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## A Žižekian Reading of Hobbes: The Leviathan as Ideology

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## **Introduction**

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651/2017) is one of the most influential classical books that is still discussed to this day. A lot of different authors show how it is the starting point of many important modern ideological movements (Bertolini, 2005; Labiano, 2000; Gauthier, 1977). Some authors even read the book as ideological (Grcic, 2007; Di Stefano, 1983). Conversely, Hobbes himself is opposed to ideology and tries to build his theory based on rationality (Ashcraft, 1978). This produces tension between what scholars read into his theory and what he claims to be trying to say.

Before continuing, this paper offers a working definition of ideology in order to avoid confusion until ideology is properly explained in the second part of the literature review. This operationalisation is based on Žižek's understanding of the concept which is also discussed later. Ideology is an implicit belief that makes people act and think in a certain way that is not necessarily rational.

In order to investigate the discrepancy between Hobbes and the scholarship, this thesis looks into whether the *Leviathan* is ideological. An issue arises in what it means for the book to be ideological as all of the scholars take different approaches and understandings to it. Thus, to be able to say something that would be true for all of the cases, this paper takes Žižek's critical approach to ideology. It offers the most modern, holistic, and full view of ideology and if it is not applicable to the *Leviathan* (1651/2017), then the book is not ideological. Thus, this paper researches whether Hobbes is ideological in Žižekian terms.

The paper begins with a literature review, the first part of which discusses in more depth the discrepancy between Hobbes and the scholars who see him as ideological. Then it summarises Žižek's argument on ideology. The next section applies that understanding to the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) by showing that three important elements from the book are ideological: The Covenant, obedience to the sovereign, and the sovereign's power. It shows how Hobbes opposes his ideological project to contemporary ideologies in order to strengthen the position of the *Leviathan* vis-à-vis them. After that there is a discussion arguing that this Žižekian reading of Hobbes reconciles the scholarship on the topic and it is able to overcome problems within the book, like the paradox of self-sacrifice, which will be explained and discussed later. Moreover, it argues that understanding Hobbes as an ideologue has implications for the modern state system, which can trace its origins within the book. Last, it argues that understanding the modern state as an ideological rather than a rational project allows for going beyond it.

## **Literature Review**

## *Ideology and the Leviathan*

Many authors like to read ideology into the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) but in different ways. Some argue that through this text Hobbes is one of the forefathers of the capitalist ideology (Labiano, 2000). Others claim that he originated the idea to understand social relations as contractual (Gauthier, 1977). A feminist critique of him is that he works out from the ideology of masculinity and his text would make more sense if read as coming from that ideology (Di Stefano, 1983). A fourth reading claims that modern-day America is a Hobbesian state (Bertolini, 2005). Kane (2010)<sup>1</sup> suggests that the problem that the *Leviathan* faces is that the loyalty to the sovereign cannot be secured only through fear and force alone but when the ideology of nationalism is introduced it overcomes this difficulty through love for the Leviathan. Grcic (2007) takes the argument even further by claiming that the *Leviathan* is an ideological text badly cobbled together. This seems problematic as there does not seem to be a comprehensive reading of ideology in Hobbes. Moreover, there are several different readings that do not interact at all.

What all of these readings have in common is that they read ideology in Hobbes but in different ways. Some argue that he sets down an ideology that is later followed, some see him as influenced by ideology, and others read in ideology to “fix” his text. These different readings will become relevant again later but for now this thesis focuses on Hobbes. His whole project builds upon rationality. He actively tries to omit any non-justifiable interference in his state-building project. As Ashcraft (1978) shows, Hobbes aims to exclude factors like ideology and class from his theory because he believes they caused the English civil war and are detrimental to any state that is based on them. Here lies the second discrepancy. So many different authors, writing at different times, on different topics seem to agree at least with the fact that the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) is ideological, but Hobbes’ goal was to make a post-ideological state (Ashcraft, 1978). If Hobbes was not following an ideology and actively trying to destroy it, like he claims, then why are so many authors reading it into his book? If he was following one of the ideologies read into his project, then why can other ones be read into it as well?

This is problematic on yet another level. If the Hobbesian state is ideological and ideology has a place in the decision-making process of the covenanting people, then Hobbes’ argument is significantly weakened. His argumentation that the state of nature produces an environment of war of all against all and the fundamental equality of all leads him to conclude

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a draft that is not to be cited without permission but my efforts to track down the original author were unsuccessful as he no longer works at the same university to which the given e-mail is tied.

that all rational people will choose to covenant in a state and elect a sovereign able to overawe them in order to secure themselves (Lev., 2:17, pp. 139-141, 1651/2017). This only works if there is no ideology that prevents people from killing each other in the first place or not covenanting in the second. Kane (2010) shows the ideology of nationalism leads to people behaving in a way that puts their lives in danger. This breaks the laws of nature as discussed by Hobbes (Lev., 1:14, pp. 105-106, 1651/2017). But Kane (2010) argues that the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) needs nationalism because otherwise the fear of punishment is not a strong enough motivating factor to push people to overcome their instinct for self-preservation and sacrifice themselves for the security of the state. Consequently, if the theory of state presented by Hobbes allows for ideology in order to explain why people might sacrifice themselves, there is nothing preventing the existence of ideology in the state of nature as well.

A possible way too overcome this problem is to argue that the *Leviathan* and ideology are co-constitutive and thus one does not work without the other. But even if Kane (2010) and Bertolini (2005) argue something similar to this position, Hobbes does not. He is adamant to exclude ideology from the state. Ashcraft (1978) claims that this is with the goal to prevent another civil war. On the other hand, authors like Di Stefano (1983) and Grcic (2007) read Hobbes as ideological himself. Both of them are concerned with power-relations. Di Stefano (1983) works out of the feminist tradition of critiquing classical authors by arguing that the Hobbesian state is a masculine ideological project furthering the false universality of masculinity. Grcic (2007) takes a different approach by arguing that the Hobbesian ideology is the creation of an all-powerful sovereign and can be debunked using the theories of Rawls. The issue with these two texts is the way Hobbes is portrayed as ideological. Is he masculine, totalitarian, or can he be both? Moreover, the two texts do a great job at portraying Hobbes as ideological in a certain aspect and then debunking that ideology, but this does not capture the true ideological dimension. This is because the two are reading different aspects of his ideology but are not connecting them to an overarching framework that could hold both. Lastly, both articles tackle visible expressions of Hobbes' ideology –its arguments or symptoms– not the root of it. Thus, even though they treat the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) as an ideology they do not show how this ideology operates, takes root, or the implications it has. This discussion leaves this thesis with the burden to prove that Hobbes was ideological in his own time in order for academia to be able to work up and tackle the questions posed by the different papers discussed at the beginning.

*Ideology and Žižek*

In order for this paper to be able to answer this question it first needs to look into what exactly ideology is. Ideology is a concept younger than the *Leviathan* (1651/2017). This means that in order to look into that book as ideological, the conceptualisation needs to allow for reading back. In a sense, the indicators of ideology should be naturally occurring in the time period of the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) regardless of the name they bear. Second, the conceptualisation has to be holistic. This means that it has to be as broad as possible and to focus on the big topics, rather than focus on something specific. Thus, this paper will be able to go beyond the articles presented by Di Stefano (1983) and Grcic (2007) and provide insight into the root of the Hobbesian ideology.

The modern philosopher Slavoj Žižek offers a conceptualisation of ideology that fits the two criteria and more. In his masterwork *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) Žižek presents a critique of the modern capital-driven world by arguing that it is deeply ideological, despite its claim to be post-ideological. Later, in the film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), directed by Sophie Fiennes, written and narrated by Žižek, he restates and explains in a more accessible way his theory. He does that by presenting a critical view of what ideology is, based largely on the writings of Hegel, Marx, and Lacan. The idea that ideology died with the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is completely rejected by Žižek (Fiennes, 2012, min. 03:54-04:40).

Ideology is present in all social interactions and is both a mask that obscures their true meaning and a lens through which they are interpreted (Žižek, 1989, pp. 25-26). Žižek (1989, pp. 25-26, 45; Fiennes, 2012, min. 5:45-6:10) argues that ideology becomes part of the very things it is said to obscure. Not only that, it brings the Marxist notion of surplus enjoyment to those things (Fiennes, 2012, min. 13:50-16:20). In a way people enjoy not only the thing itself but also the ideological worth of it. Žižek illustrates this in the movie with a simple example. He shows how drinking Coca Cola brings people enjoyment, beyond the taste or quenching thirst, by making them experience this ideological surplus of enjoyment (Fiennes, 2012, min. 13:45-14:25). This is produced by the Cola advertisement which claims that “It is the real thing” (Fiennes, 2012, min. 14:25-14:30).

Enjoying ideology means enjoying this surplus. But enjoyment does not mean pleasure, on the contrary – enjoyment is often found through distorted pleasure or even pain (Žižek, 1989, pp. 88-91; Fiennes, 2012, min. 7:45-8:15). The end goal presented by ideology can only be achieved by going through an outer layer or the path of achieving the ideological end. Thus, ideology becomes a justification of the means rather than the goal. People, enjoy the means because they desire the end. This, on the other hand, stays hidden to the average person, who strives to achieve the end, promised by the ideology (Žižek, 1989, pp. 91-92). Žižek (1989, p.

90) uses an example from Descartes to show this phenomenon. When a person gets lost in the forest, they need to walk in a straight line until they reach safety, regardless if there seem to be better routes. How ideology works in this example is that the belief that walking straight will lead to safety justifies walking past other possible routes that might be better or even the correct one.

One crucial aspect to the way ideology works is that it become a metaphorical loop through which all other ideological frames are passed (Žižek, 1989, pp. 94-96). The example that Žižek (1989, pp. 94-96) gives is that there could be right-wing environmentalist, left-wing environmentalists, feminist environmentalists, etc. where each ideology incorporates the environmentalist ideological element but has a different idea of how to approach climate change. This means that ideological elements have both a pre-ideological meaning and an ideological one, which is pegged to and to be enjoyed through the ideology.

Furthermore, Žižek show how ideology is also very difficult to be exposed. Simply put, it aggregates all of the people's fears into one single object that has to be fought against (Fiennes, 2012, min. 40:30-41:11). It makes this, sometimes ordinary, thing to be experienced through suspicion, thus finding a scapegoat for the ideological discrepancies. Žižek (1989, p. 50) argues that an ideology succeeds when it manages to subvert these inconsistencies and incorporate them within the structure. Moreover, the subjects have their fantasies which become the building blocks of ideologies (Žižek, 1989, p. 45; Fiennes, 2012, min. 32:57-33:05). These fantasies then become a protective layer around the ideology that covers up inconsistencies and provides easy answer to difficult questions.

Last, ideology needs a lie that maintains the illusions created by it but also to act as a surplus element that is enjoyed (Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:16:22-1:16:46). This is the figure of the big Other, who makes everything permissible but is also used to justify and regulate the actions of people (Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:30:39-1:36:15). This big Other can be the People, Society, God, or anything similar that keeps people in check. This big Other is necessarily imaginary because if it is real it can be engaged which would pose an existential threat to the ideology. Žižek stresses that the big Other does not exist, which is "the tragedy of the human predicament" (Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:42:35-1:44:00).

Žižek also provides a way to fight ideology. He argues that the ideological elements are empty canisters that could be fulfilled with any ideology (Fiennes, 2012, min. 22:23-22:50). These elements serve to be enjoyed within the ideology and a way to undermine that is to enjoy them outside of it (Fiennes, 2012, min. 52:28-54:50). If they are taken and enjoyed in their pre-ideological sense they are liberated from the current meaning, which undermines the ideology



that tries to use them. The next step to fighting ideology is to undermine the big Other itself (Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:36:16-1:37:51). This is done by showing that the secret order of things that is represented by it is false and that many prohibited things that should not be happening to the big Other actually happen to it (Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:37:40-1:40:16). The big Other must maintain a certain appearance and if that appearance is undermined or broken, so is the big Other<sup>2</sup>.

To summarise the Žižekian argument, every ideology has some goal that justifies its existence. There is some surplus enjoyment to reaching this, which becomes the big Other and is the enjoyment the subject gets from the ideology. The ideology is the path to achieving the object goal and is justified through the end. Every ideology gathers free ideological elements and uses them as part of the enjoyment. It controls the way people interact with neutral objects by giving them an ideological dimension. Furthermore, ideology gathers people's fears into a single object which begins to be seen with suspicion and serves as a scapegoat. Last, an ideology succeeds when it is able to co-opt things that contradict it and make them work in favour of it, using fantasies to cover any inconsistencies.

This understanding of ideology can produce new and interesting insights if applied to Hobbes. It allows this essay to go beyond what Di Stefano (1983) and Grcic (2007) argue. This is necessary in order to show that if the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) is ideological, then masculinity and totalitarian power are just ideological elements. Aiming to go beyond their research, this thesis starts from the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) and the goal of the next section is to prove that the state presented in that book is an ideological project using the Žižekian understanding. Thus, by applying such a complex but also holistic theory allows this thesis to show where ideology comes from, what the ideological elements are, and then investigate their implications.

## **Body**

This section proves that the *Leviathan* is ideological. The *Leviathan* is justified as producing peace and prosperity, and is the product of a Covenant between people. It is headed by a sovereign that overawes the subjects who must obey. It is built embracing rationality and opposes any irrational forces or alternatives to its structure because they pose an existential danger to it. It functions to secure peace among the subjects. All of these seem like rational ideas but the following sub-sections tackle them and show how they are ideological and that is

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<sup>2</sup> Žižek also has arguments regarding fighting ideology and the violence caused by deadlock within the ideology, but the only relevant part to this thesis is his argument on undermining the big Other and liberating elements from their ideological meaning (Fiennes, 2012).

where their power and binding force come from, not rationality. This is proven by applying the Žižekian understanding of ideology to the *Leviathan* (1651/2017).

### *Covenanting is Ideological*

The state of nature plays a central role in the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) as it provides the rationale behind engaging in a covenant in the first place. The state of nature is one where humans live in a constant state of War (Lev., 1:13, pp. 100-102, 1651/2017). This War makes the human experience miserable and the human life “short, nasty and brutish” (Lev., 1:13, p. 103, 1651/2017). This state of nature is the logical conclusion of natural condition of humanity presented in book 1 (Lev., 1:13, pp. 100-101, 1651/2017). Humans are fundamentally equal because even the weakest can kill the strongest and they are in constant competition for scarce resources (Lev., 1:13, pp. 100-101, 1651/2017). Out of these two premises Hobbes argues that it follows a state of constant War, where everybody tries to dominate everybody in order to increase their own security (Lev., 1:13, pp. 101-102, 1651/2017). This natural condition is more of a hypothetical than a historical state. The idea that there was ever a time where every person was left to their own devices is unrealistic, and even Hobbes does not fully believe in it (Lev., 1:13, p. 104, 1651/2017). But this does not strike at the core of Hobbes argument because regardless of the origins of War, what matters to his claim is that War is the environment of social interaction and it is realistic enough to say that people should avoid it. The issue is that the scariest part of War is that there is nobody guaranteeing that the laws of nature are followed. But the logic Hobbes uses is way less deterministic than he claims. He himself allows for people to engage in cooperation under War and although there are many different causes of conflict this does not necessarily lead to violence (Lev., 1:14, pp. 109-116; 1:15, pp.117-118; 2:17, pp. 137-138, 1651/2017). Thus, a critical reading of the Hobbesian state of nature can reduce it to a simple thought experiment. There is another issue with it. It is supposed to have happened a long time ago and the only example of it could be seen in the indigenous people of the Americas (Lev., 1:13, p. 104, 1651/2017). This argumentation is flawed because Hobbes was wrong about the way of life of indigenous Americans (Crawford, 1994)<sup>3</sup>. In order to overcome these issues this essay treats the state of nature as hypothetical.

This proves problematic because the state of nature is a project that has serious implications for the *Leviathan*. Its purpose is to build up the image of War and make it as scary as possible. But it is just retroactively imagining a natural condition that would allow for this.

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<sup>3</sup> Crawford (1994) shows how the indigenous to the state of New York Iroquois nations lived peacefully in a loosely structured confederacy from circa 1450 until they were colonised in 1777.

The state of nature become the environment in which the covenanting people live and everything that they are afraid of is gathered in other people. This is achieved by portraying others as dangerous and unpredictable. To use Žižekian terms, War becomes the surplus of this state of nature. The Hobbesian state of nature become ideologically appealing from its simplicity. People look on each other with suspicion and there is War looming over everything even if people are peaceful.

Because people are afraid of each other and are aware that there is no way of being secure they enter into a Covenant (Lev., 2:17, pp. 139-141, 1651/2017). This Covenant, which is still hypothetical, serves as the juridical justification of the powers of the sovereign. It becomes the opposite of War. So now there are two big ideas. One of them is War under which everybody has a right to anything but also lives in constant anxiety because any other person has the same rights and is unpredictable. The other is Covenant which secures the life of the contracting people by binding them in a state. All of the sudden the same state of nature has other implications. Now the surplus is the Covenant, which gives structure to social relations. People no longer fear each other but fear the return of War. At this point, the Hobbesian ideology has reached its final form. To apply Žižek, the Leviathan becomes the ideology, attaining peace is the end which justifies it, and the Covenant is the big Other which makes this way of achieving peace attractive and enjoyable. The big Other makes everything done in its name permissible and the ideology is enjoyed as the means of attaining the promised end<sup>4</sup>. This is the point where the Covenant stops being hypothetical as Hobbes wants to apply it in reality by showing how it is built and how it should operate.

Hobbes presents two ways in which a person can become part of the Covenant. Either through voluntary subjugation or through force (Lev., 2:18, p. 141; 2:20, pp. 166-167, 1651/2017). This can become problematic if the contemporaries believe that their ancestors were forced into the Covenant because the legitimacy of it is undermined. This means that the Hobbesian contemporaries have to believe that their ancestors subjugated themselves willingly and have to see the Covenant as the big Other so they subscribe to the ideology. In order to overcome this issue, Hobbes produces a theory of how even people who have been defeated and forced to the Covenant have to obey it (Lev., 2:20, pp. 166-167, 1651/2017). Yet again in the background of this all is the shadow of War as a scary state that gathers all of the fears of

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<sup>4</sup> The Žižekian argument that the big Other makes everything permissible clashes with his other argument that end goal of ideology makes everything permissible (Žižek, 1989, pp. 91-92; Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:30:39-1:36:15). To reconcile the two claims this paper understands that the big Other is justified in making anything permissible as it is the surplus enjoyment of the ideology which is justified through the end it strives to attain.

the people, because if people do not accept the Hobbesian rational explanation and rebel, they end up in a state of War. Thus, even if people are forced to Covenant, the legitimacy comes from the lack of War and not from the rational explanation presented in the book. The Žižekian logic is that the Covenant is justified because –as surplus of the ideology– leads to peace.

### *Obedience is Ideological*

After the Covenant is set up, the next step is the election of a sovereign (Lev., 2:17, p. 140, 1651/2017). This sovereign can be democratic, a council of aristocrats, or a single monarch (Lev., 2:19, p. 151, 1651/2017). Regardless of the form, the sovereign has the collective power of all the subjects (Lev., 2:17, p. 140, 1651/2017). The subjects become the authors and the sovereign becomes the actor of the actions of the Leviathan (Lev., 1:16, pp. 134-135; 2:17, p. 140, 1651/2017). Obedience to this sovereign is expected from the subjects. Hobbes offers several rationales for it. First, as the authors, the subjects themselves own the actions, hence it is rational for them to follow them (Lev., 2:18, p. 144, 1651/2017). Second, the subjects have promised in the Covenant to obey the sovereign and they have to uphold that out of duty and honour (Lev., 1:14, pp. 115-116, 1651/2017). Third, the sovereign has the right to punish disobedience and it is rational for the security-maximising subjects to follow the rules so they are not punished (Lev., 2:18, p. 147, 1651/2017). Last, if people start to disobey en masse the state will fall apart which will lead again to the conditions of War (Lev., 2:18, p. 150; 2:29, pp. 263-264, 1651/2017).

Even though all of these are presented as rational reasons for obedience, the actual obedience comes out of ideology. First, in order for the subjects to be the author of the sovereign's actions the Covenant needs to be real and existing and the subjects need to have had their input. But as shown formerly, the Covenant is a hypothetical contract. Hence, obedience on this criterion comes out of the belief that the Covenant is real and not its existence. If the people did not follow the ideology which had that contract as its big Other their obedience could not be explained or expected from this reasoning.

Second, obedience out of promise to obey goes only so far. In the first part of his book Hobbes shows how people are different (Lev., 1:6, pp. 41-52; 1:8, pp. 56-67, 1651/2017). Thus, even if some are willing to sacrifice a lot because of honour, even themselves which is a paradox to be addressed later, others cannot be assumed to be the same. So, the reasoning that people will obey out of a sense of duty and honour cannot be applied to everybody. In order to save this explanation ideology has to be present. Applying Žižek, obedience is a way through which the surplus of the Leviathan is enjoyed. The Covenant is the surplus produced by the Leviathan.

It can be presented through the strict hierarchy and order in the Hobbesian state. Living in any collective of people and following any rules does not lead to the surplus enjoyment offered by this ideology. Only living under the Leviathan and following the sovereign's rules is the way to enjoy the surplus. For example, Žižek shows how Coca Cola can only be enjoyed cold and carbonated because only in this state it fulfils the ideological role of surplus enjoyment that is ascribed to it through commercials (Fiennes, 2012, min. 16:20-16:57).

Third, obedience coming from the ability of the sovereign to punish transgression also relies on an ideological justification. The right of the sovereign to punish comes from his right to uphold justice and to make sure that covenants between the people are upheld (Lev., 2:28, pp. 254-255, 1651/2017). Hence, by punishing transgression the sovereign reasserts the obligations of the subject under the Covenant, giving its ideology a physical manifestation. Žižek argues that the big Other has the agency of appearance (Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:38:55-1:40:16). Through punishment the Covenant appears real as the consequences of it can be experienced.

Being punished becomes part of enjoying the Leviathan because only this punishment is just. Any other punishment, that is not sponsored by the Covenant is seen as unjust and part of War, but the right of the sovereign to punish the subjects is part of the ideology and directly goes against the notion of War. Even though hurting others is not strictly unjust under War, it is one of the symptoms of that War and main part of the justification for the Covenant. But under the Covenant, hurting others is not only permitted, it is woven into the structure of the state and from an ideological element with a negative meaning, it becomes an ideological element embraced by the ideology.

Last, obedience becomes part of the big Other. According to Hobbes, if people do not obey the sovereign, the Leviathan is undermined which leads to its decay and death (Lev., 2:18, p. 150; 2:29, pp. 263-264, 1651/2017). This does not necessarily hold true as the whole issue can be mended by simply getting a new sovereign. The actual threat here is that if people disobey the sovereign this undermines the structure created by the Covenant. The way the Žižekian understanding is applied here is through the way the object that collects all the fears becomes an enemy. Disobedience starts to be seen as leading to War, thus any disobedience becomes suspicious. Avoiding War legitimises any rule, justifies it, and mandates for it to be obeyed.

*Sovereignty is Ideological*

Not only the subjects of the state have obligations in the Leviathan, the sovereign also has duties because he, alongside the people, is a subject to the ideology. Even though Hobbes argues that the sovereign operates outside of the Covenant, this does not mean that he is not bound by its ideological dimension. Despite not being bound by the Covenant he still enjoys it as a surplus from the Leviathan because it gives him the collective power of all its subjects. Hobbes argues that the sovereign is not above the natural law and this natural law does not stop existing once the state is formed (Lev., 2:18, pp. 141-142; 2:27, pp. 238-239, 1651/2017). This natural law, expressed in Žižekian terms, outlines the prohibited things that should not happen to the big Other. The sovereign as a representative of the Covenant and a personhood-bearer of all the subjects has to uphold this natural law. But the sovereign also has private personhood. So, if he breaks any of the rules, he breaks them as a private person and not as the public person. The big Other cannot be seen to be in violation of the laws of nature and any transgression is to be borne by the private personhood of the sovereign.

Hobbes argues that the sovereign has absolute powers because he has to defend the peace and prosperity of the realm (Lev., 2:30, pp. 275-276, 1651/2017). But in reality the big Other makes everything permissible and the sovereign as the person who has the responsibility of upholding the Covenant is allowed to do anything to achieve that goal. The sovereign only overawes everybody because he is the perfect servant of the Covenant. To illustrate this point this thesis relies on Žižek's example of the Soviet leadership. The leaders portray themselves as simple men who like children and dogs and all the atrocities they commit is in the name of the People. Here the big Other –the People– justify any and all actions of the Soviet leadership. By analogy the big Other –the Covenant– justifies any and all actions of the sovereign.

Last, the ability of the sovereign to overawe his subjects is also ideological. Hobbes does not provide definition of awe, despite providing a definition of most terms he uses. The Oxford dictionary's definition states it is "a feeling of fear or dread, mixed with profound reverence" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). This is similar to the way Žižek argues that people experience an effective ideological symbol through petrified enjoyment (Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:03:38-1:04:47). The sovereign becomes more than a person. He becomes a symbol of the ideology which not only awes, it overawes. Thus, he is the main symbol of the ideology of the Leviathan.

### *Hobbes against other Ideologies*

Thus far, in the previous three sub-sections, this paper proved that the Leviathan is an ideology which has peace as its end goal, which serves to justify it, and the Covenant as surplus

enjoyment, which makes it attractive. War becomes an aggregate for the plethora of fears of the people and the fear of it makes both the power of the sovereign and obedience to his rule necessary. This obedience also stems from other ideological rationales. Hence, only thing this section still needs to do is contextualise the Hobbesian ideology. More specifically, further cement it as ideology by showing that it opposes other contemporary ideologies. The following paragraphs oppose the Covenant to religion, empires, and local autonomy, showing that all of them can be tolerated only on the Covenants own terms.

Hobbes dedicates a lot of work to oppose religion. He uses rationality to undermine religion. First, he argues that God is eternal and humanity's inability to understand the concept of eternity makes God unknowable (Lev., 1:11, pp. 85-86, 1651/2017). Hence, anyone who claims to talk to God or understand him lies. This aims to undermine not only the Church but also God as its big Other. If God is unknowable, then he cannot be the big Other to which to confess, He cannot organise the secret order of things, and He cannot have understandable agency. All these points undermine Him because if He is unknowable, then the order He creates cannot be understood by the people. Furthermore, His agency cannot be understood, thus He loses the appearance that is so important to maintaining the lie. Hobbes replaces the unknowable big Other of Christianity with the Covenant which pretends to have physical dimension.

Hobbes does not oppose God as an idea. He still needs Him and perhaps wants to include Him due to his own religious beliefs. What Hobbes does is strip God from his ideological dimension, returning him to His pre-ideological meaning. God becomes a neutral frame. Subsequently, Hobbes argues that God can be understood only through divine revelation (Lev., 1:12, pp. 96-97, 1651/2017). Moreover, he builds up to the widely recognised Christian morality through rationality (Lev., 1:15, pp. 128-129, 1651/2017). Thus, both God and Christianity as a whole are introduced back into the ideology but on its own terms. All of the sudden, Christianity as ideology and God as its big Other are no longer opposed to the Hobbesian project. They become part of it. The Covenant has successfully subverted the two and turned them into its own ideological elements.

The reasons for such an inversion in the way God is understood is because He cannot present an alternative big Other to the Covenant. There is only space for one big Other and it has to be the Covenant. If not, then the ideologies will clash. Both the Leviathan and religion justify themselves with peace as their end goals but offer different ways of attaining it. The two ideologies are locked in competition for subjects. Moreover, they cannot coexist in the same place because they try to structure the life of their followers, which would inevitably lead to a clash of ideas even though the Leviathan uses the same moral claims as religion. This is mainly

due to the authority of the sovereign not tolerating any other authority within his realm and the bishops claiming dominion over every Christian.

On the other hand, Hobbes is not as tolerant towards other spiritual ideas. He outright rejects ghosts and witches and argues that people who believe in them are wrong to do so (Lev., 1:12, pp. 91-94, 1651/2017). With this move he undermines the objects of fear of more minor ideologies, like local folklore. With the absence of an object that aggregates the fears of people the ideology becomes largely defunct as without such object the ideology cannot present itself as fighting a clear enemy. This is done not as much to discredit local beliefs, although it still has that function, as to pre-emptively fight the emergence of other ideologies in the future by framing such claims as irrational and untrustworthy. Furthermore, by denouncing the supernatural, he eliminates fear-bearing elements, thus the fear that was aggregated by them is transferred to War and only makes it scarier.

The other threat to Hobbes' ideology is power-sharing. This is explored in the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) through the image of the local representation and the empire. For the ideology of the Leviathan to hold true, the sovereign must hold the absolute power. He is allowed to loan it to other people but he should be able to reclaim it at any time (Lev., 2:18, p. 149, 1651/2017). In this case the ideological justification is similar to the rational justification. Hobbes argues that if the sovereign shares even a fraction of his power with other people, this undermines his ability to hold the state together and allows for conflict to arise between the two or more power holders (Lev., 2:18, pp. 148-149; 2:29, p. 268, 1651/2017). This will ultimately undermine the Leviathan and produces the danger of civil war and subsequently resorting back to the state of War (Lev., 2:18, pp. 148-149, 1651/2017). The ideological reasoning is as follows. The way the big Other –the Covenant– requires somebody to make sure its rules are followed. Through these rules it maintains the appearance of being real. It needs somebody to enforce the rules, create new ones and act in its name in general. Even though people can act in the name of the Covenant, it would become problematic if different people start making up and enforcing rules. The rules will lose their legitimacy which will undermine the Covenant. Hence, it requires a single sovereign to do all of this work. The word of the sovereign has to trump every other voice in the polity in order to sustain the illusion that the Covenant has agency. As shown before, the position of sovereign becomes an ideological element that is enjoyed through its ability to overawe.

Empires are also problematic. The notion of empires is acceptable and so is the idea of colonialism (Lev., 2:24, pp. 207-208, 1651/2017). The issue lays in their structure. Empires where the constitutive parts retain some sovereign power present the same issue as outlined in



the previous paragraph. Neither the emperor nor the lower nobles can take back the full sovereign power. This power-sharing can lead to conflict which would ultimately undermine the Leviathan both as a state and ideology. Next, if the empire has colonies they are treated like children of the Leviathan (Lev., 2:24, pp. 207-208, 1651/2017). The sovereign retains dominion and is the only source of rules until they gain their independence and have their own sovereigns (Lev., 2:24, pp. 207-208, 1651/2017). Then they owe just honour and friendship (Lev., 2:24, pp. 207-208, 1651/2017). The ideological reasoning is the same. The Covenant would be undermined if the colonies could rule themselves independently whilst under the original Leviathan or they did not gain full sovereignty upon liberation.

The takeaway from this sub-section is that for the ideology of the Leviathan to work the sovereign has to have the sole power. If he competes with other power sources this undermines the Covenant as the big Other because its appearance of agency depends on the ability of the sovereign to act in its name. Furthermore, by stripping God of His religious ideological dimension and incorporating Him into the ideology of the Leviathan, Hobbes' ideology could be considered as a successful one.

## **Discussion**

### *Implications for reading the Leviathan*

Reading this ideological sub-level changes the way the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) should be read and understood. If ideology was always part of the project for a state, this explains the paradox of self-sacrifice. Shortly summarised, the paradox stems from the need to defend the state from external threats and the fundamental right of nature which stipulates that people will always act in a way that protects their lives (Lev., 1:14, pp. 105-106, 1651/2017). If people have to defend the Leviathan with their life, they will opt to abandon it because the natural right dictates that they should prioritise their own survival. This is problematic because the whole state hinges on posing enough threat that others will not attack it. But even Hobbes admits that madness causes strange behaviour, which means that some might attack without regard for their own life (Lev., 1:8, pp. 61-66, 1651/2017). Thus, the defence of the state is a mess that boils down to the paradox that in order for the state to be able to protect its subjects some of them must be willing to put their lives in danger. If not, everybody's lives will be in danger, which makes the state next to useless. As Kane (2010) argues this is solved by the ideology of nationalism. But nationalism is a relatively new idea, that was not present when Hobbes lived. But if the Leviathan already is an ideology of its own as this thesis proved in the previous section, then the problem is solved by itself. Žižek argues that the big Other makes everything permissible

(Fiennes, 2012, min. 1:30:39-1:31:40). Hence, the Covenant allows people to break the right of nature.

It is possible to argue that allowing for ideology to be present in the Hobbesian project undermines it. But this would be false because allowing for ideology fixes the paradoxes of his project. Ideologies are fundamentally paradoxical but use illusions to divert the attention and to smooth over the issues (Fiennes, 2012, min. 44:16-44:45). Hence, only people outside of the ideology can notice the discrepancies because they are not blinded by the illusions produced by it. On the other hand, rationality and ideology do not sit together well as ideology has this blinding effect and rationality needs full knowledge of the circumstances. Hence, Hobbes cannot build a state on the idea that people make the rational choice to covenant, whilst needing ideology to fix later issues. This is also false because the Covenant is not formed by rational people. Hobbes needs people to believe that the Covenant was a rational project but this is simply a lie maintaining the ideology. In actuality by arguing against other ideologies, what he is doing is trying to convince people to subscribe to his ideology instead of the ones they are currently subject to. Once, the way ideology works is understood, it is easy to see it almost everywhere in the *Leviathan* (1651/2017).

Moreover, reading the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) as an ideological project does more than simply explain the paradox of self-sacrifice. It allows to reconcile all the different readings outlined in the literature review. Each of them presents a different claim to the way ideology works. Bertolini (2005), Labiano (2000), and Gauthier (1977) see three different ideologies that originated in the *Leviathan* (1651/2017), while Di Stefano (1983) and Grcic (2007) see ideology as already present in Hobbes, and last Ashcraft (1978) and De Olaso (1993) understand the ideological and political dimensions of religion against which Hobbes argues. The problem is that all of them have different starting points and seem to not be connected to each other. This is solved by reading Hobbes through Žižek's theory of ideology. It goes beyond all of their readings. The *Leviathan* as ideology becomes a nodal point for all of the ideological elements they investigate. It bundles them together and fixes their meaning to the *Leviathan*. For example, there could be anarchic capitalism, capitalism of empires, capitalistic relations between two cities, etc. but the capitalism that Labiano (2000) reads into Hobbes is pegged to the *Leviathan*. It becomes capitalism through the state; not just any state but the Hobbesian ideological state. By seeing how this theory has the ideology of the *Leviathan* as a starting point it is easy to be reconciled with Di Stefano's (1983) claim that Hobbes worked out of the ideology of masculinity and thus vested it into his project. Masculinity becomes pegged to the

ideology of the Leviathan. Hobbes becomes a meeting point of all of these texts and gives specific ideological meaning to the ideological elements they explore.

### *Implications for the Modern World*

The *Leviathan* has had big influence on the modern world. For example, as Bertolini (2005) points out the United States is a Hobbesian state, Gauthier (1977) argues that today's tendency to see social relations as contractual originates from Hobbes, and Labiano (2000) who claims that capitalism originates from the Leviathan. This shows the impact the *Leviathan* (1651/2017) has had through history culminating in the modern state.

This historical impact of the *Leviathan* (1651/2017), elicited from the premises that the Leviathan is an ideology, the Hobbesian characteristics of the modern state, and modern ideologies originating from Hobbes, allows this thesis to read beyond the scope of what was discussed so far. The ideological characteristic of the state leads to the erroneous assumption that sovereignty is a guiding principal of the state system. Sovereignty as the ability of a state to have full control over its territory is an ideological construct crafted by Hobbes. But as Žižek states breaking away from ideology is painful (Fiennes, 2012, min. 6:10-6:23). Thus, going beyond the structure of the state is hard, and impossible to conceive in ideological terms.

To illustrate this the paper brings the example of the European Union (EU). The EU cannot be explained using the terms available to the Hobbesian ideology. It does not have a single sovereign. The states within it have most of their sovereignty but they give up crucial aspects of it, like control over their markets. This has led the EU to be conceptualised as a state-project aiming to remove the sovereignty of the states within it and vest it into a supranational government<sup>5</sup>. The extent to which this is true is not questioned in this paper as the goal is to show how inconceivable the EU is if one works out of the Hobbesian ideology. The way to understand the EU would be to work out of a position that is critical of this ideology and is able to see more nuance. What this means is that in order for the ideology to hold true the EU should change. It should either return the sovereignty to its member states or take all of it. It should either become a normal international organisation or become the United States of Europe. But the ideology does not have to hold true. The way to keep the EU as it is, or at least have it develop on its own, is to change, or replace the ideology.

The EU is one of the many inconsistencies with the ideology that originated from Hobbes and evolved into the modern state. This opens possible avenues for future research. For

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<sup>5</sup> For further discussion on the topic of the form of statehood of the EU see Caporaso (1996)

example, whether the ideology of the Leviathan can be changed to reflect reality better, can it be replaced, or is it possible for ideology to be completely removed? Another possible direction for research is to explore how the ideology evolved and spread through the ages and whether Hobbes put its seeds, or there were previous ideas that heavily influenced him.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis observed that a lot of scholars read Hobbes in an ideological way but he himself opposes ideology. Thus, it posed the question to what extent was he ideological. In answering it, the text invoked Žižek's framework of ideology. After doing a Žižekian reading of the *Leviathan* (1651/2017), this paper showed that the Leviathan is an ideology that justifies itself by claiming that it aims to achieve peace. The Covenant acts as the ideological big Other that carries the surplus enjoyment and makes the Leviathan attractive as means for attaining peace. Obedience to the state and the rights of the sovereign are justified on ideological rather than rational grounds. The Leviathan is opposed to preceding ideologies and either goes against them or incorporates their elements within its framework. The ability of an ideology to become a nodal point for free elements, thus giving them ideological meaning, manages to reconcile the large amounts of literature that discusses Hobbes and ideology. Moreover, this text discussed how the modern state system is grounded on this ideology, but it is possible to go beyond it.

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