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## **Enjoy the silence. What can bridge the gap between the state and God in Hobbes' Leviathan?**

Belluardo, Arianna

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*Enjoy the silence. What can bridge the gap between the state and God in Hobbes' Leviathan?*

Arianna Belluardo (s2823292).

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Thesis supervisor: Dr. Matthew Longo.

Second reader: Dr. Paul Nieuwenburg.

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*Create silence, bring about silence;  
God's Word cannot be heard,  
and if in order to be heard in the hullabaloo  
it must be shouted deafeningly with noisy  
instruments,  
then it is not God's Word;  
create silence!*

(Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination/Judge for  
Yourselves*. 1851, XXI, p. 47)

## **Introduction**

In *The Leviathan* (1651/2014), Thomas Hobbes takes us on a journey from the concept of man to the state to God, and as soon as we read the introduction, we are aware that to get from man to the state men require a Covenant written by citizens (Introduction, pp. 7-9). However, the more one goes on with the book, the more the question of what it is that connects the state to God inevitably emerges. So much focus has been given to words, language, science, perhaps knowing all the languages in the world would really make men able to achieve anything they wanted, but there is one thing speech cannot do: explain the divine. Yes, with speech we can give divine a name, we can use proxies and words that try to get close enough to what we really want to mean, but it remains impossible for men to explain their feelings towards God in a satisfactory way. This is because speech is a human concept, but God is not human. I argue that silence can create the bridge between the state and the divine that Hobbes did not build in his writing. Sometimes silence can do more than fill the gaps between one word and the other, humans can sometimes express themselves better in silence, and this may also be why God does not speak. Throughout the paper, I will attempt to answer to the question *What can bridge the gap between the state and God in Hobbes' Leviathan?*

After reading Chapter IV of *The Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes (1651/2017, p. 28), I became instantly curious about the massive importance that was given to speech as an instrument of rationality. The more readers engage with the book, the more there is to wonder where the

rationality of speech stops explaining men's engagement with the divine. I started looking for the answer in Hobbes (Lev., 2:17, p. 131) when he fails to explain the concept of awe and overawe, I want to argue that awe is actually the silence men feel at the presence of the divinity, and in front of the sovereign. In my research I plan to first outline, following my initial question on how to connect the state and God, how is this relation understood in current and past literature. I will explore the article written by Martinich (1992) on the laws of nature and the idea that the sovereign through these, can be the connection between state and God. Also, I will put Martinich (1992) in dialogue with Bakunin (1970) and his understanding of the laws of nature as the tool men can use to free themselves from the state and God. Then, I will analyze Abizadeh (2012) and his framing of fear as what fills the gap between the state and the divine. Finally, Scallan (2022) argues that the answer to the aforementioned question is the physical concept of motion. I argue that what the literature is missing is an analysis based on the irrational part of the mortal God, instead of trying to explain God rationally, there must be a focus on the irrationality of the divine without fearing it; my research will therefore focus on silence as a tool to tackle the problem without over-rationalizing it.

In the main body, I will first proceed to analyze Hobbes' (Lev., 1:4, pp. 27-28, 1651/2014) account on speech and its uses and abuses in order to have a clear picture of what Hobbes means with speech, and later question why he does not provide a glossary for awe -as it is supposed to be the feeling men feel in front of the sovereign- and argue that there is a broken -metaphorical- bridge between the state and God, that silence could help fix. On this matter, I will then try to answer the question of how silence can help mortals understand the divine. To this aim, I will present Marina Abramović's performance *The Artist is Present* (2012) as an example of -divine- silence being brought among men and analyze the reaction of the visitors -which could be interpreted as something similar to awe- and the artist who sat in front of them saying nothing, doing nothing, for eight hours a day for three months. This will bring me to conclude that Hobbes (Lev., 1:12, p. 85, 1651/2014) himself recognizes the divine as a realm where speech-centric rational theories do not fully function, as he argues by reprimanding those who claim to understand the divine and its ways and act as propagators of its word to the public by using witchcraft and similar arts. In my discussion section, I will how the concept of silence has been framed by other authors, these being Roth (1984) on the silence of God, Ferguson (2003), Kierkegaard (Strawser, 2006; Hay, 1998),

and Kafka (Mendieta, 2014). Roth (1984) wrote his research through interviews to Holocaust survivors on how their perception of faith changed after the Holocaust. Mostly, the author (1984) finds that survivors who did define themselves as religious before the Holocaust, later would define themselves as atheist. However, a rather interesting finding is that some people -about 5% of the interviewees- actually did not declare to be religious before the Holocaust but did after (Roth, 1984). I find this to be insightful as it gives an idea of what the silence of God really means, and how, by evaluating the different responses of the survivors, most of them believed it is not of human competence to question God's actions. I will also examine Ferguson's (2003) article on the role of silence, he writes how silence can be a tool for communities to survive, and a resource to resist and threaten someone. For instance, he makes the example of refusing to answer the question of a teacher or threatening not participation in something political such as the pledge of allegiance in the United States (Ferguson, 2003). Then, I will outline Kierkegaard's idea on silence between men and God, and his encouraging humans to create silence (Strawser, 2006), in contrast with the conceptualization of silence in literature as a negative concept. I will lastly reflect on Kafka's narration of the myth of Ulysses and the sirens (Mendieta, 2014), and how he argues that sirens actually did not produce any sound, and their threatening force was silence. Finally, I will conclude my paper by giving some recommendations for further research and a short conclusion of my arguments.

It should be noted that in the paper I will often refer to men in the way Hobbes does, as to mean humans, I do not intend to exclude women or gender non-conforming individuals from this paper, rather I will adapt to the word "men" in the way the main source -which is Hobbes' Leviathan- does.

## **Literature Review**

In order to proceed with my research, I will first outline how the current literature has described the connection between the state and God, and how these understandings would fit into my own research. Before going into the reading of Hobbes, it is necessary to provide some context for the time period he lived in, for instance Martinich (1992) gives his interpretation of Hobbes' work by highlighting who he was a Calvinist, and highly contested during his time. Martinich (1992) explains how there were two main strains of thought on the separation between the state

and the Church; the Roman Catholics and the English Catholics. The Roman Catholics wanted the religious authority to be represented by the Pope, while the English Catholics wanted the religious authority to be the college of English bishops, and they would be independent from the sovereign. Hobbes disagreed with both and advocated in his work for the sovereign as the only spiritual authority, under the direct command of God (Martinich, 1992). This is important context to be given in order to understand Hobbes' views on the state and God. It is, furthermore, to be said that states where the government's authority and God's reside in the same person do exist; for instance, the Holy See, where the Pope would be a sort of sovereign if we follow the Hobbesian characterization<sup>1</sup>. Most literature focuses on the aforementioned relationship as a means to explain Hobbes' position on religious matters. His attempt of reconciling a laic state with an overlooking divinity in whom the ultimate power would reside has made the academia wonder on the author's personal beliefs. Although some have argued that Hobbes was actually an atheist but could not admit it because of the time he lived in, most literature rejects this view and actually believes that Hobbes was trying to create a state without abandoning his religious views (Martinich, 1992).

#### *The State is connected to God by the laws of nature*

Going back to Martinich (1992), he answered to the matter of what it is that connects the state and the divinity by with the laws of nature. The author was attempting to prove how Hobbes is not simply an atheist disguised as a religious, as sometimes literature would assert, rather that religion

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Il Sommo Pontefice, Sovrano dello Stato della Città del Vaticano, ha la pienezza dei poteri legislativo, esecutivo e giudiziario. [Art. 1: The Pope, sovereign of Vatican City, has full legislative, executive, and judiciary powers.]

2. La rappresentanza dello Stato nei rapporti con gli Stati esteri e con gli altri soggetti di diritto internazionale, per le relazioni diplomatiche e per la conclusione dei trattati, è riservata al Sommo Pontefice, che la esercita per mezzo della Segreteria di Stato. [Art. 2: The state's representative in the relationships with foreign states and other subjects of international law, for the diplomatic relations and the conclusions of treaties, is reserved to the Pope, who exercises it through the state's Secretary].

has a fundamental importance in his work. Martinich highlights, by analyzing Chapter 30 of *The Leviathan* (1961/2014), how the sovereign connects the state to the divine. The sovereign is in fact created from a Covenant he is not part of, that is written by mortals, but his powers are the same of God, as “he has overwhelming power to accompany his natural right to all things. God is sovereign because he naturally has the irresistible power to accompany his natural right to all things” (Martinich, 1992, pp. 161-162). Martinich (1992) also contests the idea that Hobbes might have written that the sovereign has no obligations, on the contrary he states that the sovereign has an obligation to God to represent his power and bring the laws of nature among men. In this reading, the sovereign has the duty to keep his people safe, protect them, and “exercise general providence, just as God exercises providence over creation” (p. 162). The author further argues that the connection between human and divine exercised by the sovereign in the laws of nature is also exemplified in Chapter 31, where Hobbes writes that people ought to know the laws of nature, because it must not happen that citizens are not aware of what Gods commands them to do, such as seek peace, and the only way they can know the laws of nature is through the sovereign, here we have again the link between the civil state and God, represented by the sovereign and the laws of nature (Martinich, 1992).

On the topic of the laws of nature, I believe Bakunin’s (1882/1970) reading could also give interesting insights on these. It is true that Bakunin was an anarchist and his views of God and the State are diametrically different from Hobbes’, but this is exactly why I believe the author can give such a useful perspective on the state, God, and the laws of nature. For Bakunin, the state was to be abolished, and so was the organized Church, as both these institutions perpetuated oppression and exploitation of men under the false disguise of providing protection and safety, instead, they would deprive men of liberty and equality. On God, Bakunin writes “God being everything, the real world and men are nothing; God being truth, justice, goodness, beauty, power, and life, man is falsehood, inequity, evil, ugliness, impotence, and death. God being master, man is the slave [...] thus if God really exists it would be necessary to abolish him” (p. VIII). We can understand from this that, for Bakunin, God and the state are connected by oppression of men. Furthermore, Bakunin mentions how the laws of nature -and this part I find interesting to put in dialogue with Hobbes- are what makes men able to govern themselves without the need for an overarching authority. According to the author, if men follow the laws of nature, then they can be free, which



can be traced back to what Hobbes writes, with the difference that for Hobbes the laws of nature are where humans find God, while for Bakunin, where they free themselves from Him.

*The state is connected to God by fear*

Moreover, according to Abizadeh (2012), the Leviathan presents itself as a bridge between God and citizens because of the way he makes use of fear. Fear is a central concept in most readings of Hobbes, especially because of the representation of the Leviathan as a mythological monster that instills fear. In fact, the author analyzed how the Leviathan as an entity presents characteristics that are both of a God and of a human. He, for instance, is described and worshipped as a divine entity, he has the ability of comforting the subjects over their fear for the afterlife and bring them enough security to justify his existence. However, he is a mortal, not a God, his skill to instill fear in his subjects is not enough that they want to rebel, but still enough to not make them feel completely safe even under his command. This is not God-like, because, from a religious perspective, if God governed humans, then they would not have to be worried about the state of war, but under the sovereign, they are. According to the author, this fear is an irrational fear that derives from imagination of a state of war, that still makes the citizens feel unsafe regardless of the fact that the sovereign brings them security., “the state must cultivate an image of itself as a mortal god of nearly unlimited power, so that it may overwhelm its subjects and instill in them enough reverence and fear to win their unwavering obedience” (p. 113). Abizadeh further adds how Hobbes did not believe that a mortal could possess the divine qualities that would allow the seat of the sovereign to be filled permanently by a human, and that is the reason why he would remind his readers of the insecurity that the sovereign still brings among the citizens’ figure, that as a mortal, he could be replaced and thus chaos would be spreading among the subjects. This way, Hobbes did not want to undermine the Leviathan, rather keep in his readers this perpetual feeling of fear not only “of *him*, but also of his absence” (p. 113).

*The state is connected to God by motion*

Finally, John Scallan (2022) answered to what could be the link between the state and God with the concept of motion by writing a thesis on the corporeal nature of the God Hobbes describes. Scallan (2022) starts from the idea of motion, of how Hobbes states that a body does not initiate

its own motion, nor can it stop once it is in motion. At the same time, motion is not transferable, therefore, humans cannot give motion to something else, and on the contrary God is motion, as He is the universal cause of all things (2022). Then the author (2022) proceeds to assert how, in his reading of Hobbes, men come in contact with God through nature; when they encounter events they cannot explain, they immediately assign a cause to these events that would be God, therefore, it would be impossible for men not to believe in God, because they experience his presence in nature, specifically, Scallan writes, in motion. I believe research on Hobbes is overfocused on what is rational. The overarching idea that Hobbes must have wanted the reader to rationally understand God, which is nothing but an irrational concept, “The reason Hobbes thinks that humans can have no idea of God is that all human ideas are analyzable or reducible to sensations and that God cannot be sensed” (Martinich, 1992, p. 186). Scallan (2022) mentions that humans may give another name to the first cause of motion but does not expand further on why humans would specifically react to motion and no other principles, and what is the temporality between the understanding of the divine and the one of motion. Most importantly, current literature is lacking a focus on awe and overawe, fear and the laws of nature are valid answers to what the sovereign can use to connect God to the state, but Hobbes (Lev., 2:17, p. 131, 1651/2014) has already written than the Leviathan overawes its subjects. Therefore, instead of focusing on, valid, physics explanations, an approach on the feelings the sovereign causes may be more appropriate, considering that awe does not emerge from most of the current research. Hence, my argument will follow the traces of the puzzle of overawe to the concept of silence, and how it may can bridge the gap between the state and God.

## **Main Body**

In this section of my paper, I will explore thoroughly the concept of speech in Hobbes, in order to question the -non- definition of awe, and then I will build my argument on the value of silence both by analyzing Hobbes and Abramović.

### *Hobbes and speech*

In this paragraph I will outline Hobbes’ position on the precision of speech; it’s uses and abuses, the characterization of insignificant names, and my own argument on the definition of awe. Hobbes

(Lev., 1:4, pp. 26-33, 1651/2014) brings up the importance of speech in Chapter IV of the Leviathan, but then does not provide a definition or a glossary for the word awe (and overawe). Specifically, not only the author advocates against metaphors and figures of speech, but mentions insignificant words, these being on two kinds (pp. 27-28; p. 31). The first, words that do not have a definition, that are new, and second, words that are made of two names contradicting each other, such as if it is said that “a quadrangle is round” (p. 32). Keeping in mind that the first category of insignificant words is words without a definition, the absence of a glossary for awe -and overawe- appears even more contradictory, one could perhaps argue that Hobbes believed that awe was an insignificant name, but then it does not appear clear why he would use it. Furthermore, if Hobbes thought that the meaning of awe was so evident that no definition was required, then we shall ask why he would give so much attention to define other -more intuitive- concepts. As readers, failing to question why this occurred would mean that our reading of the author is superficial in one of his overarching arguments. Therefore, I will first recall how Hobbes requires precision for speech, and then proceed to analyze awe and give my own reading in relation to silence.

Hobbes (Lev., 1:4, p. 27, 1651/2014) first mentions how speech is functional to remember and recall instances, second, to show others the knowledge we have attained, third, to communicate opinions and feelings, and finally, to delight other people, or generally make them feel happy. To every one of these uses, there is a corresponding abuse. These are first recalling memories wrongly by the inconsistency of the words used, second, to use words metaphorically, third, to declare one’s false will, and lastly, to use words to grieve one another (pp. 27-28). However, Hobbes himself does not respect this precept, as he does not give a definition or a glossary for awe, even though its theory seems extremely speech-centric. Perhaps, and this is what my research leads me to believe, Hobbes reserves speech for the mortal world. Humans need to speak to each other, to communicate their thoughts correctly -if they manage to do so, that is another question, and I will tackle this further in the paper- in order to formulate the covenant that leads men to the formation of a state and the state to God. However, this is the point where the speech-centric theory falls apart, as the bridge between men and the sovereign and God is awe, and awe is not explained or defined. I want to argue, without being immersed in the hunt for the etymological meaning of awe, that the reason why Hobbes does not define awe, is because it is an *unspeakable* and *unhearable* feeling.

Introducing Kierkegaard's argument that men have to create silence to make space for the divinity, I want to argue that awe is the silent feeling that men bear when in front of the divine, and if it is not awe, is something quite similar, a feeling of astonishment in front of something, or someone, that humans are not able to comprehend with rationality and with speech (Strawser, 2006). This is why, I make my case, Hobbes does not define awe, because awe simply cannot be defined; by this I intend to state that we may look for a translation for the word awe in the dictionary, but in analyzing it as Hobbes would have wanted his readers to, the correct definition may not be something rational that can be described, because spirituality and the relation with God cannot be understood with a speech-centric theory, it is not a squarable circle.

### *Hobbes and revelation*

Furthermore, in Chapter XII, 'On Religion', Hobbes (Lev., 1:12, pp. 83-94, 1651/2014) gives insights on religion that I believe are quite interesting. He traces back religion to the need of humans to identify causes of natural phenomena, what I am interested in is his framing of revealed religion (p. 85). According to the Oxford Dictionary, revealed religion is defined as "religion based on divine revelation rather than reason" (Oxford Dictionary, 2023), the author critiques those who claim to know the essence of God and profess the divinity's will; "In like manner they attribute their fortune to a stander by, to a lucky or unlucky place, to words spoken especially if in the name of God be amongst them; as charming and conjuring, the liturgy of witches; insomuch as to believe, they have power to turn a stone into bread, bread into a man, or anything into anything." (Hobbes, Lev., 1:12, p. 85, 1651/2014). Therefore, Hobbes critiques those who claim, through those that are called divine revelations, to know what the divinity wants or says. Hobbes moreover, critiques the Gentiles -the pagans- as they would assign to anything -animals, houses, names- a god or a devil, and claim that everything, every event, good or bad, would be caused by a divinity. In this interpretation, I note how Hobbes reprimands those who claim to know what God wants as they try to explain with words what his actions are. Later on, Hobbes argues against political religion, hence, when sovereigns use God or divinities to induce obedience in their subjects (pp. 87-91). For instance, Hobbes makes the examples of Numa Pompilius who pretended to receive precepts from the nymph Egeria, or Mahomet who claimed to have had conferences with the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove (p. 89). Even though Hobbes does not specifically mention silence, he points out how those who claim to know God and try, with words, to deceit others with speeches and

predicaments are in the wrong and that God is intelligible in his nature, and his spirit incorporeal (p. 85). It could be argued that sovereigns, who make use of the word of God to induce compliance and fear in their subjects are trying to bring the divine to the mortals in a deceiving way; they use speech to explain God to the mortals. On the contrary, I would like to argue that silence is the tool by which the divine can be brought among men and although I believe that the power of silence is to manifest the divine in a form that men can understand but not communicate, I would like to examine the performance *The Artist is Present* by Marina Abramović (2012) as a case for how silence can be introduced -in this case through art- in the mortal sphere, and how spectators reacted to it. This will be useful to have an empirical case for how humans may react when they are forced to be confronted with silence, instead of being confronted with the divine with speech, as Hobbes mentions that sovereigns often do.

*Silent is Present- an account on Marina Abramović*

*The Artist is Present* (Akers, 2012) is an artistic performance done in 2010 at the MoMa in New York. This performance consisted of the artist sitting on a chair opposite to another chair where people could line up and in turns sit for as much time as they wished. Before entering the room where Abramović was, the public had to go through some of her past performances enacted by her students. One notable inclusion was the one in which people had to walk in a very small space between a man and a woman naked, who would neither speak to each other nor move to let the visitors pass comfortably. Then, upon minutes, or sometimes hours of waiting in line, the visitors would get to finally sit in front of the artist. She would sit in silence and look at the person in front of her in silence every day for eight hours for three months, and queues would be lined up for blocs as many people were interested in taking part in the performance. The two chairs were separated by a table that was later removed, to limit the focus of the audience on the artist. The only time the artist broke the immobility was when her ex-husband Ulay showed up, and they, in silence, held hands. As I am an admirer of Abramović's work myself, I have been interested in her work for about ten years, and when I first saw the documentary with more mature eyes this exact performance, I was very impressed by her work, therefore, it was natural for me to think of her when formulating my idea of silence. The fact that people would wait in line for so long just to sit in silence sparked great curiosity, therefore, I watched the documentary again to try and find some insights on what value could silence have had in that instance. I will admit that part of the queueing

was possibly the fame Abramović has reached around the world in the last years, hence, many people were probably more interested in her than in the performance itself. However, I do think there is a big component of the value of silence as a form of non-verbal communication. I believe that silence can reach where speech stops, in the realm of irrationality, when people do not speak, or rather do not need to speak, this gives them freedom to express themselves in the most freeing and true way, just by showing emotion without having to rationalize it into words. The example that keeps popping in my mind is going to a museum and reading the description for a work of modern art; I find it quite interesting when the curators of an exposition try to explain a work of art that is hardly explainable with words, I find it redundant and pleonastic. For instance the Artist is Present has the following description on MoMa's website: "*The work was inspired by her belief that stretching the length of a performance beyond expectations serves to alter our perception of time and foster a deeper engagement in the experience*" (MoMA.org, 2010), I believe this description barely tells the reader anything about the performance beside the action that the artist is taking, which is basically none. It is utterly impossible to truly understand the performance if speech is the medium we are trying so desperately to use. What Abramović does is bring silence, something so irrational that it is hard to comprehend rationally, in the mortal sphere, by forcing visitors to be uncomfortable in a setting that they would rarely experience otherwise. The artist wants to make the public uncomfortable even before they approach her, by showing them blood, screaming, and nudity, and then obligating them to sit and face this emotion that they do not know how to explain. This is why I argue that people would have these incredibly emotional reactions - such as crying or going back 20 times more- to this performance, because it brought them into contact with a part of themselves, almost spiritual, that humans tend to generally neglect. It could even be said that visitors were in awe of Abramović. *The Artist is Present* is a case of bringing the divine to the mortal, instead of trying to bring the mortal to the immortal, by explaining concepts that belong to religiosity and spirituality with speech.

Going back to my initial question on what can bridge the gap between state and God, I believe silence is the answer as it can put the mortal in contact with the immortal by bridging the gap that speech cannot fill between the state and God. If we do not treat speech and silence as opposite ends, rather put them on a spectrum, where speech explains the rational and silence the irrational, (that is, everything that cannot be explained with rationality) only then, the two can coexist.

Considering this, a new reading of Hobbes inevitably emerges, so far, I have looked at two different ideas (Hobbes and Abramović) and analyzed them separately. Now I would like to use one to better understand the other. Abramović (Hakers, 2012) has been interpreted through Hobbes' (1651/2014) words and ideas, her attempt to create a divine silence has been connected to awe, but the analysis made so far leaves the reader to wonder what would happen if *The Leviathan* was analyzed through silence rather than speech. If one of Hobbes' (1651/2014) goals was to write a political book by keeping religion aside, but still being a religious man, then this emerges from the entity of the Leviathan. The Leviathan is created by speech, by a Covenant written from its subjects with the rationality as means which speech and humans possess. However, the sovereign is a mortal God, and if he manifests his mortal attributes by the way he is created, then, he shows his God-like part by his ability to overawe his subjects, which, as we have seen, is of divine nature. Therefore, the sovereign possesses the capacity to induce silence -taking for granted that overawe is a feeling best expressed through silence. It is evident here how speech and silence are not opposed and cannot exist one without the other, there can be no mortal without speech, and no God without silence. The sovereign is the entity that can merge the two by its own existence; he is made by speech, but his power resides in silence. It is even more evident how silence cannot be ignored in reading *The Leviathan*, and awe and overawe should be overlooked as an unsolved puzzle but brought in the conversation on the nature of the semi-mortal creature Hobbes wished to create.

#### *What if? A counterargument on religious language*

In order to test my argument, I will proceed to outline a counterargument and attempt to disprove it. To this aim, since my argument is silence can bridge the gap between the state and the divine, the counterargument would be that speech can bridge the gap between the state and the divine. The way I interpret this is to say that men can speak of God, or more broadly, that they may use language to describe God to others and they can succeed in this. Without considering the previous claims made by Hobbes (1651/2014) that mortals can exploit the uncertainty about God for their own political benefits, and giving for granted as an axiom that the people who have a desire to talk of God do this in good faith and with no intent of hurting others, this claim still sparks a plethora of questions. First, if one wished to claim that it is not possible for someone to talk to God, but simply *of* Him, one would also have to explicit what kind of words are appropriate to use. Let us

assume that the appropriate language is English, for the sake of this paper, and that, for instance, *God is good* is an appropriate characterization of the divinity. However, all words have a meaning, a meaning that shall be precise, not necessarily univocal -e.g. that one word only means one thing- but that at least that the meaning(s) of a word are all clear logically and that, even if we have not used a word, we can make sense of its meaning. For instance, saying that pie is good makes sense, because even if we have never tried pie, we can understand in what way it could be good, and even if we do not like pie, we can understand how it might taste good to some people. However, can we assert that God is good the same way pie is good? One could motivate this by saying that the way God is good is different from the way something like pie can be good. Intuitively, this is clear, and it seems almost offensive to assert the contrary. However, good as a concept is known to humans only as applicable to finite things, such as pie. No man is able to understand the way in which God is good, because no human has knowledge of what good in a “God-like” way means. Therefore, using the word good makes no sense. Let us think about one of the precepts by Karl Popper, that in research every affirmation has to be falsifiable in order to function logically -according to the Cambridge Dictionary, an affirmation is falsifiable when it is “able to be proven false” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1997/2022). For instance, if I affirm that “all trousers are jeans”, I can falsify this claim empirically by buying leggings or sweatpants. However, any affirmation on God cannot be falsifiable. If one says “God is good”, but does not know how God can be good, consequently, it is not only impossible to confirm the claim -as we do not know the nature of God’s behavior- nor deny it, because it is impossible to prove that “God is bad”, for the same reasons mentioned above. If I accept good as a divine attribute, I may as well then describe God in any other way, if I do not understand the meaning behind of what I am saying. Furthermore, good as a word is human-created, therefore not only would we then be using a human-created word to describe something not human-created such as God, but we would be attributing to God a quality that we can only understand in human terms; as Hobbes (Lev., 1:4, 1651/2014) puts it “if speech be peculiar to man (as for aught I know it is), then is understanding peculiar to him also” (p. 33). However, if we wish to persevere, then we would have to assert that also the opposite can be done, therefore, that divine terms can be attributed to humans. Then, we could say that men are timeless and unintelligible, although as humans we do not possess the faculty to understand or deny what timeless or unintelligible mean, as it is of the divine realm, not



the mortal. Therefore, against a counterargument, silence still results to be the appropriate tool to understand the divine.

## **Discussion**

In my discussion I will expand on my argument and apply it to a broader concept by outlining what contribution other authors who have written about silence have given to the academia. Silence is usually framed as a negative concept. To be *silenced* relates to people being deprived of their right to speak, to express their rights, women are *silenced* and *silent* when they are not believed as victims of a violence (Ahrens, 2006). The silence of men can be the indifference in front of the crimes of humans against those of their same kind, the horror of the Holocaust, the silence of World leaders in front of the atrocities perpetrated by their adversaries or their allies (Roth, 1984).

This last one is especially interesting, under the question of the role of God during the Holocaust, John Roth (1984) writes in *the silence of God* how Holocaust survivors had interpreted the actions of God. As one would predict, many people who defined themselves as religious changed their view into atheism after the Holocaust. Surprisingly, some people -not many, about 5% of the interviewed, but it is still a larger number than one would expect- shifted from considering themselves atheist to religious only after the Holocaust. I find this incredibly interesting, the fact that such horror could lead people to find faith in their own way, and perhaps put their trust in something that not only hypothetically they will never see, but that they actually never saw or heard when they needed it the most, I find it incredibly fascinating. What is even more fascinating are the results of this study, the fact that most of the survivors, when asked why they either became religious after the Holocaust or maintained their faith throughout it, have answered “It is not for us to judge the ways of God” (Roth, 1984, p. 413). This leads me to believe even more that there is something irrational about religion that previously discussed literature does not account for.

This would lead me to believe that silence has a power, perhaps a rather destructive one, something to be fought and challenged, or perhaps, the power of silence might be so much more than that, in fact I believe that this is not the only reading of silence, and authors such as Kennan Ferguson

(2003) have tackled several conceptualizations of silence; some can be quite useful for my own research. Especially interesting is the example Ferguson (2003) provides of the use of silence in familial dynamics, where families, in order to keep being at peace with each other, at times pick silence instead of speech, in this case to avoid fighting. Ferguson (2003) is the first author I have encountered to propose that silence can be a communal tool. In other words, that silence can enable men to be together rather than apart. Ferguson (2003) also highlights how in current literature silence is usually portrayed as the representation of withdrawal; however, silence can also have a function of resistance, threat, and more in general, power. If we try to remember the final scene of *Dead Poets' Society* (Weir, 1989), where the students stand on their desks to protest their new teacher, while the only sound to be heard in the room is the teacher screaming at them with no success, is quite easy to understand what Ferguson (2003) means when writing that silence “disturbs those institutions and institutional executors (including teachers) who demand verbal interaction as evaluative mechanisms” (p. 15). Furthermore, he enhances silence as a form of threat; for instance, silence as non-participation can be threatening. Speech is not only a right, sometimes is a duty: taking as an example the compulsory pledge of allegiance in the United States, or the practice of taking an oath; silence can be political and can indeed be meaningful (Ferguson, 2003). To my question on whether silence can reach where speech stops, the answer seems to be debated, but finally affirmative.

Another interesting framing of silence is the one made by Kafka (Mendieta, 2014). The author rewrote the mythological story of Ulysses and the sirens by describing their song as silent instead of seductive sound. This reading has been interpreted in many ways, a popular one being that the sirens did not mean to hurt Ulysses, they were rather in love with him, and at the sight of the hero covering his ears in wax they did not emit any sound, so stumbled they were that he would not reciprocate their love. This way, silence is framed as a means with which to communicate the emotion of surprise and confusion, perhaps, one could say, even awe. Another interpretation, which I find quite fascinating, is that silence could be much more attractive and dangerous than any other sound, therefore, the sirens were trying to hurt Ulysses, but with silence instead of sound. Here, we do not get to know if silence actually hurts more profoundly because Ulysses has his ears covered indeed, so he is not aware, in Kafka's piece, that the sirens are not singing. It is clear in

Kafka when he picks silence, out of all the sounds and words available to the human being, to exemplify the most mysterious concept.

Finally, Kierkegaard writes about the silence men have in front of God, of the silence of God in front of the sacrifice of his child Isaac; “Silence is the way of interiorization for us ordinary human beings” (Hay, 1998, p. 115). Furthermore, he writes “I always run up against the paradox, the divine and the demonic, for silence is both. Silence is the demon's trap, and the more that is silenced, the more terrible the demon, but silence is also the divinity's mutual understanding with the single individual” (Hay, 1998, p. 116). Silence, therefore, was to Kierkegaard the way men and God can communicate, this understanding hints to a framing of silence more similar to the one I am introducing with my research. According to Kierkegaard, men must create silence, so God's word can be heard (Strawser, 2006). Silence is not the end or communication, rather the beginning; only in silence men can turn to their inwardness and subjectiveness. Strawser (2006) also mentions how silence can exist in the presence of speech. Although it seems paradoxical, one can speak and still communicate nothing, Abraham can explain his gesture of faith one hundred times, his contemporaries would still not understand him for “Speak he cannot; he speaks no human language. And even if he understood all the languages of the world, even if those he loved also understood them, he still could not speak - he speaks in a divine language, he speaks in tongues” (Strawser, 2006, p. 59). Kierkegaard makes a point similar to my own regarding silence and speech not necessarily being opposed, there are simply matters, for the author is the divine, that are not sufficiently explained by speech alone, silence is a sort of way of speaking to a different part of the human being.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, I have started researching for this paper with the question of *What can bridge the gap between the state and God in Hobbes' Leviathan?* in mind. To this aim, I have outlined what different authors wrote about this connection in my literature review; these include Martinich (1992), Bakunin (1882/1970), Abizadeh (2012), and Scallan (2022). In the main body, I made my argument on silence clear by first focusing on Hobbes (1651/2014) and later on Abramović (Akers, 2012), then I have outlined a counterargument. Finally, in my discussion I expanded my argument

by analyzing other authors such as Ferguson (2003), Roth (1984), Kierkegaard (Strawser, 2006; Hay, 1998), and Kafka (Mendieta, 2014). I also believe some recommendations for future research can be given.

Hobbes (1651/2014) argues that humans may use speech to communicate positive feelings to each other and even make others happy, however, this point is quite contradictory. I wonder if speech is an adequate tool to use in improving human relations. Hobbes himself argues that men live in a perpetual state of war and fear towards each other. If it is to consider that men exist in a plurality, where they strive to be equal and individual at the same time, this addresses the question of whether men can live in a society without being constantly scared of each other; Hobbes would say that they cannot -hence, the need for the sovereign- however one wonders if speech has a function in this process of socialization and sparks an interesting question on how speech can ameliorate social relationships. If men are not afraid anymore, do they then not need the sovereign? Would speech be enough to reassure men into governing themselves without the need for an overarching power to keep them from killing each other? This would be an interesting insight for further research. It would be extremely interesting for scholars to investigate whether speech could be used to ameliorate the state of war and enable men to communicate positive feelings, these could include trust. Perhaps, speech could be used by humans to reassure each other about their intentions, and if this is still not enough for people to not fear each other, then perhaps communicating positive feelings is not really a use of speech, but rather a promise that remains, as of now, unfulfilled.

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