobbes here is arguing that the sovereign must retain and accumulate power for the sake of salus populi; reaching deals with internal competitors by power-sharing is ‘unjust’ not because the accumulation and retention of power is to be pursued in spite of public safety, but rather because power-sharing is ultimately contrary to public safety. In other words, ceding necessary powers for the sake of public safety is a miscalculation: in the long run, this will decrease public safety. Note, however, that in this discussion public safety remains the
fundamental duty of the sovereign; public safety remains the end of sovereignty, this passage simply discusses what Hobbes believes to be a misguided strategy that will undermine it.

Hobbes also argues that making concessions of power to factions within the commonwealth will likely be exploited by foreign commonwealths; in effect, ceding power to factions provides a “way in” for foreign commonwealths intent on weakening their neighbours. Dissenting subjects belonging to a faction, Hobbes argues, will be used by foreign sovereigns, “... who in order to the good of their own subjects let slip few occasions to weaken the estate of their neighbours (L, 211)”. Hobbes here is notably not arguing that a sovereign ought to increase or expand its power in order to improve the lot of its subjects. Rather, he argues from the perspective of a sovereign who wishes to ensure its subjects’ safety. Hobbes sets out what he believes necessary for a sovereign to defend against a neighbour aiming to increase the good of its subjects to the detriment of one’s own subjects’ safety. In other words, Hobbes insists that the minimum amount of power a sovereign requires is required not for imperialistic pursuits or aggression against one’s neighbours, but rather to defend against imperialistic pursuits or aggression by neighbours. Again—contrary to Arendt’s claim and supportive of Meinecke’s—for Hobbes the fundamental guiding principle of the sovereign’s actions vis-à-vis other sovereigns is his own subjects’ safety.

Hobbes also details the dangers inherent of commercial imperialism. Prosperity does not according to Hobbes, as Arendt mistakenly argues, require or even entail imperialism.

Two things are necessary for the citizens to prosper: hard work and thrift; a third contributing factor is the natural produce of earth and water; and there is also a fourth, military activity, which sometimes increases the citizens’ wealth but more often erodes it. For a commonwealth set on an island in the sea, with only just enough room for habitation, can grow rich by trade and manufacture alone, with sowing and without fishing; but there is no doubt that if they have territory, the same number of them can be richer or a larger number can be equally well off. The fourth factor, military activity, was once regarded as a gainful occupation under the name of piracy or raiding. And before the formation of commonwealths, when the human race lived dispersed in families, it was considered just and honourable. For raiding is simply making war with small forces. And great commonwealths, particularly Rome and
Athens, at certain times so enlarged their country from the spoils of war, foreign tribute and the acquisition of territory by arms, that they did not impose taxes on the poorer citizens; in fact they actually distributed money and land to individuals. But we should not take enrichment by these means into our calculations. For as a means of gain, military activity is like gambling; in most cases it reduces a person’s property; very few succeed. As there are only three things then which enable the citizens to increase their prosperity – products of earth and water, hard work, and thrift – they are the only objects of a sovereign’s duty (DC, 149-50)

Thus, whereas both Meinecke and Arendt agree that a commonwealth’s sovereignty will provide it the freedom to express its right of nature, they differ on the ultimate nature of a Hobbesian commonwealth. Both agree that the nature or personality of the commonwealth determines the ends which that expression will take. Both also agree that it is an artificial personality, in the sense that it represents the individuals which comprise it. However, the actions undertook on behalf of the individual members are driven by two fundamentally different logics: On the one hand, Meinecke argues that its actions will be guided by the need to preserve the well-being of its subjects; on the other hand, Arendt argues that its actions will be guided by the necessity to accumulate power on behalf of its subjects. The textual evidence clearly points, however, in favour of Meinecke’s interpretation over Arendt’s.

**Hobbesian man writ large**

The autonomy of Hobbes’s commonwealth was interpreted by Meinecke and Arendt in descriptive and unconditional terms; that is, they asked what could be gleaned, specifically what behaviour could be expected, from the autonomy Hobbes seems to ascribe to both individuals and commonwealths. Importantly, their focus was on the shared autonomy of agents, but neither assumed that Hobbes ascribed a common nature between agents. Also, the environment of the state of nature did not factor into their judgements of how a Hobbesian commonwealth would act. Two thinkers largely credited with being among the ‘founders’ of the IR discipline, Martin Wight and Hans Morgenthau, followed Meinecke and
Arendt by approaching Hobbes with a descriptive approach. Moreover, both also ignored ‘the state of nature’ as a factor which conditions behaviour when attentive to Hobbes.

Wight’s concern with Hobbes seems to have been only to the extent to which Hobbes typified a realist’s view of state behaviour, while Morgenthau understood Hobbes as accurately describing state behaviour. Also, both Wight and Morgenthau, when their focus was on Hobbes, like Meinecke focused more on the nature of Hobbes’s individual than on the state of nature in which his individual acts. When attentive to Hobbes, his state of nature appears to have been for both of them only the condition in which the nature of his individual becomes apparent and is permitted reign. Their implicit understanding of Hobbes’s state of nature, in other words, is that it does not condition one’s nature, it allows its expression.

Wight may have been predisposed to interpret Hobbes in this manner:

What is clearest in Wight’s account of ‘anarchy,’ then, is just how insignificant a factor he seemed to consider it in the workings of international relations. Indeed, it demonstrates the extent to which he was unconcerned with setting out a ‘systems-level’ approach. The contrast with later thinkers is stark: whereas the starting point of Hedley Bull’s *Anarchical Society* is a ‘system’ defined by ‘anarchy,’ Wight treated it as almost a marginal issue. His primary concern was with states: what they are, how they differ, and what they do.21

Accordingly for Wight, realism, invented by Machiavelli and who’s only “peer” was Hobbes, understood states to “pursue power and their national self-interest, conduct diplomacy by ‘coercion and bribery’ and war by all available means”22.

Of more concern than Wight is Morgenthau: Morgenthau approaches Hobbes more directly and can largely be credited with popularizing Arendt’s interpretation of Hobbes. Hobbes, for him, represents the classical account of imperialism. Unlike Arendt, however, who understood that Hobbes’s commonwealth was an artificial entity (which would nevertheless act like an individual because of the sovereign’s role as a channel through which


22 Hall, p. 147.
subjects’ interests are conveyed, or in other words, as a conduit), Morgenthau neglects the natural/artificial distinction and presumes that Hobbes ascribed a shared *nature*—and not just a shared autonomy—to both individuals and sovereigns.

This oversight of Hobbes natural/artificial distinction, and Morgenthau’s focus on a shared nature rather than on their shared autonomy, guided the interpretative lines of much of the subsequent IR literature on Hobbes. A predominant interpretive tack became either finding evidence for, or discounting, the following claim: Hobbes’s analogy of individuals and commonwealths suggest that a Hobbesian commonwealth will act according to his description of human nature. This claim, although appearing on the surface to be fairly straightforward, is complicated by the fact that in Hobbes’s writings the individual-commonwealth (x-y) analogy has four possible y-variables, which have largely been confused as equivalent or simply gone unnoticed. The four possibilities are: (i) Kings; (ii) Sovereigns; (iii) Unions; and (iv) Commonwealths.

I will demonstrate that Hobbes’s use of the analogy (without presuming that it precisely mirrors his non-analogical arguments) actually demonstrates that a Hobbesian commonwealth will *not* act according to human nature, regardless of what that might be said to consist of. That is, within the terms of the analogy, Hobbes’s description of human nature is inconsequential and indeterminate of how his commonwealth would act. Briefly, this is because three of the four (sovereigns, unions, and commonwealths) are all *artificial* persons, and quite simply, an artificial person can not be expected to act as a natural person, in much the same way as an actor can not be expected to act on stage in the same way as she would in private life. As for kings, which are in a few instances described by Hobbes as if they were natural persons, I will discuss them first.

It is necessary to first look at the passage from *Leviathan* which Morgenthau cites as evidence for his claims:
So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. And from hence it is that kings, whose power is greatest, turn their endeavours to the assuring it at home by laws or abroad by wars; and when that is done, there succeedeth a new desire, in some of fame from new conquest, in others of ease and sensual pleasure, in others of admiration or being flattered for excellence in some art or other ability of the mind (L, 52).

Like Arendt, Morgenthau imagines that a sovereign state, operating as Hobbes describes it, would act imperialistic. Unlike Arendt, however, Morgenthau draws a parallel not only between the right of nature and sovereignty, but also between the natures of a Hobbesian individual and a Hobbesian commonwealth. Recall that both Meinecke and Arendt held the commonality between Hobbesian states and Hobbesian individuals to be the possession of sovereignty, the permission to express one’s nature. A separate question entirely, and not to be confused with the first, is whether there is presumed by Hobbes to be a similar parallel between the nature of the state and the nature of the individual. In other words, is the state’s raison d’état equated by Hobbes with the individual’s judgement of what is necessary for self-preservation?

The above passage suggests that Hobbes himself held the nature of individuals and kings to be the same. Moreover, were the above passage all that Hobbes wrote on the matter, Morgenthau’s interpretation could not be faulted. Hobbes here is indeed (i) describing the lust for power as being common to both individuals and kings; and (ii) arguing that all other desires are dependent and subordinate to this lust for power. Drawing a conclusion from this passage exclusively, one would be justified—as Morgenthau evidently thought—in arguing that Hobbes gave expression to “... the expansionist policies of Alexander the Great, Rome,
the Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries, Napoleon I, and Hitler.\textsuperscript{23} Hobbes accurately describes the motivation of their behaviour according to Morgenthau: “They all have in common an urge toward expansion that knows no rational limits, feeds on its own successes, and, if not stopped by a superior force, will go on to the confines of the political world”\textsuperscript{24}.

The approach of Morgenthau cannot be better described than the phrase used by Noel Malcolm to describe it: Morgenthau infers that a Hobbesian state would essentially act as a “Hobbesian man writ large”\textsuperscript{25}. Notice, however, that in the passage Morgenthau cites, Hobbes does not equate individuals with sovereigns, but rather argues that kings will often act precisely like what they are: individual humans. Objecting to Morgenthau, first, I would suggest that Hobbes here is referring not to kings in their official capacity as an artificial personality or as a sovereign, but rather referring disparagingly to kings who act according to their personal whims. Secondly, and more evidently, not all people, according to Hobbes, and therefore not necessarily all kings, will act as power-hungry expansionists. Some may act as expansionists, but Hobbes certainly does not ascribe to all individuals a ‘lust for power’ as Morgenthau’s argument implies. In \textit{Leviathan}, for instance, although Hobbes seems to suggest that all individuals will strive for power, he carefully adds that those that do so driven by a ‘lust for power’ are rare:

... because there be some that taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than their security respuires, if others (that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds) should not by invasion increase their power, they would not be able, long time, by standing only on their defence, to subsist. And by consequence, such augmentation of dominion over men being necessary to a man’s conservation, it ought to be allowed him (L, 75).”

While some are motivated, therefore, by a lust for power, most lack that lust and rather seek power in order to defend themselves adequately.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
The point Morgenthau clearly misses is that while the pursuit of power may be a consequence of a lust for power, more often than not it is a response to the threat that others pose to oneself. Only some lust after power; most strive to attain it only in order to protect themselves. The pursuit of power is therefore usually a conditioned consequence, a response to one’s environment, rather than emerging naturally from lust.

In the Latin edition of *Leviathan*, Hobbes adds: “For since there are those who, from pride and a desire for glory, would conquer the whole world ... (OL, 75)”. Note his omission: he does not write that “all those” are driven by pride and glory, but rather that “there are those”. Again in the *Elements*, Hobbes suggests that only a few are motivated by a ‘lust for power’, driven by pride and glory: “For such commonwealths, or such monarchs, as affect war for itself, that is to say, out of ambition, or of vain-glory, or that make account to revenge every little injury, or disgrace done by their neighbours, if they ruin not themselves, their fortune must be better than they have reason to expect (*Elements*, 126)”. Morgenthau is therefore mistaken to assume that kings and individuals will share a lust for power. Nevertheless, the ‘Hobbesian man writ large’ metaphor is nowhere near exhausted. Again, while Arendt and Meinecke drew predictions of behaviour from a parallel between the autonomy of both individuals and commonwealths, Morgenthau missed their distinction between natural and artificial. Only in the case of kings can it be said that Hobbes thought the ‘natural’ may apply. And in that case, we have seen that a ‘lust for power’ is ‘natural’ only in a few.

In my estimation, there are three ‘artificial’ personages that may potentially be interpreted as a ‘Hobbesian man writ large’: a sovereign, a people (or a union), and a commonwealth. If one wishes to draw from Hobbes descriptive and predictive content, there is no avoiding these distinctions between natural and artificial categories of agents. Nor, however, should the ‘Hobbesian man writ large’ metaphor be simply ignored due to the
misconceptions of past commentators, for the simple reason that Hobbes himself explicitly
draws this metaphor. The question of whether or not a Hobbesian commonwealth would be
defensive or aggressive is not unimportant, and examining the metaphor carefully in
Hobbes’s works leads to a definitive answer within its terms.

**Hobbes’s _persona civilis_**

Hobbes writes the following in the introduction to _Leviathan_, comparing his
commonwealth to the body parts of an individual:

> For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE (in Latin CIVITAS), which is but an artificial man, though of
greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence
it was intended; and in which the _sovereignty_ is an artificial soul, as giving life
and motion to the whole body; the _magistrates_ and other _officers_ of judicature
and execution, artificial _joints_; _reward_ and _punishment_ (by which fastened to
the seat of the sovereignty every joint and member is moved to perform his
duty) are the _nerves_, that do the same in the body natural; the _wealth_ and
_riches_ of all the particular members are the _strength_; _salus populi_ (the people’s
safety) its _business_; _counsellors_, by whom all things needful for it to know are
suggested unto it, are the _memory_; _equity_ and _laws_, an artificial _reason_ and
_will_; _concord_, _health_; _sedition_, _sickness_; and _civil war_, _death_. Lastly, the _pacts_
and _covenants_ by which the parts of this body politic were at first made, set
together, and united, resemble that _fiat_, or the _let us make man_, pronounced by
God in the creation (L, 3-4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commonwealth (State)</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
<td>Soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magistrates and Officers</td>
<td>Joints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward and Punishment</td>
<td>Nerves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth and Riches</td>
<td>Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Salus populi</em></td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellors</td>
<td>Memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity and Laws</td>
<td>Reason and Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedition</td>
<td>Sickness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil War</td>
<td>Death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice Hobbes describes the sovereign as the ‘soul’ of the artificial body. He
elaborates: “For the sovereign is the public soul, giving life and motion to the
commonwealth, which expiring, the members are governed by it no more than the carcass of
a man by his departed (though immortal) soul (L, 219)”.

In this sense, as a part of an artificial body, while a man may be a sovereign, his position, his role, is not that of a natural personage. A man or an assembly, in this sense, occupies the sovereign position. The role is an artificial one.

Almost everyone who makes the comparison of commonwealth and citizen with the body and its members says that the holder of sovereign power in the commonwealth is to the whole commonwealth what the head is to the whole man. But it appears from what has been said that the recipient of such power (whether Man or council) has the relation to the commonwealth not of the head but of the soul. Because man has a soul, he has a will, that is, he can assent and refuse; similarly a commonwealth has a will, and can assent and refuse through the holder of sovereign power, and only so. The appropriate analogy for the head is rather the corps of counsellors or (if he consults only one man) the single counsellor whose advice the holder of sovereign power makes use of in the most important matters of government (De Cive, 89).

Compare this with John of Salisbury’s analogy of the body natural and politic in the twelfth century:

... the position of the head in the republic is occupied, however, by a prince ... the place of the heart is occupied by the senate, from which proceeds the beginning of good and bad works. The duties of the ears, eyes and mouth are claimed by the judges and the governors of provinces. The hands coincide with officials and soldiers. Those who always assist the prince are comparable to the flanks ... the feet coincide with peasants perpetually bound to the soil.26

The contrast in the role of the sovereign—in Salisbury’s account, the head; in Hobbes’s account, the soul—is stark, and very significant. The sovereign, in Hobbes’s account, through the sole possession of will is “exercising the commonwealth’s right ... (De Cive, 88)”. The sovereign exercises the commonwealth’s right of nature just as an individual’s soul wills one to exercise one’s right of nature. The sovereign is not merely a ‘decider’—as it would be if it were likened to being ‘the head’ of the body politic—it is rather charged with exercising its decisions. This aspect of sovereignty is what I refer to as ‘governance’, the exercise of sovereign instrumental power. As a reminder:

It is useless for men to keep peace amongst themselves, if they cannot protect themselves against outsiders; and it is impossible to defend themselves if their strength is not united. It is therefore necessary to the preservation of individuals that there be some one Assembly or one man who has the right to arm, muster and unite, on each occasion of danger or opportunity, as many citizens as the common defence shall require, taking into account uncertainty about the number and strength of the enemy; as well as the right to make peace with the enemy when advantageous. It must therefore be recognized that the individual citizens have transferred the whole of this Right of war and peace to one man or assembly (De Cive, 78).

The concept of will is essential to the exercise of this aspect of sovereignty:

... Since therefore a combination of several wills in the same end is not adequate to the preservation of peace and stable defence, it is required that there be a single will [una voluntas] among all of them in matters essential to peace and defence. This can only happen if each man subjects his will to the will of a single other, that the will, that is, of one Man or of one Assembly, in such a way that whatever one wills on matters essential to the common peace may be taken as the will of all and each (De Cive, 72).

What does Hobbes mean by the term “the will”? He defines it elsewhere, in Leviathan:

Every deliberation is then said to end, when that whereof they deliberate is either done or thought impossible, because till then we retain the liberty of doing or omitting, according to our appetite or aversion. In deliberation, the last appetite or aversion immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the WILL, the act (not the faculty) of willing ... Will therefore is the last appetite in deliberating (L, 33).

As the soul of the commonwealth, the sovereign’s will ‘immediately adheres to the action’ of the commonwealth. Hobbes does not provide a conceptual distinction between the will of the sovereign and the will of the commonwealth, they are one and the same. The will of the commonwealth is the sovereign. The liberty of the commonwealth, its autonomy, ends at precisely the moment the sovereign wills something. When Hobbes compares the sovereign to the soul of the commonwealth, he is maintaining that the will of the sovereign is the life of the commonwealth: “The soul, in Scripture, signifieth always either the life or the living creature, and the body and soul jointly, the body alive (L, 419)”. The soul, argues Hobbes, is not an incorporeal substance, it has no existence separate from the body (L, 419)"
Hence when speaking specifically of the sovereign as the public soul, as cited earlier, he writes: “For the sovereign is the public soul, giving life and motion to the commonwealth, which expiring, the members are governed by it no more than the carcass of a man by his departed (though immortal) soul (L, 219”).

The commonwealth has liberty only to the point at which the sovereign ‘wills’. The commonwealth is then conceived by Hobbes to act as the sovereign willed. Arendt has unmistakably erred. Recall she argues that the commonwealth, the artifice, is meant to serve the individual interests of each member. Her mistake was to characterize Hobbes’s commonwealth as being ‘headed’—an analogy in the same spirit as John of Salisbury’s—by a sovereign who channels the interests of its subjects. She treats Hobbes’s sovereign as a conduit for what Hobbes would define as a crowd. Hobbes clearly did not intend this, however:

The doctrine of the authority of the Commonwealth over the citizens depends almost wholly on a recognition of the difference between a crowd of men ruling and a crowd being ruled. For the nature of a commonwealth is that a crowd of citizens both exercises power and is subject to power, but in different senses ... Because crowd is a collective word, it is understood to signify more than one object, so that a crowd of men is the same as many men. Because the word is grammatically singular, it also signifies one thing, namely a crowd. Neither way of taking it implies that a crowd has one will given by nature, but that each man has his own will. And therefore one must not attribute to it a single action of any kind. Hence a crowd cannot make a promise or an agreement, acquire or transfer a right, do, have, possess, and so on, except separately or as individuals, so that there are as many promises, agreements, rights, and actions, as there are men. For this reason a crowd is not a natural person. But if the same crowd individually agree that the will of some one man or the consenting wills of a majority of themselves is to be taken as the will of [them] all, that number then becomes one person; for it is endowed with a will, and can therefore perform voluntary actions ... and is more often called a people than a number. A distinction must therefore be made. Whenever we say that a People or a number [of men] is willing, commanding or doing something, we mean a commonwealth which is commanding, willing and acting through the will of one man or through the wills of several men who are in agreement ... But whenever something is said to be done by a number of men, great or small, without the will of that man or meeting, it means that it was done by a people as subjects, that is, by many individual citizens at the same time, and that it does not spring from one will but from the
several wills of several men, who are citizens and subjects but not a commonwealth (De Cive, 76-7)’.

A commonwealth, therefore, does not merely represent a crowd, and use the sovereign as a conduit for their individual self-interests, as Arendt argues. Rather, a commonwealth is a people, to be taken as one person, with a single will:

A Union so made is called a commonwealth or civil society and also a civil person; for since there is one will of all of them, it is to be taken as one person; and is to be distinguished and differentiated by a unique name from all particular men, having its own rights and its own property. Consequently, no single citizen nor all together (except him whose will stands for the will of all) are to be regarded as the commonwealth. A COMMONWEALTH, then, (to define it) is one person, whose will, by the agreement of several men, is to be taken as the will of them all; to make use of their strength and resources for the common peace and defence (De Cive, 73).

The sovereign is therefore not the conduit of individual wills; a commonwealth cannot be said to represent the wills of individual people. Rather, a commonwealth represents the will (singular) of a people, and is therefore a civil person acting as a single entity. It is unequivocally not a conduit for the collection of individual wills.

There are, therefore, four comparisons which Hobbes makes regarding personages: that between kings and individuals, that between sovereigns and individuals, that between a union and a crowd (of individuals), and that between a commonwealth and an individual. Of the four, only one, kings, can from a certain perspective be considered natural persons. The others are all artificial: sovereigns, unions and commonwealths are all artificial persons. In terms of behaviour, although Morgenthau has made the argument that kings—as conceived by Hobbes—will act according to human nature, that nature has been misinterpreted as uniform. Hobbes, rather, argues that while a few may be driven by a ‘lust for power’ and act as expansionists, most will seek power only for the sake of protection and act aggressively only insofar as it is required to protect themselves and their subjects. In terms of the behaviour one can expect from a sovereign, because it is an artificial personage, and because it is likened by Hobbes to be the soul of the commonwealth, neither will a sovereign act as
Arendt suggests it would: as a conduit of individual desires unleashed on neighbours. As for a union, it is not a collection of individual wills as in a crowd, but rather acts according to a single will. Since this will is exercised by the sovereign, it is not to be understood as a collection of individual, natural wills; it is, again, artificial. Finally, the commonwealth itself is the encompassing conception, the totality of the *civilis persona*; acting not like a “Hobbesian (natural) man writ large”, but rather as an *artificial* man writ large. Although the sovereign may use the natural power of its subjects, the purposes that power is used for are unequivocally not determined by the ‘human nature’ of those subjects.

**Leviathan’s Frontispiece**

A remarkable illustration of this, of Hobbes’s intent to create not a ‘Hobbesian man writ large’ but rather a *persona civilis*, is found in the frontispiece of *Leviathan*. Such frontispieces were common in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, were largely designed by the book’s author (and created by skilled engravers), and were meant not merely as an eye-catching marketing tool, but rather as a component of the author’s argument and a compliment to the text.27

I will discuss this at some length, and it may appear to be a digression. However, one of the dominant characterizations of Hobbes’s commonwealth in international relations theory is based on a metaphor, as a Hobbesian man writ large. It may be an intuitive assertion to make, but I suspect the image which many associate with Hobbes’s commonwealth and which reflexively supports the mischaracterization of the commonwealth along those lines drawn by Arendt and Morgenthau, is that portrayed by the frontispiece; they fail, however, to view it as Hobbes intended. To dispel the premise that Hobbes’s commonwealth is an extension of individual wills, or that it acts like a human being would

---

under the same circumstances, a task worth undertaking is to better understand the illustration which Hobbes himself employs to clarify his intent.

Two copies of the frontispiece exist: (i) an original drawing contained in the copy of Leviathan presented to Charles II in Paris (and which was likely drawn by Wenceslaus Hollar28 and (ii) an engraving which is a close copy of the original drawing and which prefaces the first edition of Leviathan (1651), two subsequent editions published within Hobbes’s lifetime, and in the Molesworth edition of Hobbes’s collected works (1839-45).

As Keith Brown argues, it is likely that the original drawing, which precedes the engraving, more accurately reflects Hobbes’s guidance than does the engraving29. Most modern commentators, however, have focused their attention on the engraving30. This matters only insofar as there are differences between the two, and as Malcolm points out, there are two significant differences31. In the original drawing, the body of the sovereign is comprised of individual bodies which are noticeably larger than the bodies comprising the sovereign in the engraving, which makes for an awkward, lumpy appearance of the sovereign. Second, there is a difference in the direction the individuals are facing: in the original drawing, the individuals are facing outwards and their gaze follows the same direction as the sovereign’s; in the engraving, the individuals are facing inwards, with their backs facing the viewer, their gaze affixed in the direction of the head of the sovereign.

Malcolm leads the way in understanding the significance of this difference; why, he asks, if we correctly assume that the original drawing more accurately reflects Hobbes’s intent, did Hobbes design it so that the viewer sees the faces of the individual bodies? Why

---

29 Ibid.
31 Malcolm, 644.
are they awkwardly large and facing outwards? His answer is a curious one, but ultimately convincing: “Hobbes had the idea of faces making up a larger figure with a face rather than little people with their backs to the viewer making up such a figure, because he had in mind a particular visual effect, created by an elaborate optical device which had been invented in the late 1620s and had become a fashionable scientific-aesthetic toy by the 1640s”32.

The optical device Malcolm refers to is anamorphosis, which “uses an exaggerated perspective to produce an image which appears grossly distorted when seen from the normal viewing position in front of the picture, but which, looked at from an unusual viewpoint or with the help of a correcting device (such as a mirror), exhibits a ‘normal’ image”33.

A classic example of anamorphosis, for instance, appears in Holbein’s painting “The Ambassador’s” (1533). In the bottom-centre of the oil painting, there appears a thin disk-shaped object which, if viewed from nearly the side of the painting, is revealed to be an anamorphic skull. Another example, more closely approximating what Malcolm believes Hobbes had in mind, is by Francois Niceron. He published, in 1638, a treatise devoted to anamorphosis entitled “La Perspective curieuse”; in it, he provided an explanation of dioptric anamorphosis, recounted here by Malcolm:

The key to the whole device was the polygonal or faceted lens in the little optic tube through which the picture was viewed. With the tube held in a fixed position at a short distance from the painted panel, each facet of the lens transmitted to the eye the image contained in a precise portion of the picture—a small trapezoid, lozenge, or other segment, depending on the shape of the facet. These portions of the picture were not contiguous on the picture itself, although they joined up and filled the visual field of the person looking through the lens. The trick, then, was in principle quite simple, though it required precision and some artistic imagination to do it well. First, the contents of those scattered geometrical portions would be painted in, so that the when viewed through the lens they composed a unified image of a face; and then each of these dispersed fragments of faces on the panel would be completed, so that the picture itself consisted of a number of separate and whole faces. A clever artist could make each of these faces as different as possible from the master-face whose fragments were dispersed among them;

32 Malcolm, 201.
33 Ibid., 203.
this would intensify the astonishment and delight of those who looked first at the picture as a whole, and then at the hidden image revealed by the lens.\textsuperscript{34}

Niceron also provided a visual example:

The picture was of fifteen ... Ottoman sultans in Turkish dress, each of them modelled on a specific portrait in a published collection of engravings; but, on looking through the tube, the viewer saw a portrait of Louis XIII, dressed ‘a la Francoise’. In this way, as Niceron explained, ‘most of the emperors in this picture pay him homage, in so far as they each contribute a part of themselves to form his image, as if they were despoiling themselves to honour his triumph’.\textsuperscript{35}

Malcolm provides convincing evidence that Hobbes was familiar with Niceron’s work, and indeed, may have even met him in Italy in 1641.\textsuperscript{36} What concerns us here is what implications this optical device has for interpreting Hobbes’s frontispiece, and the answer is rather straightforward: ‘the iconographical and conceptual implications of the device’ struck Hobbes as an ideal way in which to present the arguments of Leviathan in illustrative form:

The specific designs mentioned by Niceron and other writers give us some clue, to begin with, about how people understood the iconographical potential of the device ... Most ... make use of the concept of multiple objects in the painting contributing to, or culminating in, a single image in the lens. Thus, we have sultans contributing parts of themselves, and thereby indicating their submission, to the French king; ancestors combining their virtues in their glorious descendant; attributes of rule, and the virtues of the parents, coming together in the person of the young Louis XIV; an historical tradition of poses culminating in the present one; Old Testament prophets joining to form the common object of their prophecy; Old Testament antetype combining in the ‘type’ they all foreshadow; or, more simply, dry bones or dismembered limbs being reunited in living bodies. The multiple objects are subordinate to the single image, and gain their real meaning by being subsumed under it (‘which great one’, as Fanshawe put it, ‘... was first and chiefest in the Painters designe, and that for which all the rest were made’). And yet at the same time there is a simple sense in which the multiple images are more real: they physically exist, as paint-marks on a panel or canvas, whereas the master-image itself is only an image, a visual construct. They, in other words, are natural bodies, while it is an artificial one.\textsuperscript{37}

The optical device, then, was seen by Hobbes to be the ideal vehicle for illustrating his concepts of representation and personality. As outlined earlier, and explained by

\textsuperscript{34} Malcolm, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 218.
\textsuperscript{37} Malcolm (2002).
Malcolm in this different context, “The sovereign ‘bears the person’ of the people: he or it represents them, not as a mere aggregate of individuals, but as a corporate entity”\(^{38}\). As Hobbes writes in Leviathan, “A multitude of men are made one person, when they are by one man, or one person. For it is the unity of the represented, that maketh the person one. And it is the representor that beareth the person, and but one person, and unity cannot otherwise be understood in multitude (L, 104)”.

In ingenious fashion, Hobbes therefore creates a visual representation of, not a natural ‘Hobbesian man writ large’, but rather an artificial persona civilis. The persona Hobbes portrays is neither a ‘natural’ king, nor a crowd, nor a conduit. Rather, he portrays a sovereign, a union, a commonwealth. Those, like Arendt and Morgenthau, who argue that Hobbes’s commonwealth will act in the same manner as a Hobbesian individual, in a sense miss the composite and anamorphous aspect of the metaphor. Consistent with Hobbes’s use of the body-commonwealth analogy, this portrayal demonstrates that a commonwealth will not act according to human nature, whatever that may be said to consist of, for the simple reason that the sovereign is not in any way ‘natural’: the sovereign is not a ‘natural’ being, nor does its will emerge from a crowd.

**Hobbes’s body politic and pathology**

Hobbes also relies on the natural/artificial body analogy to make a fascinating rhetorical statement about the pathology of an aggressive, or imperialistic, body politic.\(^{39}\)

Referring to the above table, notice that Hobbes equates sedition with sickness. It is this aspect of the metaphor which best serves to rhetorically contextualize imperial ambition. Hobbes writes “Amongst the infirmites, therefore, of a commonwealth I will reckon in the

---

\(^{38}\) Meinecke, 223.

first place that those that arise from an imperfect institution, and resemble the diseases of a natural body which proceed from a defectuous procreation (L, 210).” One such infirmity is the earlier discussed case of power-sharing, in which rebellious groups are likened to “... the bodies of children, gotten by diseased parents, are subject either to untimely death, or to purge the ill quality, derived from their vicious conception by breaking out into biles and scabs (L, 211).”

In the same manner, imperial ambition is classified by Hobbes to be an illness. As if to address claims similar to Arendt’s and Morgenthau’s directly, Hobbes also argues specifically that lust for power is akin to an illness: “We may further add the insatiable appetite, or Bulimia, of enlarging dominion, with the incurable wounds thereby many times received from the enemy, and the wens, of ununited conquests, which are many times a burden, and with less danger lost than kept, as also the lethargy of ease, and consumption of riot and vain expense (L, 218).” Far from being the natural condition of a commonwealth, the lust for power is classified as a sickness, a disease, an aberration of health. What Arendt and Morgenthau are describing are the actions of a sick person; the commonwealth they describe is bulimic.

Conclusion

An important approach in the IR literature towards Hobbes was heralded by Friedrich Meinecke and Hannah Arendt: the attempt to determine how his commonwealth, or a commonwealth similarly constituted, would act on an international stage. Inextricable with this approach is the use of an analogy, suggested by Hobbes, yet largely restated and interpreted in an inaccurate manner. This is the individual-commonwealth analogy, likening the behaviour of a Hobbesian individual with a Hobbesian commonwealth.
Two competing conclusions of how a Hobbesian commonwealth would be expected to act are advanced by Meinecke and Arendt, based on their interpretations of the analogy. What appeared to be in common between Hobbesian states and individuals, according to Meinecke and Arendt, was autonomy, the possession of sovereignty, the ability to express one’s nature without outside appeal. While Meinecke argued that the raison d’état of a Hobbesian commonwealth intended to preserve individuals by protecting them, Arendt argued that it intended to allow the pursuit of individuals’ natural desires. For Meinecke, autonomy represents the commonwealth’s freedom to protect itself and its subjects; for Arendt, autonomy allows the commonwealth to project its subjects’ interests outside of its borders.

Besides the descriptive approach they heaped aldered, Meinecke and Arendt also present the two main conclusions as to how a Hobbesian commonwealth would act, either protective of its subjects or aggressive on behalf of its subjects, and all IR commentators generally interpret Hobbes to be suggesting either one or the other, although most taking a descriptive approach (as opposed to an evaluative approach) concur with Arendt. Morgenthau, the most notable of those who imitate Arendt’s interpretative approach and descriptive conclusion, nevertheless appears to miss an important distinction which Arendt noticed in Hobbes: that between natural and artificial persons. The distinction led Arendt to conclude that although Hobbes’s commonwealth will act like Hobbesian individuals, it is not because Hobbes ascribes them both the same nature. Rather, Arendt contends that a Hobbesian commonwealth and a Hobbesian individual will act in the same manner because of the sovereign’s role as a channel through which subjects’ interests are conveyed, or in other words, as a conduit. Morgenthau neglects the natural/artificial distinction and presumes that Hobbes ascribed a shared nature—and not just a shared autonomy—to both individuals and sovereigns.
This oversight of Hobbes’s natural/artificial distinction, and Morgenthau’s focus on a shared nature rather than on their shared autonomy, guided the interpretative lines of much of the subsequent IR literature on Hobbes. The interpretations of both Arendt—despite her more sensitive reading—and Morgenthau are not confirmed by Hobbes’s texts, however. First, throughout his works Hobbes denies the value, and emphasizes the unnecessary risk, of imperialism. Secondly, his own use of the individual-commonwealth analogy suggests that: (i) an imperialistic commonwealth is equivalent to a diseased or unhealthy body; (ii) although kings may be considered natural persons, human behaviour is not uniformly aggressive and therefore one can not presume a king will necessarily act aggressively; and (iii) based not only on his use of the analogy, but also on his illustrated metaphor in the frontispiece drawing of *Leviathan*, sovereigns, unions, and commonwealths are artificial persons, and therefore their actions cannot be equated to the actions of natural persons.

In other words, within the terms of the analogy as Hobbes conceived of it, human nature neither describes nor predicts the international actions of a commonwealth. It may instead, for descriptive purposes, be far more useful to conceive of an artificial actor as more closely approximating a stage-actor: an artificial person cannot be expected to act as a natural person in much the same way as an actor cannot be expected to act on stage in the same way as she would in private life. Consider, for instance, that Hobbes also uses the adjective “feigned” to describe an artificial person (L, 101). Feigned, defined by the OED, is to be “fictitiously invented or devised”, much as a character in a fictitious play. Hobbes implicitly suggests this himself:

The word Person is Latin, instead whereof the Greeks have *prosopon*, which signifies the face, as *persona* in Latin signifies the disguise or outward appearance of a man, counterfeited on the stage, and sometimes more particularly that part of it which disguiseth the face (as a mask or vizard); and from the stage hath been translated to any representer of speech and action, as well in tribunals as theatres. So that a person is the same that an actor is, both on the stage and in common conversation; and to personate is to act, or
represent, himself or another; and he that acteth another is said to bear his person, or act in his name ... (L, 101).

This clarifies the misstep Morgenthau makes, for instance. Whereas Arendt argues, albeit mistakenly, that Hobbes’s commonwealth will act like an aggressive individual, Morgenthau compounds the interpretive error by presupposing that it will act like an aggressive individual because they share the same nature. This would be akin to arguing that an actor on stage acts like the character she portrays because they share the same personality.

Both Arendt and Morgenthau similarly overlook that the actions of an actor are the actions of an artificial character, actions which are not prompted by the actor’s own nature. In other words, by overlooking the implications of the artificial quality of Hobbes’s commonwealth, both have failed to see the “Hobbesian man writ large” as a personification, a civil person whose actions are willed independently of human nature.