Shakespeare and Hobbes: Macbeth and the Fragility of Political Order

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Abstract

Thomas Hobbes sought a reconstruction of philosophy, ethics, and politics that would end, once and for all, the bitter disputes that led to the English Civil War. This reconstruction begins with the first principles of matter and motion and extends to a unique account of moral consent and political obligation. However, the author contends that his materialist account of human nature gives rise to a set of perceptions, imaginings, and desires that contribute to the chaos of the state of nature. He argues that the sort of person that emerges from Hobbes's materialist anthropology is unlikely to be able, or unwilling, to make the necessary agreements about common meaning and language that constitute the ground of the social contract. Following Hobbes's materialist anthropology, Shakespeare's Macbeth, and not the rational actor who consents to the social contract, is the more likely result. Performed approximately 25 years before Leviathan appeared, Macbeth provides a literary version of the state of nature, and expresses many of the themes that Hobbes later gave philosophical explanation to. The author suggests that we interpret Macbeth through Hobbes's materialism. On this reading, the crisis of Macbeth is caused by the material motion of Macbeth's senses, imagination, and desires. Macbeth provides graphic examples of the type of problems that the author suggests arise from Hobbes's materialism, and it illuminates the political significance of Macbeth.

Introduction

Toward the end of his life, one that witnessed successive waves of violence and civil war, Hobbes writes,

The cause . . . of civil war is, that men know not the causes neither of war nor peace, there being but few in the world that have learned those duties which unite and keep men in peace, that is to say, that have learned the rules of civil life sufficiently. . . . But why have they not learned them, unless for this reason, that none hitherto have taught them in a clear and exact method? (De Corp., i, 7)

Hobbes dedicated his life to articulating and teaching men, in a clear and exact method, the material dynamics of human nature and the moral and civil rules that follow from it. He believed a true understanding of human nature begins with the first principles of motion and body, and it is from these principles that the rules of moral and civil life are correctly established. Hobbes writes,

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

Shakespeare's Macbeth

Force and fraud are in war two cardinal virtues.

Hobbes's Leviathan

Hobbes turns to materialism in order to provide a new foundation for the generation and understanding of meaning, language, and political stability. He sought to discover the material causes of human sensation, perception, thought, and action because he believed that knowledge of these processes would provide the scientific, hence undisputable, knowledge that would end the moral and religious civil wars.

I contend, however, that Hobbes's account of materialism reveals a dynamic process of perceptions, imaginings, and desires that lead to a fragmentation of meaning that contributes to the chaos of the state of nature and the unlikelihood of commonwealth. Characterized by the absence of a highest good, the equal vulnerability of each to a violent death,
radical diversity of perception and meaning, and the absolute freedom to pursue one’s desires, Hobbes’s state of nature is not just a theoretical model but rather a product of his materialist account of sensation, imagination, and desire. Hobbes’s account of materialism leads toward greater anarchy of perception, meaning, and condition, and away from agreement or commonwealth, because at each stage of the argument, the potential for diversity of perceptions, images, and ideas creates deeply subjective interpretations of the physical, social, and political environment. I argue, therefore, that Hobbes’s materialist account of human nature defeats the very purpose for which it is conceived. To illuminate this claim, I turn to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

Performed approximately 50 years before Hobbes’s *Leviathan* appeared, *Macbeth* foreshadows Hobbes’s account of the state of nature, and expresses many of the psychological and political themes that also occupied Hobbes. If *Macbeth* is considered a tragic hero because he should have known better and acted differently. However, seen from the perspective of Hobbes’s materialist account of human nature, *Macbeth* is not tragic at all. I argue that the subjective and fluid motion of *Macbeth*’s senses, the images they create, his vainglorious imagination, and his boundless desire for power create the terror and political instability of *Macbeth*. I contend that Hobbes provides graphic examples of the problems that arise from Hobbes’s materialism, and these problems illuminate the political significance of *Macbeth*. By reading *Macbeth* in light of Hobbes’s materialist account of human nature, we witness the self-defeating tendencies of Hobbes’s materialism as they manifest themselves in *Macbeth*’s perception of himself and the world. Following Hobbes’s materialism, it is *Macbeth* and his violent end, and not the rational individual who creates the commonwealth, that is the more likely result.

If *Macbeth* is the “natural” consequence of Hobbes’s materialism, and yet we insist that the problem with *Macbeth* lies in his rejection, or forgetting, of moral reasoning or the natural law, we risk misunderstanding the source of our moral and political problems. Because *Macbeth* is this way, and because he shares the world with others, significant political ramifications follow. If Hobbes’s materialism is an accurate account of our sensation, perception, imagination, and their affect on our decision making and desires, the political significance lies in the recognition that rational resolution to the diversity of imaginings and desires will be exceedingly difficult.

**Hobbes’s Materialism and Macbeth**

Hobbes believes that matter is the only substance of reality, that matter produces states of mind, and that changes in matter are the result of different rates of motion. Perception and awareness, Hobbes believes, begin with complex sensations streaming through the mind and body. “There is no conception in a man’s mind,” Hobbes asserts, “which hath not at first, totally or by parts, been gotten upon by the organs of sense” (*Lev.*, i, 2). It is through our senses, and the images they produce, that we perceive and experience the external world. The most important aspect of Hobbes’s account of sensation is the role it plays in perception and the development of understanding. “If the appearances be the principles by which we know all other things, we must needs acknowledge sense to be the principle by which we know those principles, and that all knowledge we have is derived from it” (*De Corp.*, xxv, 1).

Beginning with Hobbes’s claim that it is through our senses that we perceive the external world, Macbeth and Banquo’s encounter with the three witches provides a good opportunity to illuminate the process, and consequences, of Hobbes’s materialism. As Macbeth and Banquo speed through the forest, still in sensory overload from the violent battle, their senses produce ambiguous data and they are perplexed by what they perceive.

**Banquo**

How far is’t to Forres? What are these?
So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o’ the earth,
And yet are on’t? Live you? (I. iii. 38-41)

**Banquo**

the earth hath bubbles as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?

**Macbeth**

Into the air; and what seemed corporeal
Melted, as breath into the wind (I. iii. 78-81).

Banquo believes the “apparitions” of the witches are caused by vapor and swamp gas. Macbeth declares that the witches have vanished into the wind. Macbeth and Banquo’s senses produce uncertain images and lead to a fragmentation of perception because, according to Hobbes, the physical qualities of external objects do not determine the images we create of them. Hobbes writes,

The subject wherein colour and image are inherent, is not the object or thing seen . . . [There] is nothing without us really which we call an image or colour . . . [T]he
said image or colour is but an apparition unto us of that motion . . . which the object worketh in the brain . . . [I] n conception by vision, so also in the conceptions that arise from other senses, the subject of their inheritance is not the object, but the sentient. (EL, ii, 1-4)

What exists “out there” is matter arranged in particular ways, and when this matter strikes our senses, the motion in the body and mind creates certain images. The images that Macbeth and Banquo create are not realistic representations of the objects they signify. “[W]hatsoever accidents or qualities our senses make us think there be in the world, they are not there, but are seemings and apparitions only” (EL, ii, 10). While Macbeth and Banquo attempt to dismiss the witches as “figments” of their imaginations, their ambiguity is a natural consequence of Hobbes’s account of the dynamic relationship between external objects, sensation, and perception.

From his description of sensation and the role it plays in perception, Hobbes’s materialist anthropology moves to an account of imagination. Hobbes identifies two forms of imagination—simple and compound. Simple imagination consists of the phantasm (image) that forms in the mind as a result of a sensory encounter with an external object. As we encounter new objects or people, new images are created in our minds. At the most basic level, the content of the mind comprises a variety of images jockeying for mental space and priority. An image will linger in the mind, Hobbes believes, until a new set of sensations initiates another series of images. Our perception and thoughts are also constituted by what Hobbes calls compound imagination. As human experience consists of “memory of many things,” compound imagination is the combination in our mind of many images. “So when a man compoundeth the image of his own person with the image of the actions of another man, as when a man imagines himself a Hercules or an Alexander, it is compound imagination” (Lev., ii, 4). Compound imagination is the combining of different images in order to create new possibilities.

Seeing how Hobbes’s account of sensation creates ambiguous images in the minds of Macbeth and Banquo, we can now trace the influence this account of perception has on the development of imagination and thought.

First Witch
All hail, Macbeth, Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis
Second Witch
All hail, Macbeth, Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor
Third Witch
All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter! [I. iii. 48-50]

Due to the unique way Macbeth’s sensations affect his body and mind, his mind tells him that shrubs and bushes are witches, and his natural desire for power now leads the witches to declare that he will be King. The creative fusion in Macbeth’s mind of the witches and their declarations is a good example of Hobbes’s notion of compound imagination. As Hobbes notes,

When . . . imagining anything whatsoever, we seek all the possible effects that can by it be produced; that is to say, we imagine what we can do with it, when we have it . . . the discourse of mind . . . is nothing but seeking, or the faculty of invention. (Lev., iii, 5)

In Macbeth, however, we see a good example of the deleterious effects of compound imagination.

When Macbeth’s senses and the images they create are combined with his natural desire for power, the consequences become problematic. No sooner has Ross addressed Macbeth as the Thane of Cawdor, than Macbeth, speaking to himself says,

Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind. (I. iii. 116-117)

Two truths are told
As happy prologues to the swelling Act
Of the imperial theme. (I. iii. 127-129)

Before Ross’s words settle, Macbeth begins, as Hobbes tells us, the process of imagining how to acquire what he desires—the imperial theme. As Macbeth’s mind creates unique images (shrubs are witches), then recreates them to fit his desire for power (their declaration he will be King), his perception and understanding of the empirical and social environment are deeply subjective. Rather than providing a mechanism by which individuals will move closer together regarding perceptions of reality, simple and compound imagination creates distance between them. As Richard Flathman notes, compound imagination leads to as much “confusion and disorder . . . [as it does] understanding” (Flathman, 1993, p. 18). This account of sensation, perception, and imagination undermines the possibility of political stability because imagination is the raw data from which agreement about meaning, and ultimately the social contract, must be struck.

Another difficulty associated with Hobbes’s account of sensation, perception, and imagination lies in the fact that external objects will not produce the same phantasm in different people. There is no common reception of data among individuals. As Hobbes notes, “[f]or though the nature of that we conceive be the same, yet the diversity of our reception of it, in respect of different constitutions of body and prejudices of opinion, gives everything a tincture of our different passions” (Lev., iv, 24). The image and its meaning that Macbeth creates in his mind share only the thinnest connection to the
images and meanings that Banquo possesses. “People,” Tom Sorell writes, “have different constitutions, are affected sen-
sually in different ways by different objects, and can encoun-
ter different objects as they follow their different spatio-temporal paths” (Sorell, 1986, p. 91). Hobbes’s claim that each person will experience an external object differently is found in the information the witches give to Macbeth and Banquo. After hearing the witches speak to Macbeth, Banquo addresses the witches:

To me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me who neither beg nor fear
Your favors nor your hate. (I. iii. 56-60)

The three witches proclaim to Banquo:

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.
Not so happy, yet much happier.

Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none. [I. iii. 64-68]

The different “messages” the witches give correspond to
the different phantasms created in the minds of Macbeth and
Banquo and to their different desires. The apparitions in
Macbeth and Banquo’s mind promise them both glory in
their own unique way.

Having articulated a material account of sensation, per-
ception, and imagination/thought, Hobbes proceeds to his
theory of motivation. For Hobbes, human actions are ma-
terial phenomena, characterized by two types of motion—vital
and voluntary. Vital motion is Hobbes’s name for the body’s
essential functions such as breathing, the circulation of
blood, and the beating of the heart. The second form of
motion Hobbes calls voluntary, which is “to go, to speak, to
move any of our limbs, in such manner as is first fancied in
our minds” (Lev., vi, 1). This form of motion is purposeful
action driven by imagination or reason, and directed toward
the attainment of some perceived good.

Hobbes believes that voluntary thought and action begins
with the body’s vital motion. “There is a reciprocal
of movement from the brain to the vital parts, and back from the
vital parts to the brain; whereby not only imagination begetteth
motion in those parts, but also motion in those parts begetteth
imagination” (EL, iii, 3). Our encounter with external objects
or conditions directly affects the intensity and character of our
vital motion. If the rush of vital motion leads us toward some-
thing, this is what Hobbes calls desire, if it leads us away,
aversion and fear (Lev., vi, 2). In addition to the connection
between vital and voluntary motion, there is a dynamic rela-
tionship between imagination and voluntary motion. “[B]

because going, speaking, and the like voluntary motions depend
always upon a precedent thought of whither, which way, and
what, it is evident that the imagination is the first internal
beginning of all voluntary motion” (Lev., vi, 1). As we move
through the world, constantly sensing, imagining, and experi-
cencing many things, the mind seeks to increase the positive
rush, or to decrease the fearful rush, of vital motion.

Macbeth’s senses and imagination direct his voluntary
motions—his desire for glory and crown. The witches are
the phantasms of Macbeth’s imagination and desire, signi-
fying what is in his heart and mind, what his passion and
vanity already spies. Their words were always his thoughts
and desires. Enacting Hobbes’s claim that we are driven by
our imagination and passions to acquire one desire after
another, Macbeth only needs to hear and voice the desire,
and there is no turning back. Macbeth’s senses, imagina-
tion, and passions come together to create a “train of
thoughts” that leads him toward violence and away from
peace. Macbeth’s sensations, imaginings, and desire for
power direct his will.

A revealing example of this connection is found in the con-
versation between Duncan and Macbeth. As soon as Duncan
acknowledges Macbeth as the Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth
commits himself to the murder of Malcom. Macbeth states,

The Prince of Cumberland! That is a Step
On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap
For in my way it lies. (I. iv. 49-51)

As Hobbes notes, “competition of riches, command, or
other power, inclineth to contention, enmity, and war;
because the way of one competitor to the attaining of his
desire is to kill, subdue, supplant, or repel the other” (Lev.,
xi, 3). Macbeth’s desire for power and his willingness to kill
for its acquisition is a product of his imagination and passion.
His imagination creates the witches and their prophecy; and his
passion and vainglory compel him forward. The competition
for riches, honor, and power has its origin in perceptions,
imaginings, and desires that construct subjective and conten-
tious realities.

According to Hobbes, this condition arises because
Macbeth’s conceptions of good and evil are a product of his
own subjective imaginings and desires. Hobbes writes,

Whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire
that is it which he for his part calleth good; and the
object of his hate or aversion, evil . . . For these words
of good [and] evil . . . are used . . . with relation to the
person that useth them, there being nothing simply and
absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil to
be taken from the nature of the objects themselves, but
from the person of the man. (Lev., vi, 7)
Claims about good and bad rest solely on the subjective judgment of Macbeth’s “conscience.” What Macbeth’s “conscience” considers good, his desire to be king, is simply what his sensations and imagination generate and drive him to acquire. “[W]hatsoever seems good, is pleasant, and relates either to the senses, or the mind. But all the mind’s pleasure is either glory . . . or refers to glory in the end” (De Cive, i, 2). Hobbes captures Macbeth’s state and motion of mind when he writes, “[j]oy arising from imagination of a man’s own power and abilities is that exultation of the mind which is called Glorying” (Lev., vi, 39). However, it is important to stress that it is the imagination and passions that are the source of much dispute and violence between individuals.

[W]hen every man follows his own opinion, it is necessary that the controversies which arise among them, will become innumerable and indeterminable; whence there will breed among men, who by their own natural inclinations do account all dissension an affront, first hatred then brawls and wars. (De Cive, xvii, 27)

Malcolm is an obstacle to Macbeth’s glory. Toward the end of the play, Macbeth perfectly expresses Hobbes’s account of the material relationship between sense/imagination/thought/action. Macbeth declares,

The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
To crown my thoughts with acts,
Be it thought and done. (IV. i. 147-149)

Macbeth is Hobbes’s quintessential example of a mind and body in motion, one whose will is moved by the objects of his desires.

Macbeth is not the only one stirred by the motion of imagination and desire. Seduced by the promise of power and glory conveyed in Macbeth’s letter, Lady Macbeth’s imagination and desire direct her thoughts and actions. Lady Macbeth says,

Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant. (I. v. 55-57)

As is the case with Macbeth, her imagination and desire are so consuming that just the thought of imagined glory leads to the plotting of foul deeds. Her desire to be queen leads to the scheming of Duncan’s murder.

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. (I. v. 36-38)

Lady Macbeth’s imagination and desire lead her to kill. And in this state of war of all against all, where “force and fraud are the cardinal virtues,” she instructs Macbeth to “look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under’t.” Later on, Lady Macbeth, entreating her husband to remember who he is, captures well Hobbes’s account of the fusion of imagination, desire, and act.

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? (I. vii. 36-37)
Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? (I. vii. 39-41)

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth present significant challenges to Hobbes’s desire to create political stability on his materialistic account of human nature.

Hobbes is not without an answer to these challenges. He seizes on the summum malum of death, and our intense fear of it, to act as a sobering and stabilizing force. “The passion to be reckoned upon,” Hobbes writes, “is fear” (Lev., xiv, 31). While Hobbes acknowledges that people fear different things, he believes that the material uniformity of fear is enough to allow an individual to know what another is experiencing without knowing what he is thinking.

[W]hosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, &c., and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon the like conditions. (Lev., intro., 3)

Moreover, Hobbes believes that the overwhelming presence of fear will act as a moderating force on men’s ambition and action.

But, does Hobbes’s account of fear, and the influence it has over the thoughts and actions of men, serve the purpose he proposes? In only one place does Macbeth admit that he fears another man. Macbeth admits,

Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep . . .
There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; and under him
My genius is rebuked. (III. i. 48-49, 53-55)

According to Hobbes, Macbeth’s fear of Banquo should counter his ambition and counsel him away from violence and toward peace. Macbeth does just the opposite, and contrary to Hobbes’s counsel, proclaims, “Banquo, thy soul’s flight, [i]f it find heaven, must find it out tonight” (III. i. 140-141).12 Hobbes’s account of fear only works if fear influences behavior. With Macbeth, it does not. As Macbeth becomes emboldened by his success, he fears less and less.13
As Macbeth rushes toward the realization of his imagination and desires, the witches, echoing the thoughts in his mind, proclaim,

Be Bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
The power of man; for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth. (IV. i. 78-80)

Macbeth has seen ferocious battle. He has murdered those who stand in the way of his imagination and ambition. He recognizes the difficulty, perhaps even the terror, of the path he has chosen. And yet, Macbeth presses on. Moreover, even if Hobbes is descriptively correct in asserting that individuals are afraid, it does not follow that fear operates as an edifying force. Simply being afraid does not necessarily increase one’s cognitive ability to choose peace. In the presence of competing claims to power and what is “Good,” extreme fear militates against the very state of mind and clarity necessary to pursue compromise and peace. It is likely that during times of intense uncertainty and anxiety, the passions will “discharge themselves in an uncontrollable manner, compounding the fluctuations of the senses and inflaming the imagination” (Flathman, 1993, p. 20). Macbeth discharges his passions:

Then live Macduff; what need I fear of thee?
But yet I’ll make assurance double sure,
And take a bond of fate. Thou shalt not live, (IV. i. 86-88)

While Hobbes believes that fear is the passion “that must be reckoned upon,” he acknowledges that “where there is no power of coercion, there is no fear; the wills of most men will follow their passions of covetousness, lust, anger, and the like” (EL, pt. II, i, 6). Without the power of coercion emanating from the sovereign, it seems that the sensations, imaginings, and passions of men will not be restrained; and yet, it is precisely the stampede of sensations, apparitions, and desires that works against the creation of the legitimate coercion of the sovereign.

In addition to the moderating affect of fear, Hobbes also believed that the motion of sensation and perception could be reigned in by the invention of language. Hobbes calls speech the “most noble and profitable invention of all” because it enables us to bring stability and coherence to our imagination and thoughts. Language is invented to signify the images that exist in our minds and is the process by which human beings name and define things, establish truth, and institute a commonwealth. Hobbes places a great deal of confidence in language and our ability to utilize it properly—even as he cannot refrain from cataloging our misuses of it. According to Hobbes, marks are personal notations we create so that our “thoughts may be recalled to our mind as are like those thoughts for which we took them” (De Corp., i, 1). Marks then evolve into names that begin the process of ordering and stabilizing our perception. “A name is a word taken at pleasure to serve for a mark, which may raise in our mind a thought we had before” (De Corp., i, 4). He further claims that “marks” and “names” are created “at pleasure” by human beings, and are “arbitrary” in their designation (De Corp., ii, 2). The words we invent bear no relation to the objects they represent. There is no natural origin for speech except the “will of man” (De Homine, x, 2). Solitary individuals give meaning to the world by naming and defining things. Hobbes’s famous preoccupation with power is, first and foremost, the very power to coin names and assert definitions.

The Ecstatic Affect of Hobbes’s Materialism on Macbeth

So far, I have traced the stages of Hobbes’s materialism and explored the developmental influence they have on Macbeth’s thought and action. This linear approach, however, does not sufficiently capture the holistic consequences of Hobbes’s materialism. To get an accurate picture of the potential problems associated with Hobbes’s materialism, we must view his theory ecstatically—that is, we must view each stage of his materialism dynamically acting upon, and interacting with, each other. Macbeth provides a good opportunity to explore the holistic effect of the interplay between sensation, perception, imagination, and the passions. In Macbeth, intense sensation, extravagant imagination, the desire for glory, and the need to kill to acquire it, all come together to create an acute sense of anxiety and mental instability that undermines his rationality and grasp on reality. In the dagger scene that takes place the moment before Macbeth kills Duncan, Macbeth’s senses deceive him, his imagination compounds the deception, and his desire for power propels him forward. Macbeth says,

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come,
let me clutch thee—
I have thee not and yet I see thee still!
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
Mine eyes are made the fools o’the other senses . . .
And, on my blade . . . gouts of blood,
Which was not there before . . .
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. (II. ii. 33-39 and 44-49)

The combined effect of Macbeth’s senses, imagination, passions (both fear and desire), and the need to kill to acquire what he wants, creates an overwhelming state of anxiety.
Macbeth’s “heat oppressed brain” leads him to “see” a dagger floating before him, rendering him unable to distinguish between what is externally objective and what is a hallucination. What is “sensible” to his mind is not sensible to the touch. It is the bloody business, he says, that creates the dagger floating before his eyes. In this madness that is Macbeth, the sensible becomes the fantastic. And the fantastic leads to the phantasmagoria of Duncan’s murder.

The motion of Macbeth’s body and mind also warps his perception of reality. When consciousness is comprised of a stream of images and desires that blurs the distinction between images based on encounters with objective objects and those that are invented, reality becomes highly fluid and unstable. Under these conditions, it would be very difficult to distinguish between what is originally an image or memory of an external object or experience, and what is simply fantasy. The blurring of what is objectively real and what is fantasy makes Macbeth’s perception of reality highly quaint. This is not an abstract issue for Hobbes. He is keenly aware of the influence that fantasy and “things invisible” have on the minds and actions of men. Hobbes never tires of reminding us that it is our fear of invisible powers and fantasies that lead many to act so irrationally.

From this ignorance of how to distinguish dreams and other strong fancies from vision and sense did arise the greatest part of the religion of the [peoples] in times past . . . and now-a-days the opinion that rude people have of fairies, ghosts . . . and the power of witches. (Lev., ii, 8)

People believe in invisible powers, Hobbes thinks, because they cannot distinguish what is material and properly sensible, from what is not. Macbeth is one of Hobbes’s “rude people” who believe in the existence and power of the witches, the truth of their declarations, and the bloody knife floating before him.

While Hobbes believes his materialism is the cure for the fear of “things invisible,” it seems likely that his materialism may actually produce them. It is revealing, therefore, that we find Hobbes admitting “that it is a hard matter, and by many thought impossible, to distinguish exactly between sense and dreaming” (Lev., ii, 5). Macbeth is caught in the twilight between sense and dreaming. Here delusion, hallucination, and madness eclipse Macbeth’s reason precisely during the moment he needs sound perception and judgment the most.14

In this tempest of being it seems unlikely that Macbeth, and Hobbesian individuals, will possess the judgment and reason necessary to pursue peace.15 There is little in Hobbes’s materialism that explains how this kaleidoscope of perception, images, fantasy, and desire is brought into focus, as the thoughts and actions of Macbeth demonstrate.

In The Elements of Law, Hobbes writes,

If we consider the power of those deceptions of sense . . . and also how unconstantly names have been settled, and how subject they are to equivocation . . . and how subject men are to . . . fallacy in reasoning, I may in a manner conclude, that it is impossible to rectify so many errors. (EL, v, 14)

Hobbes concludes this passage by suggesting that the only way to rectify these errors is to begin “anew from the very first grounds of all our knowledge, [and] sense” (EL, v, 14). But, as I have tried to show, there is strong evidence supporting the claim that rather than rectifying the errors of sense, imagination, and passion, Hobbes’s materialist account of human nature produces them. What we get from Hobbes’s materialism and theory of language is a perceptually unstable realm of solitary individuals, driven by their passions, frantically trying to stabilize their experiences, most of which end in a violent death at the hands of others. And this is how we find matters in Shakespeare’s Macbeth.

Hobbes’s Response

Despite the materialistic obstacles to the creation of stable perspectives and meaning listed above, and despite Hobbes’s own detailed catalog of the misuses of language, Hobbes writes as if sensations and perceptions are able to settle into coherent perspectives and that these perspectives evolve into a language that is remembered, shared, and taught from one generation to another. How does Hobbes explain the apparent tension between the deleterious effects of his materialism and theory of language and the demonstrated ability of humans to give names, formulate languages, and produce science? Anticipating such concerns, Hobbes rhetorically poses to himself the following observation:

Because . . . I would say that names have arisen from human invention, someone might possibly ask how a human invention could avail so much as to confer on mankind the benefit speech appears to us to have. For it is incredible that men once came together to take counsel to constitute by decree what all words and all connexions of words would signify. (De Homine, x, 2)

Hobbes tacitly agrees that it is doubtful that language could develop in the way stated, and offers the following response. “It is more credible,” he writes,

that at first there were few names and only of those things that were the most familiar. Thus the first man by his own will imposed names on just a few animals . . . then on other things, as one or another species of things offered itself to his senses; these names, having been accepted, were handed down from fathers to their sons, who also devised others. (De Homine, x, 2)

At first there were just a few names, these names were remembered, and they were passed down from father to son.
This process was repeated exponentially as human beings evolved and developed more names and abstract forms of reasoning.

In *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes buttresses this position by suggesting that habit and custom reinforce the formation of stable perspectives and language.

It is the nature almost of every corporeal thing, being often moved in one and the same manner, to receive continually a greater and greater easiness and aptitude to the same motion; insomuch as in time the same becometh so habitual that to beget it, there needs no more than to begin it. The passions of man, as they are the beginnings of all his voluntary motions, so are they the beginnings of speech, which is the motion of his tongue. (*EL*, vi, 14)

The repetition of certain passions and the names associated with them is strong enough, Hobbes suggests, that these desires and names become habitual. Once habitual, these passions and names form a sort of custom of desire and meaning that “hath so great a power, that the mind suggesteth only the first word [and] the rest follow habitually” (*EL*, vi, 14). The above passages contain the spirit of Hobbes’s explanation for the development and stability of individual perspective, language formation, and shared meaning.¹⁶

Can Hobbes’s account of language formation do the work he assigns it? Or, rather, does it contribute to the problems I have identified? I argue that Hobbes’s materialism destabilizes the conventions of language. Three points can be made regarding Hobbes’s explanation for the demonstrated ability of human beings to give names, formulate languages, and produce shared meaning. First, Hobbes provides no reason to believe that separate human beings will assign the same marks or names to objects. Words express only the perception and imagination of the person who coins them. Hobbes writes,

> For seeing all names are imposed to signify our conceptions, and all our affections are but conceptions, when we conceive the same things differently, we can hardly avoid different naming of them. (*Lev.*, iv, 24)

Given the subjective naming of our encounter with things, it is likely that the world and events will be characterized by a nearly infinite variety of words and descriptions. In *Macbeth* we find precisely this ambiguous, delusive, and even deceptive quality of language. In the uncertain world of *Macbeth*, language serves to multiply images and contradictions. For example, during the witch’s second speech, the First Witch describes Banquo’s ambiguous fate, “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater,” to which the Third Witch adds, “Not so happy, yet much happier” (I. iii. 64-65). It is important to stress that the ambiguity of words and meanings derives from the subjective and changing motion of perception and imagination. Words are simply signs invented to code our perception of the external world, and our perception is itself fluid and ambiguous. Reflecting on the message of the witches and pondering what it means, Macbeth says to himself, “Two truths are told . . . And nothing is but what is not” (I. iii. 127, 141).¹⁷ This sort of linguistic opposition and uncertainty pervades the entire play. Indeed, it is the oppositional and equivocating nature of language, as it tries to capture the uncertainty and ambiguity of Hobbes’s account of sensation, perception, and imagination that ensnares and traps Macbeth and the others.¹⁸

More importantly, the relativity that characterizes imagination and naming expresses itself in the special class of words we use to designate good and evil.

For these words of good . . . [and] evil . . . are used with relation to the person that useth them, there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of objects themselves, but from the person of the man. (*Lev.*, vi, 7)

About the very passions and ends for which men are willing to die, there is no agreement and many names. Disputes will emerge over the most important differences among men, and the great diversity of words used to express these differences will only contribute to the anarchical differences between them.

Second, Hobbes’s account of the utility of repetition, habit, and memory, even if plausible, says nothing about whether or not the right—rationally conceived and scientifically useful—language has been invented, remembered, and deployed for the benefit of human happiness. Hobbes’s account of how our demonstrated ability for speech develops does him little good if what is learned, remembered, and passed along from teacher to student is nothing more than the errors of the “deceiving schoolmen.” It is important to note that even while Hobbes relies on phenomena such as learning, habit, and custom to do the work of stabilizing our perspectives, names, and shared language, he is very critical of their influence in the wrong circumstances. For example, Hobbes writes,

> [A]s it is with beggars, when they say their paternoster, putting together such words, and in such manner, as in their education they have learned from their nurses, from their companions, or from their teachers, having no images or conceptions in their minds answering to the words they speak. And as they have learned themselves, so they teach posterity. (*EL*, vi, 14)

Hobbes’s criticism of the way beggars recite their prayers without understanding what they say—because they have no
image or conception in their minds corresponding to the words they use—applies equally to all people who by rote memory recite what they have learned about the rules of civil life.

Third, for Hobbes, there are no supernatural foundations that account for the presence of human language, shared meaning, and reason. Human beings are complex bodies in motion—nothing else. There is a significant disconnect between Hobbes’s rich and detailed account of human sensation, perception, imagination, and language and his rather prosaic account of how it all gets off the ground. For Hobbes’s explanation to be plausible, there must be a more internally consistent connection between his theoretical assumptions about materialism and language and his expected, and assumed, outcomes. The power and utility of Hobbes’s theoretical apparatus of materialism rests on its ability to provide a causal explanation of the chain running from sensation to knowledge, and from knowledge to politics. If a close analysis of Hobbes’s theoretical assumptions about materialism and language reveal that they struggle to plausibly generate their own conclusions, then perhaps there is something wrong with Hobbes’s account of the connection between sensation, perception, language, and reason. If we are confronted with the paradox that Hobbes’s theoretical assumptions struggle to generate their own conclusions, and yet everywhere we witness human beings giving names, formulating language, and reasoning abstractly, then perhaps an alternative philosophical or theoretical interpretation of human perception, language formation, and reason will more adequately explain the mystery.

Can Hobbes’s Comprehensive System Be Saved?

I have argued that Hobbes’s version of materialism leads to a diffusion of perceptions, meanings, unstable linguistic environments, and the unlikelihood of social contract. I now want to consider whether an alternative metaphysics, or turn to God, can save Hobbes’s comprehensive philosophical and political system from the problems I have identified. In The Two Gods of Leviathan, A. P. Martinich argues that Hobbes turns to a form of Calvinist theology in order to stabilize his philosophical and political project. According to Martinich, God serves this stabilizing role by underwriting Hobbes’s philosophical position (his materialism) and by authoring the laws of nature. Martinich’s thesis consists of two parts. His primary thesis is “that theological concepts, especially those of English Calvinism, are an inextricable part of [Hobbes’s] philosophy, especially his moral and political views” (Martinich, 1992, p. 1). Following the claim that Leviathan is a thoroughly religious text, Martinich argues that Hobbes’s laws of nature are Divine commandments.

I maintain that it is Hobbes’s view that God is the controlling authority for the laws of nature . . . the root of all obligation is God’s omnipotence, because irresistible power directed to an object literally binds, ties or constrains that object to a certain course of action. [And therefore] the laws of nature are literally laws . . . in the same way in which they are divine laws. (Warrender, 1957, p. 88, 100)

His secondary thesis claims that, contrary to the standard reasons given for Hobbes’s interest in natural science, “Hobbes was trying to answer the challenge that the new science . . . posed for religion” (Warrender, 1957, p. 5). Hobbes turns to science, Martinich claims, not to undermine religion but to demonstrate that “the distinctively religious content of the bible could be reconciled with the new science and to prove that religion could not legitimately be used to destabilize a government” (Warrender, 1957, p. 5). It is important to stress, however, that while Martinich believes that religion can provide the stabilizing force in Hobbes’s thought, he acknowledges that Hobbes’s turn to materialism to buttress religion from the emerging sciences fails. “Rather than supplying an adequate conceptual foundation for religion, on the whole his views fit into a long tradition that intended to undermine it, often contrary to the intentions of the authors” (Warrender, 1957, p. 8). I turn to Martinich because his interpretation of Hobbes’s thought constitutes the sharpest challenge to my thesis. My goal is to provide sufficient evidence that Martinich’s reading of Hobbes does not stand in the way of my reading of Hobbes’s materialism or its application to Macbeth.

I contend that Martinich misinterprets the role religious themes serve in Hobbes’s thought and that Hobbes does not turn to natural science to buttress his religious convictions but to eliminate the sort of debates about God and scripture that led to so much controversy and political instability. Hobbes writes,

They that make little or no inquiry into the natural causes of things, yet from the fear that proceeds from the ignorance itself of what it is that hath the power to do them much good or harm are inclined to suppose and feign unto themselves several kinds of powers invisible. . . . And this fear of things invisible is the natural seed of that which everyone in himself calleth religion. (Lev., xi, 26)

Hobbes seems to suggest that only “they” that do not inquire into the natural causes of things are led by curiosity to a belief in God, while those who do inquire into the natural causes of things will be led to different conclusions. Inspired by the scientific discoveries of Galileo and Harvey, Hobbes does “inquire into the natural causes” of the phenomena human beings perceive in themselves and the natural world. It is important to stress that Hobbes does not claim to provide human beings with a way of thinking that will extinguish the “fear of things invisible.” Given his account of what we can
and cannot know, our understanding of natural things and their causation will always remain hypothetical, mysterious, and hence invisible. What Hobbes is trying to do, I suggest, is replace the idea of God as the ultimate cause with a description of the material dynamics of man and nature that are amenable to rational articulation and manipulation. We will never have absolute knowledge of the invisible causes of motion and the natural world, but we can equip ourselves with the tools necessary to contain their most terrifying potential—violent death. Moreover, Hobbes’s claim that the “fear of things invisible” is the origin of religion in human beings weakens Martinich’s claim that Hobbes believes that God is the cause of all things. For it is one thing to say, as most Christians do, that human beings must fear God, and quite another to say, as Hobbes does, that the “fear of things invisible” is the cause of belief in God(s).

Hobbes’s materialism and his turn to science signal a desire to provide an alternative explanation of causation. In the 10 chapters that precede this passage in Leviathan, Hobbes elaborates a systematic (albeit truncated) account of the material mechanics of sensation, imagination, thought, and speech. While Hobbes rhetorically gestures to the common view that God is the ultimate cause, giving the appearance that he too believes it, he is actually articulating a materialistic account of cause and effect as the true object of rational curiosity. For example, in De Corpore, Hobbes writes,

The subject of Philosophy, or the matter it treats of, is every body of which we can conceive any generation, and which we may by any consideration thereof, compare with other bodies . . . that is to say, every body of whose generation or properties we can have any knowledge. . . . Therefore, it excludes Theology, I mean the doctrine of God, eternal, ingenerable, incomprehensible, and in whom there is nothing to divide or compound . . . It excludes the doctrine of angels . . . [and] It excludes all such knowledge as is acquired by Divine inspiration, or revelation, as not derived to us by reason. (De Corp., i, 8)

Hobbes makes a clear distinction between philosophy and religion. Philosophy is the product of rationally directed curiosity about the generation and properties of matter (bodies) in motion. Due to the different forms of matter, Hobbes claims that there are two general types of philosophy—natural and civil. Natural philosophy seeks knowledge about the generation and properties of objects existing in the world that are not the result of human creation. Civil philosophy seeks knowledge about the generation and properties of bodies that are a result of human artifice—especially commonwealths. Dividing once again, Hobbes then argues that civil philosophy is broken down into ethics, which deals with the dispositions and affections of men (human passion and thought as complex matter in motion), and politics. While Hobbes’s taxonomy becomes labored, because the natural body called man is the object of both natural and civil philosophy, the essential claim being made is that in order to understand the creation of commonwealths, you must know something about the human body, and to know something about the human body, you must understand the material mechanics of sensation, imagination, and thought.

Hobbes’s emphasis on philosophy as the proper paradigm for understanding natural and civil bodies reflects his belief that the most important object of knowledge is motion.21 Countering Martinich’s claim that Hobbes believes that God is the ultimate cause of all things are passages where Hobbes claims that motion is the underlying principle of reality. In The Elements of Law, Hobbes writes, “[t]he things that really are in the world without us, are those motions by which these seemings are caused” (EL, ii, 10). In De Corpore, Hobbes extends this claim by writing,

The causes of universal things (of those, at least, that have any cause) are manifest of themselves . . . for they have all but one universal cause, which is motion . . . and motion cannot be understood to have any other cause besides motion. (De Corp., vi, 5)

Here Hobbes suggests that motion is the cause of all things and that motion has no other cause then motion.22 Hobbes goes on to connect an understanding of motion to knowledge of human beings and commonwealths. It is through attaining “knowledge of the passions and perturbations of the mind” that we “come to the causes and necessity of constituting commonwealths, and to get the knowledge of what is natural right, and what are civil duties” (De Corp., vi, 7). Hobbes believes that human beings are complex bodies of motion, and commonwealths are artificial aggregates of these, often tumultuous, individuals. His goal is to understand, and instruct, the motion that animates human and civil bodies.

The Laws of Nature as Divine Commandments

I now turn to Martinich’s claim that Hobbes’s laws of nature are divine commandments. This claim represents a clear challenge to my reading of Macbeth. If Martinich is correct, then Macbeth’s thoughts and actions are the result of moral ignorance. On this reading, Macbeth’s thoughts and actions are not influenced by the quixotic motion of sensation, perception, and imagination, but rather by the fact that Macbeth is violating the natural moral order.

Martinich writes,

The laws of nature consist of two elements: the command of God and propositions about self-preservation.
There are four points I want to make in response to Martinich’s interpretation of the laws of nature. First, Martinich makes a very important distinction between what he calls a “primary” and “secondary” state of nature in Hobbes’s theory. I am skeptical of Martinich’s distinction between a “primary” and “secondary” state of nature. Second, I disagree with Martinich’s claim that human beings are under an “original” obligation in the state of nature. Third, I contend that laws become laws only after the commonwealth has been instituted. And, fourth, I contend that Hobbes’s materialism and account of language effectively derail Martinich’s account of how we come to know and learn what the laws of nature contain.

Describing the state of nature, Hobbes writes, “[t]he notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice” (Lev., xiii, 13). This appears to contradict Martinich’s claim that God is a common power over all people and that it is his irresistible power that constitutes the moral force of the laws of nature. Much of the strength of Martinich’s argument rests on his ability to explain the contradiction or provide an alternative interpretation.

To get around this passage, Martinich deploys a clever interpretive maneuver: He draws a distinction between what he calls the “primary” and “secondary” state of nature (Martinich, 1992, p. 76). The “primary” state of nature, Martinich argues, ought to be “considered in isolation (or abstracted) from all laws, including the laws of nature” (Martinich, 1992, p. 76). He goes on to say that in the “primary” state of nature, “not even the existence of God is considered” (Martinich, 1992, p. 76). After discussing the “primary” state of nature, Martinich argues that Hobbes makes an important textual and conceptual transition by introducing the laws of nature in Chapter XIV. “The way out” of the “primary” state of nature, Martinich argues, is through the laws of nature (Martinich, 1992, p. 76). The “secondary” state of nature is a condition in which the only common power is God and the laws of nature are laws in the strong sense (Martinich, 1992, p. 76).

No where in Leviathan, or any other of Hobbes’s text, do we find the distinction between a “primary” and “secondary” state of nature. Hobbes does not use these words nor does he provide other textual evidence that he intended his readers to make this distinction. Moreover, Martinich’s distinction has the effect of neutralizing the important philosophical transition that Hobbes effects between traditional natural law doctrine and his state of nature (Strauss, 1953). Martinich’s distinction between a “primary” and “secondary” state of nature weakens the coherence and power of the state of nature as a theoretical device. More importantly, it is unclear if the distinction is plausible. Martinich writes, “it is precisely because the common power of God is absent from the primary state of nature that there is ‘no law’ at all and ‘where no law, no justice.’” On Martinich’s reading it is unclear how God can be both absent from the state of nature and the author of its laws. One of Hobbes’s more (in)famous suggestions is that God is some form of material substance. Early in Leviathan Hobbes claims that the concept incorporeal substance is a contradiction of terms (Lev., iv, 21). Later he adds,

The world (I mean not the earth only . . . but the universe, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal (that is to say, body). . . . And consequently, every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe. And because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing (and consequently, nowhere). (Lev., xli, 15; see also xii, 7, and xlv, 15)

On Martinich’s account, God must be part of the “whole mass of all things that are,” and if so, it is impossible for God, or his power, to be “absent from the primary state of nature” in the same way that it would be impossible for God to be outside the universe. In the last instance, Martinich fails to justify the distinction he draws between a “primary” and “secondary” state of nature, the conceptual implications of the distinction subvert the state of nature as a theoretical device, and it runs counter to Hobbes’s implicit materialistic account of God.

I now turn to my second concern. Martinich (1992) claims, “the laws of nature are moral laws in the same way in which they are divine laws” and that the “root of all obligation is God’s omnipotence” (p. 100). For Martinich’s argument to work, there must be an original command and this command must create a form of obligation. However, in the state of nature, Hobbes asserts that there is no common power capable of issuing such a command (Lev., xiii, 13). In the absence of an original command or common morality Hobbes argues that human beings possess the Right of Nature.

The Right of Nature . . . is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life, and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto. (Lev., xiv, 1)

In the state of nature, individuals exercise their natural right to use their power to preserve their lives. According to Hobbes, there is no prior command, and hence no moral law, prohibiting any action that compromises an individual’s right to self-preservation. Moreover, Hobbes argues that obligation derives from voluntary consent, not God’s irresistible power.
Hobbes writes, “in the act of our submission consisteth both our obligation and our liberty... there being no obligation on any man which ariseth not from some act of his own; for all equally are by nature free” (Lev., xxi, 10). As Strauss (1952) puts it, “obligation comes only on the basis of a covenant between formerly free and unbound men” (p. 24). There is no obligation that does not derive from a voluntary act.

My third point concerns Martinich’s claim that the laws of nature are moral laws in the traditional sense. This position is countered by at least two passages in Leviathan. Hobbes concludes his discussion of the laws of nature by saying

[1]These dictates of reason men use to call by the name of laws, but improperly; for they are but conclusions or theorems concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defense of themselves, whereas law, properly, is the word of him that by right hath command over others. (Lev., xv, 41)

The laws of nature are necessary not because they derive from God but rather because they dictate to human beings what they must do to preserve themselves. Later Hobbes writes,

The laws of nature... in the mere state of nature... are not properly laws, but qualities that dispose men to peace and to obedience. When a commonwealth is once settled, then are they actually laws, and not before... for it is the sovereign power that obliges men to obey them. (Lev., xxvi, 8)

In the state of nature, the laws of nature are prudential guides to self-preservation. Ideally the laws of nature lead individuals to voluntarily consent to and authorize the power of the sovereign. Authorization gives the sovereign the power to command, and it is the power of the sovereign’s command that creates the law and constitutes the moral order.

The fourth observation I want to make concerns Martinich’s account of how we come to know the laws of nature. Martinich (1992) claims “humans are informed of God’s law by reasoning about what it would contain” (p. 136). Because God no longer speaks directly to people, and because there is no supernatural apprehension of the laws of nature, we only learn what God intends for us by reasoning together about the best ways to achieve peace. To reason together in this manner requires that human beings invent words, establish common definitions, create rules of use, and then communicate with each other about which words, definitions, and rules will lead to peace. Martinich simply assumes that human beings will be able to do all of this. He takes it for granted that Hobbes’s account of materialism, language, and reason will do what Hobbes hopes it will. However, as I have argued, it is precisely Hobbes’s account of materialism and language that frustrates his moral and political project. Following Hobbes’s materialism and theory of language step-by-step, the possibility that individuals will reason together about the best way out of the state of nature appears unlikely.

### Hobbes's State of Nature and Shakespeare's Macbeth

It is commonplace to interpret Hobbes’s state of nature as a theoretical device used to describe the behavior of human beings in the absence of government. However, seen from the perspective of his materialist anthropology, the state of nature is less a rhetorical device and more the result of his claims about the senses, imagination, passions, and language. Hobbes’s state of nature is truly anarchic—it is characterized by the absence of a highest good, the equal vulnerability of each to a violent death, radical diversity of perception and meaning, and the absolute freedom to pursue one’s desires. In addition to the way Macbeth’s senses, imagination, and passions illustrate the negative consequences of Hobbes’s materialist account of human nature, I suggest that the existential condition of Macbeth—the absence of a governing morality, pervasive violence and fractured time, and the number of participants and their possibilities—mirrors Hobbes’s characterization of the state of nature. The way Macbeth is composed, the environment in which it takes place, the chaos with which it unfolds, and the tightly circumscribed range of activities available to the participants, all dramatically illustrate the terror of life in the state of nature.

### No Highest Good and the Ambiguity of Place

The first commonality between Hobbes’s state of nature and the existential environment of Macbeth is the absence of a governing principle of morality or natural law. Our senses, imagination, and passions tell us what is good, and Hobbes acknowledges that the desires of men are “in themselves no sin... till they know a law that forbids them” (Lev., xiii, 10). Likewise, the “notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law” (Lev., xiii, 13). Moreover, in the state of nature there is “no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct, but only that to be every man’s that he can get, and for so long as he can keep it” (Lev., xiii, 13). This last point is dramatically made as Macbeth speeds from the ferocious battle that opens the play. Referring to the Thane of Cawdor that Macbeth has just cut open from loin to chin, Duncan declares, “[w]hat he has lost... Macbeth has won” (I. iii. 70).

My claim that the existential environment of Macbeth is beyond good and evil runs contrary to the standard view that Macbeth is a story about evil. G. K. Hunter writes, “Of all Shakespeare’s plays Macbeth is the one most obsessively concerned with evil” (Hunter, 1995, p. 7). While it is true that a great deal of vicious thoughts and actions characterize Macbeth, they are not evil in the common usage of the term. To use evil in this context implies a previously existing moral
code, in this case, a latent natural or Christian conception of the distinction between good and evil. Yet, no such moral code seems to exist in Macbeth. Contrary to the classic battle between good and evil, what we find in Macbeth, from the very start, is a condition in which all claims to a naturally existing moral order have been suspended. It is not just that Macbeth does evil, but rather there are no legitimate claims about what constitutes good and bad. In Hobbes’s state of nature and the existential environment of Macbeth, Macbeth’s desire for power, his ambition, is neither good nor bad. The witches’ claim at the opening of the play that “Fair is foul, and foul is fair,” is an indication that there are no stable distinctions between good and bad. It is no accident, therefore, that Macbeth follows Hobbes’s council in the state of nature: Force and fraud are the cardinal virtues. Macbeth is the product of Hobbes’s materialist account of sensation, imagination, and passion combined with his rejection of a summum bonum or traditional natural law. In the state of nature and Macbeth, everyone is caught up in a terrifying closeness of multiple and subjective perceptions, desire for power, and violence that no one can escape on his or her own. The brutal fact about the state of nature and Macbeth is that only a political solution can provide such an escape. But as I argue, Hobbes’s materialism makes such a political escape unlikely.

Another commonality between Hobbes’s state of nature and Macbeth is the ambiguity and uncertainty of place. Our first sense of this ambiguity and uncertainty comes with our awareness that Macbeth takes place in an ill-defined land. While Scotland is alluded to, we are never given any concrete information about place. As is the case with the state of nature, there is no fixed location in Macbeth. Similar to the way Hobbes hurls us into the state of nature, we find Macbeth thrown into a condition of fluid meaning, loosely held commitments, and geographical haziness. Given Hobbes’s notion of imagination and speech, the actual place characterized as the state of nature must always be a clashing multiplicity of names and descriptions of location. In Hobbes’s state of nature and Macbeth, individuals never really know where they are. How can they? No stable, authoritative accounts of place and territory have been given. Hobbes uses this fragility of place to remind us of the fragility of life and the need for the social contract. In Macbeth, the fluidity of meaning and infinite possibility suspends any hope for a stable place. What is revealed through the state of nature and Macbeth is the fragility of place created by excessive imagination and passions, and the awareness that any fixed place is always dependent on the sort of linguistic and rational commitments that make social and political life possible.

**Violence, Death, and Time**

In Hobbes’s state of nature and Macbeth, individuals are exposed to a violence that is pervasive and always pending. This violence renders individuals equally vulnerable to death, and a death that comes, as Hobbes reminds us and as Duncan experiences, at the hands of our neighbors. Hobbes methodically informs us how easily the “weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest” (Lev., xiii, 1). We are equally vulnerable to a violent death because life is nothing more than matter in motion, and the vital motion of life is easily extinguished.

Hobbes’s observations about the ubiquity of violence and our equal vulnerability to death in the state of nature is omnipresent in world of Macbeth. The play opens with a bloody battle and its violent conclusion is irrevocably determined with the murder of Duncan. Once Duncan is murdered, there is no going back. The hope for negotiation, compromise, and the promises that make possible peace and the commonwealth are impossible. In order to secure, and protect his gains, Macbeth must continue killing. As Hobbes notes, “[s]o that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death” (Lev., xi, 2). Committed to securing power through the force of arms, and driven on by the vanity and pride produced by his imagination, everyone becomes a potential victim of Macbeth’s need to amass power. After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth orders the murder of Banquo and his son, Fleance. While Banquo’s soul flies to heaven, Fleance escapes to live another day. In Hobbes’s state of nature, Fleance’s escape reveals more than just his good luck or the incompetence of Macbeth’s assassins; it illuminates the elusive hope of gaining security through violence. The connection between Macbeth’s overwrought imagination and the need to continue killing is further demonstrated by the witches’ second visit to Macbeth. The first Witch tells Macbeth to “fear Macduff,” and the second apparition counsels him that he must kill Macduff’s wife and children. The wife and children are dispatched. Macbeth ruthlessly plays out Hobbes’s famous claim that no human being can amass enough physical power to transcend the instability and vulnerability of the state of nature. The radical equality of all human beings—our equal vulnerability to a violent death at the hands of another—is brutally played out as the play rushes toward its bloody conclusion.

In the state of nature and Macbeth, the pervasiveness of violence and the fear of death govern the character and experience of time, making time anxious, fragile, and short. For Hobbes, motion creates and characterizes time. There is a direct connection between the character of our mental and physical motions and the way time is lived. If the motions in the mind and body are frantic, fearful, and chaotic, this will determine the way one feels and experiences time. In the state of nature and Macbeth, time is foul and short. Hobbes describes time in the state of nature through the analogy of foul weather, suggesting that what makes foul weather is not a day or two of rain but the “inclination thereto of many days” of rain. And it is no accident that he ascribes the analogy of bad weather to war, for the state of nature is a time in which the disposition to settle affairs by violence is omnipresent. In this condition of war, time does not exist in the
typical manner of minutes, hours, and days; rather, time is a storm of apprehension.

Foreshadowing Hobbes’s description of time as perpetually bad weather, Shakespeare uses the analogy of darkness to characterize physical time and space in *Macbeth.* Like the brooding violence of the state of nature, the darkness that pervades *Macbeth* emanates from the darkness and terror of Macbeth’s imagination and desires. Macbeth declares, “Let not light see my black and deep desires” (I. iv. 52). After the murder of Duncan, Ross reports that

> By the clock tis day,
> And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp;
> Is it night’s predominance or the day’s shame

That darkness does the face of earth entomb

> When living light should kiss it? (II. iv. 5-10; see also II. iii. 51-58; II. iv. 1-5)

The violence that murders Duncan casts an existential darkness over the land that defines the very nature of physical time. It is perpetually dark in *Macbeth.* Even when it should be day, it is night. As the play nears its violent conclusion, Macbeth, reflecting on his life and anticipating his death, cries out, “Out, out, brief candle!” (V. v. 23). Macbeth acknowledges the mockery that the darkness of the state of nature makes of the candle’s faint light.

The candle also represents the fragility and brevity of time in Hobbes’s state of nature and *Macbeth.* In his famous description of life in the state of nature, Hobbes claims that “there is no account of time,” and ends with the blunt declaration that the time of life is short. Of all of Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth* is the shortest in length and the quickest in time. Like life in the state of nature, the movement of the tragedy is rapid, and the play itself is short because of the pervasive violence. *Macbeth* opens in violence and ends in violence. What is terrifying about the lack of time in both the state of nature and *Macbeth* is the way in which anarchy robs individuals of the opportunity for reflection on their decisions and actions. Macbeth, like individuals in the state of nature, is intensely involved in each moment because his very survival depends on it. Macbeth, Banquo, Duncan, Lady Macbeth, and the others are always-already hurled into decisions and situations that they barely comprehend. Time in the state of nature is radically compressed, one moment being strung frantically to the next. The absence of peace in which to reflect means that time consumes us.

The play ends when Malcolm and Macduff raise an army and march on Birnam Wood. In a final miasma, Macbeth is killed. The death of Macbeth, and the famous quote about time that symbolizes the event, illuminates the most important consideration about time in the state of nature and *Macbeth.* After Macbeth’s death, Macduff declares that “time is free.” On the surface, the phrase declares that the period of disorder, chaos, and injustice is over. It announces that Time, the World, and the individuals who inhabit it, all hijacked by Macbeth’s immoral vision, are now free. During the height of the violence, Mark Van Doren writes that “[T]ime is out of joint, inoperative, dissolved” (Van Doren, 1999, p. 123). The declaration that “time is free” seems to announce the return of peace and justice to the natural and political realm. It implies that there is a naturally occurring moral order that governs men and helps direct their politics. Contrary to Van Doren’s reading, I suggest an alternative view that does not imbue the death of Macbeth with a reconstituted time and moral order. Seen from a Hobbesian perspective, the phrase *Time is free* takes on a different meaning. Here we must make a distinction between radically free time and political time. Hobbes notes,

> that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man . . . All other time is peace. (*Lev.,* xiii, 8)

To say that time is free is simply to suggest that individuals are still radically free to desire and acquire what they want. In the absence of a political resolution to the play, time is free exactly in the same sense it was at the beginning of the play. To say that time is free is simply to bear witness to the horror of the state of nature. By killing Macbeth, they only eliminate a competitor; they do not solve the political crisis. Only a political solution will create the sort of useful time in which individuals are free to pursue their private desires. As Hobbes reminds us, only when there is a sovereign to guarantee the peace, is time truly free.

*The Solitary Nature of Our Lives*

While Hobbes claims that men and women are born desiring social community (*De Cive*, i, 2), their natural predilections for vanity, greed, and competition inhibit them from easily achieving lasting solidarity. The result of these dispositions is that human beings, while they remain in the state of nature, lead mostly solitary lives, punctuated by a small number of family and friends. Prior to the creation of the political community, life in the state of nature is characterized as at best crudely social, and at worst brutally solitary. This is how we find the characters in *Macbeth.* In *Macbeth* there are few characters, their roles are tightly circumscribed, and the perspectives and claims that determine their actions are highly subjective and unstable. The absolute centrality of Macbeth, the lack of depth and development of individuality found in the other characters, and the total solipsism that defines Macbeth’s thoughts and actions are what we find in Hobbes’s state of nature. Moreover, it is no accident that Macbeth’s loyalties are so easily and quickly dissolved. In the absence of a moral order and intoxicated by his imagined glory,
Macbeth pursues only his desire for “power after power,” which, as Hobbes tells us, is a pursuit that “ceaseth only in death” (Lev., xi, 2). Macbeth enacts Hobbes’s description of man in the state of nature. Hobbes writes,

In such a condition there is no place for industry . . . and consequently, no culture of the earth, no navigation . . . no use of the sea, no commodious building . . . no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society . . . (Lev., xiii, 9)

This description of life in the state of nature is more than Hobbes’s warning to us to order our desires and keep our promises; it is the result of his materialist claims about sensation, imagination, desire, and language. As Macbeth nears his violent end, he muses about the meaning of life:

It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (V. v. 27-8)

To which Hobbes would add, the lives of Macbeth and the others are truly “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Lev., xiii, 9).

Conclusion

Hobbes wanted to create a mortal God through the power of his art. “For by art,” he writes, “is created that great LEVIATHAN called the COMMONWEALTH” (Lev., introduction). And, by virtue of the power of his art, Shakespeare has been called a mortal god (Bloom, 1998, p. 3). But, is Macbeth the real product of Hobbes’s art? Hobbes sought to teach human beings, in a clear and exact method, the material principles of sensation, imagination, action, and the moral and civil rules that follow. His goal was to establish a new, and firm foundation for the generation of knowledge and its beneficial use, thereby allowing human beings to know what they were and how to create peace. However, contrary to his intentions, the result of Hobbes’s materialism is not the rational actor who creates the mortal God Leviathan but rather the all too human Macbeth.

According to the standard reading of Macbeth, Macbeth is a tragic hero because he should have known better and acted differently. From the point of view of Hobbes’s materialism, however, Macbeth is not tragic at all. He is the likely consequence of Hobbes’s materialist account of human nature. The images that constitute and define Macbeth’s perception of reality are unique and subjective imprints that code his encounter with external objects and people. These images create a kaleidoscope of ideas, imaginings, and desires that are the raw data of consciousness. Macbeth’s consciousness is therefore a moving stream of images and desires that propel him forward, toward the acquisition of one desire after another. Who he is, and what he does, are what his imagination and desire wills.

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Notes

1. Macbeth, 1. i. 12.
3. I am not suggesting that Shakespeare was a materialist, or that he conceived of the existential environment of Macbeth as a form of the state of nature. My purposes here are not to argue for certain philosophical or political views that Shakespeare may have held, views that find “expression” in Macbeth. My purpose is to interpret the perceptions, images, desires, and actions of Macbeth and others from the point of view of Hobbes’s materialism, and to illuminate the perceptual, cognitive, and political problems that derive from Hobbes’s account of human nature. Indeed, regarding the philosophical or political views Shakespeare may have held, and our ability to ascertain them, I am sympathetic to T. S. Eliot’s view that “it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong” (Eliot, 1950, p. 107).
4. In Shakespeare scholarship, the terms image and imagination are understood as rhetorical devices. For example, in her seminal work Shakespeare’s Imagery, Caroline Spurgeon writes that the image is “the little word-picture used by the poet . . . to illustrate, illuminate and embellish his thought. It is a description or an idea, which by comparison or analogy . . . with something else, transmits to us through the emotions and associations it arouses . . . the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us. The image thus gives quality, creates atmosphere and conveys emotion in
a way no precise description... con ever do” (Spurgeon, 1935, p. 9). In The Development of Shakespeare’s Imagery, Wolfgang Clemen writes, “[t]he tragedies display Shakespeare’s dramatic technique at its best. This means that every element of style, in fact every single line, now becomes dramatically relevant. The same applies to imagery, the images becoming an inherent part of the dramatic structure... [T]he imagery may also emphasize and accompany the dramatic action” (Clemen, 1951, p. 89). Conveying the meaning and purpose of imagination in Shakespeare, Harold Bloom writes, “[i]magination (or fancy) is an equivocal matter for Shakespeare and his era, where it meant both poetic furor, as a kind of substitute for divine inspiration, and a gap torn in reality” (Bloom, 1998, pp. 516-517). Rather than viewing imagery as metaphor or simile meant to lend magnitude, seriousness, or dramatic effect to a character or situation, and imagination as an expression of excessive creativity or vision, I suggest we interpret the images in Macbeth’s mind, and the imaginings they give rise too, from the point of view of Hobbes’s materialism. Here, the images in Macbeth’s mind are not metaphors, but subjective mental imprints of his encounter with external reality and others, and his imagination is not just excessive creativity, but rather the primary data of consciousness. From the theoretical vista of Hobbes’s materialism, the terror of Macbeth and the political crisis that follows are not metaphorical, but actual, and most likely inescapable.

5. Macbeth is not usually thought of as a “political” play. There seem to be two general reasons for this. The first reason is that Macbeth is typically viewed as a tragedy driven by personal greed and the lust for power. Harry Jaffa writes that Macbeth “is a play about a man of extraordinary valor and devotion... Yet an overweening ambition, aiming beyond itself, causes him to fall” (Jaffa, 2000, p. 35). However, as I argue, when seen from the perspective of Hobbes’s materialistic account of human nature and behavior, it is Macbeth’s fluid imagination and striving for power that precipitates the political crisis and prohibits a political resolution. The second reason is that in Macbeth the standard political issues are obscure. In the play, there are no discussions of regime types, justice, the highest good, the rights of man, or the limits of power. For Macbeth, allegiance is fluid, power is fragile, and the “law” lives at the whims of imagination. Strictly speaking, I recognize that in Macbeth there is King Duncan, there are identifiable heirs to the throne, and that ostensibly, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are subject to Duncan. However, as I will argue, these titles, roles, connections, and obligations are so thin and strained in the play that they hardly constitute settled issues. Moreover, I suggest that the context of the play calls the stability of these identities and relationships into doubt.

6. Additional examples of the ambiguity that develops between external objects and the images created in the minds of the principle characters can be found throughout the play. Please see I. iv. 5-10; II. i. 35-50; II. ii. 36-38; III. I. 88-96; III. iv. 99-106; III. iv. 121-25; IV. i. 86-88; IV. i. 132-39.

7. Going further, Hobbes would argue that Macbeth and Banquo’s desire to dismiss the witches as just “figments” of their imaginations betrays a philosophical error common in his day. “[T]he philosophy-schools... grounded upon certain texts of Aristotle... say... the cause of vision [is] that the thing seen sendeth forth on every side a visible species... the receiving whereof into the eye is seeing... Nay for the cause of understanding also, they say the thing understood sendeth forth intelligible species... which coming into understanding makes us understand” (Lev., I. 5). Hobbes is rejecting the argument that external objects possess objective qualities that determine or shape how we perceive them.

8. Additional examples of the way sense impressions vary across individuals, leading to the perception of different data can be found at I. iii. 38; IV. i. 136-40.

9. It might be retorted that Macbeth and Banquo do see and hear the same things. The claim that Macbeth and Banquo see the same thing is supported by the fact that in two separate places Macbeth and Banquo refer to the apparitions or phantasms as the “Weird Sisters.” In a letter to his wife, Macbeth says, “these Weird Sisters saluted me” (I. v. 1-10). Later, speaking to Macbeth, Banquo says, “I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters.” (II. i. 20). This coincidence of description is mitigated, however, by the realization that Macbeth and Banquo are never certain about what they are seeing and experiencing. Throughout the play, the phantasms of the Witches are described as forest shrub, bubbles, swamp gas, turbulent air, wind, vanishing breath, and bearded women. The phantasms of the witches are unstable and constantly changing. The claim that Macbeth and Banquo hear the same thing is supported by the fact that they both believe the witches promise them glory. However, the fact that the witches promise them glory is explained by Hobbes’s claim that all people seek glory. What is important for my purposes is the fact that the witches promise Macbeth and Banquo glory in different ways. The messages of the witches correspond to the unique imaginings of glory and power that constitute the thoughts of Macbeth and Banquo.

10. For Hobbes, desire and fear, and their extension to claims of good and bad, are not mental phenomena that are qualitatively distinct from physical or material phenomena. All human action begins with the excitement of vital motion. Intense desire and fear are the products of quantitatively more intense motions within the body and mind.

11. Hobbes’s notion of endeavor is essential to his mechanical account of moral and political activity. Given his materialist premises, he assumed that all human beings have similar structures and operate by similar processes (Watkins, 1989). Our desire to feel pleasure and avoid pain regulates our thoughts and actions. While Hobbes acknowledges that people desire and fear different things, he believes this diversity of passions can be stabilized in two ways. First, on the individual level, Hobbes believes that the prevalence of certain desires will predominate in our minds. He writes, “[T]he impression made by
such things as we desire or fear is strong and permanent” (Lev., iii, 4). Second, the mechanical uniformity of desire and fear is sufficiently common to allow an individual to know what another is experiencing without knowing what he is thinking.

12. It is important to stress that Macbeth is not ignorant of the value of safety and peace. His reaction to his fear of Banquo, to choose more violence over peace, is not driven by a lack of awareness of the benefits of security and peace. As he says, “To be thus is nothing; But to be safely thus!” (III. i. 48-49). Macbeth recognizes the merits of safety, but his fear of Banquo does not lead him to pursue peace. Fear fails to operate on Macbeth in the way Hobbes prescribes.

13. Macbeth is not the only one insufficiently seized by the passion of fear. After the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth scolds Macbeth, “Infirm of purpose . . . The sleeping and the dead are but pictures. ‘Tis the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil” (II. ii. 53-55). As with Macbeth, Lady Macbeth does not fear others or the consequences of her actions enough to abandon her desire for glory and power.

14. The dagger scene is not the only one where Macbeth’s heightened sensations, imagination, and the anxiety of the situation play havoc on his sanity. During the banquet scene, after Banquo’s murder, Macbeth hallucinates the ghost of his dead friend. “Avant, and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee! Thy bones are marrowless . . . Thou hast no speculation in those eyes [which thou dost glare with]” (III. iv. 93-96). Once again, Macbeth’s perception is unable to determine what is material and what is not. Macbeth cannot determine what is objectively real and what is simply fantasy, leading him to, as Hobbes would put it, believe in Banquo’s ghost.

15. As the play nears its conclusion, Lady Macbeth, overwhelmed by the same combination of sensory overload, imagination, and anxiety that seized her husband during the dagger scene, also succumbs to hallucinations and madness. Lady Macbeth demonstrates Hobbes’s claim that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between waking and dreaming. As Lady Macbeth sleepwalks, the Doctor observes, “You see her eyes are open,” to which Lady Macbeth’s attendant responds, “Ay, but their sense are shut” (V. i. 24-25). Sleepwalking in a state of delusion and madness, Lady Macbeth frantically tries to wash the invisible blood of her victims from her hands.

16. In several passages in Leviathan, Hobbes makes glaring reference to the role teaching, habit, and convention play in the establishment of language, shared meaning, and the transfer of meaning from one generation to another. (Please see Lev., iii, 11; iv, 13; v, 18; viii, 13; xiii, 6-9).

17. It was precisely the presence of too many “truths,” and the religious and civil wars they created, that led Hobbes to begin anew with his materialism and conventional account of language.

18. Additional examples of the equivocating nature and use of language can be found in I. i. 5; I. i, 10; I. iii. 38; I. iii. 64-68; I. iii. 127-141.

19. There is an important tradition in Hobbes scholarship that views Hobbes as a traditional natural law theorist. For example, A. E. Taylor writes, “[t]he moral obligation to obey the natural law is antecedent to the existence of the legislator and the civil society” and applies even in the state of nature (Taylor, 1965, p. 41). Howard Warrender argues that Hobbes’s notion of obligation implies a moral responsibility human beings possess “independent of the fiat of the civil sovereign . . . [m]en have moral obligations in Hobbes’s State of Nature” (Warrender, 1957, p. 7).

20. As it turns out, Martinich is more concerned to support his primary thesis than he is to support his secondary thesis. Early in the book Martinich (1992) claims that “Hobbes’s determinism, which is often thought to indicate, or even entail, atheism, is not merely a part of his mechanistic materialism; it is logically tied to Calvin’s doctrines of predestination and belief in the omnipotence of God” (p. 3). After this very bold claim Martinich says virtually nothing about Hobbes’s materialistic account of sensation, perception, thought and action or about how Hobbes used these themes to buttress religion against the challenge of the “new science.”

21. Hobbes’s interest in matter and motion develops as early as 1630. Hobbes’s first sketch of his material philosophy comes in his “Short Tract on First Principles.” This piece was first published by Ferdinand Tonnies as an appendix to his translation of Hobbes’s The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic. While there is some controversy over the authorship of the “Tract,” most Hobbes scholars, for example, Martinich (1999, p. 102); Zagorin, (1993, pp. 505-507); and Watkins (1989, pp. 14-22), attribute it to Hobbes and suggest it was written between 1630 and 1636. One notable exception to this view comes from Richard Tuck (1988, pp. 16-18). The “Tract” is important because it provides a “first sketch of Hobbes’s theory . . . of the natural world, [and] of man’s situation in it . . . [suggesting that Hobbes was a] mechanical philosopher long before his political doctrine were fixed” (Watkins, 1989, p. 22). The central thrust of the “Tract” is Hobbes’s combination of a materialist philosophy with Galileo’s theory of inertia. The main ideas of the “Tract” are (a) motion is “the universal cause of phenomena,” (b) “all change is due to direct or indirect contact between bodies,” and (c) the subjectivity of sensible qualities” (Zagorin, 1993, p. 511).

22. I do not want to give the impression that Hobbes’s claims about motion are free of difficulty. Hobbes is not always consistent in his account of what we can, and cannot know, about motion.

23. After claiming that “much more of Hobbes’s text can be interpreted literally than most scholars recognize” (Martinich, 1992, p. 43), it is ironic that Martinich turns to an interpretation of Hobbes that imports terms and theoretical constructions that are foreign to the text.

24. Strauss writes, “the fundamental moral fact is not a duty but a right; all duties are derivative from the fundamental and inalienable right to self-preservation” (Strauss, 1953, p. 181).

25. Harold Bloom writes that “Macbeth is weirdly post-Christian . . . Macbeth allows no relevance to Christian revelation” (Bloom, 1998, p. 518). By post-Christian, Bloom means that the thoughts and actions of Macbeth are offensive and shocking to all claims of universal morality. Contrary to Bloom, I
read Macbeth’s actions from the point of view of Hobbes’s materialism, where post-Christian indicates not universal repudiation, but rather the rejection of a highest good or universal morality entirely.

Macbeth is not the only one who recognizes the absurdity and nihilism of attempting to secure power and peace through violence. As Lady Macbeth states,

Naught’s had, all’s spent
Where our desire is got without content
’Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (III. ii. 5-8)

They have given everything for very little, and despite the relative success of their violent actions, they enjoy only an anxious, fleeting joy—one that, given their inability to escape the state of nature, will be short lived.

In De Corpore, Hobbes writes, “[a]s a body leaves a phantasm of its magnitude in the mind, so also a moved body leaves a phantasm of its motion, namely an idea of that body passing out of one space into another by continual succession. . . . TIME is phantasm of before and after in motion” (De Corp., vii, 3). For Hobbes, time is a product of bodies moving from one space to another. In this way, motion creates the phantasm of space, and time is the distance that can be measured between spaces. However, because the motion of our bodies is also characterized by the sensational or emotional feelings associated with the vital motions, we can be literally said, according to Hobbes, to have a sort of feeling of time. We have a feeling of time because the awareness of the movement from one space to another is always characterized by some sensation of desire or aversion. See also De Corp., xxi, 2.

References


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