Department of Political Science

Degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics

Course of History of Political Thought

Scripture and Sovereignty:

King James VI & I and Hobbes

on Obedience and Political Authority

Supervisor: Seth Nathan Jaffe

Candidate: Alessandro Noli

Academic Year 2024/2025

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

This dissertation aims to study two figures in the History of Political Thought, bound together by time, location, and common culture: King James VI & I of Scotland and England, and Thomas Hobbes, the English political philosopher. Studying these two men, their respective writings, and especially their relationship with the Bible will allow this thesis to simultaneously cover history, politics, and religion. More specifically, it will analyze how each thinker used and interpreted verses from Scripture to justify their respective political theories, focusing on sovereignty, the source of its legitimacy, and the relationship between politics and religion.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is undoubtedly a well-known and renowned thinker. He is credited as one of the most influential political theorists ever. Published in 1651 and written during the English Civil War (1642–1651), his major work is *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, commonly just referred to as *Leviathan.* This title alludes to the biblical figure of leviathan, an extraordinary creature mentioned in one of the books of the Bible, i.e., the Book of Job (chapter 41). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes expressed what he saw as the need for an absolute sovereign who holds both temporal and religious power in order to prevent civil wars. Initially, he presented his pessimistic views on human nature, and these premises then served as the basis to introduce a solution, namely, the Hobbesian Leviathan, or commonwealth. Hobbes wrote about human nature, religion, Christianity, paganism, classical philosophy, and the relationship between the church and the state. Though he quoted Scripture extensively throughout his *Leviathan*, Hobbes is often accused of atheism today. Indeed, this writer appears to have been a materialist who held unorthodox religious views. Many of his contemporaries also suspected him of being an atheist.[1] Hobbes, however, did not deny God's existence explicitly, yet his views were not

[1] Christopher Brooke, Introduction to *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes (London: Penguin Classics, 2017), p. xxxi.

traditional or typical. From chapter XI of the first part of *Leviathan*, it appears that Hobbes believed in an eternal yet distant and impersonal God, seen more as the first cause or first mover, rather than a personal, all-present and loving Creator.[2]

On the other hand, although usually studied merely as a historical figure, King James (1566–1625) published several political writings. He is mainly known for his role as a monarch in British history. He ruled Scotland as King James VI from 1567 and, after uniting the crowns of England and Scotland in 1603, the year of Queen Elizabeth's death, he ruled as King James I until he died in 1625. Despite his position of authority, his written material on politics does not seem to receive much attention. James is often dismissed and misunderstood in modern scholarship. The historian Jenny Wormald notices the presence of many "violently conflicting views" on James VI and I, both positive and negative, which mutually exclude each other.[3] Some of the King's main writings include *Basilicon Doron* (1598), which was a best-seller at the time, and *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1599).[4] In these books, King James presented his thoughts on what constitutes the best form of government, that is, monarchy, which he saw as an institution divinely ordained by God and supported by the Bible. It is worth noting that Hobbes explicitly recognized King James as "our most wise king" in the final paragraph of chapter XIX of part II of *Leviathan*.[5] Understanding the reasons behind Hobbes' admiration for King James offers a compelling avenue for further investigation and comparison. What convictions and behaviors might have made his rulership worthy of Hobbes' praise? From his writings, it transpires that King James was a Protestant and a devout believer in the Bible. He frequently mentioned or quoted it in his written material and parliamentarian speeches. He believed in its authority and full inspiration, both as the Word of God and as a constitution upon which to base his beliefs, his life, and even his approach to politics. His love for the Bible is apparent in the fact that he commissioned and authorized its translation in the year 1604. The famous King James Bible was intended to become the definitive English translation and supplant other older English

[2] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Christopher Brooke (London: Penguin Classics, 2017), p. 85.
[3] Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I: Two Kings or One?" *History* 68, no. 223 (1983): 188.
[4] Johann P. Sommerville, introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. xv.
[5] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 161; and Sommerville, Introduction, p. xv.

translations. For 7 years, a team of almost 50 experts translated the Scriptures into English from the original tongues of Hebrew and Greek. The resultant work was then published in 1611 after its completion. It became one of the most influential translations ever, replacing other popular translations in churches and households. After over four centuries, the King James Version of the Bible, commonly abbreviated as KJV or KJB, is still widely used today and regarded by many as one of the best translations of the Bible ever made. With billions of copies produced and sold worldwide, it is estimated to be one of the top best sellers of all time.[6]

Indeed, one thing in common between Hobbes and James is their use of Scripture. As a Christian king, James presented his political theory and defense of monarchy by referencing verses and biblical teachings. He mainly relied on a previous version of the Bible, since he wrote much of his material before the complete translation and publication of his own Authorized Version in 1611. Hobbes also used Scripture to justify his ideal system, making various biblical references and showcasing how pervasive the Bible's influence was during his era. Both of them lived in an atmosphere dominated by Protestant Christian ethics, where Scripture was seen by many as the infallible Word of God and as a source of authority for members of different denominations. Nonetheless, as Hobbes pointed out, religion was a source of conflict, often contributing to tension and civil unrest.

Few studies have directly compared James and Hobbes to each other. However, both are important figures, connected by their use of Scripture as a tool to justify their respective political ideologies. Despite the similarities between the two, a significant contrast can be seen in the transition from divine right with James to a secular basis of political authority with Hobbes. The latter, most notably with his social contract theory, exemplified this departure from a more traditional view of sovereignty, which James adhered to. This thesis will examine a pivotal shift in Western political thought, from religious to secular foundations, combining historical, political, and theological analysis. It will fill a gap in

[6] King James Bible Anniversary, *King James Bible Online*, accessed May 10, 2025, https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/King-James-Bible-Anniversary/.

scholarship by addressing a neglected comparison between Hobbes and James, shedding additional light on the evolving relationship between politics and religion, a topic that is still relevant to modern-day debates.

The primary focus of this thesis will be to examine how Hobbes' interpretation of the Bible differed from or aligned with King James' interpretation, principally regarding the divine right, the relationship between the sovereign and his subjects, and the source of his legitimacy, all themes that both thinkers dealt with extensively. The King James Version will be quoted in this thesis in honor of James Charles Stuart and for linguistic consistency, consonance, and clarity. I will examine the verses and scriptural references they used, focusing especially on the ones they used in common and the ones they used the most. From this, it will be possible to determine how shared biblical texts were interpreted differently to support diverging or similar conclusions. Some verses, of course, were cited by one, but not the other. In this case, not much attention will be dedicated to these, unless relevant or valuable in the examination of other passages. In addition, besides explicit biblical references, implicit references were also made. Sometimes, these latter ones were auxiliary so as to expand their political thought further when necessary. After having read and identified the most used verses and/or the ones used in common, an analysis of the interpretation and use of Scripture as a justification for their political doctrines will follow. At certain points, we will witness a clash between these two thinkers, while at other points, we will observe a convergence in interpretation and thought.

Besides the *Political Writings* of James, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and Scripture (the King James Bible), secondary sources will be brought up to develop this thesis. For example, Judd Owen will provide insight into Hobbes' strategy to secularize politics by reinterpreting Scripture. Scholars like Laurence Berns, Michael Oakeshott, and Harvey Mansfield will also provide helpful information about Hobbes and his political theory. At the same time, academics such as Johann P. Sommerville, Jenny Wormald and Godfrey Davies will do the same for King James VI & I.

The structure of this thesis will reflect a progression from a shared agreement on obedience (Chapter 1) to a fundamental disagreement on the ultimate source of political sovereignty (Chapter 2), culminating in a conclusion that will evaluate the contemporary relevance and spiritual implications of their diverging views. The first chapter will explore the theme of obedience and rebellion, analyzing how Hobbes and King James VI & I interpreted biblical passages to justify civil submission to civil authority. The second chapter will highlight the clash between divine right and the social contract theory, revealing two different worldviews and interpretations of Scripture. Lastly, the final chapter will evaluate the theological and contemporary implications of their positions, presenting a series of thought experiments and reflecting on the enduring relevance of this early modern debate.

2. On Obedience and Rebellion

Among the topics both thinkers dealt with, strict obedience to rulers was certainly the one they agreed on the most. Whereas James and Hobbes partially agreed on the relationship between state and church and disagreed on divine right and the social contract, rebellion against the king was unequivocally condemned by both thinkers. This chapter will deal with the topic of obedience, examining and comparing how Hobbes and James used biblical passages to support their political thought. First, it will demonstrate how New Testament epistles and Jesus' words were used in this effort (Chapter 2.1). Then, the focus will shift towards the Old Testament and the question of paternalism (Chapter 2.2). Finally, the discussion will turn to rebellion and theological and philosophical questions (Chapter 2.3). Afterwards, Chapter 3 will highlight how additional differences between the two thinkers ultimately captured larger historical shifts, namely, the gradual process of secularization and the emergence of liberalism.

2.1 Obedience in the New Testament

For both James and Hobbes, the New Testament provided a cornerstone for the principle of obedience to rulers, with several verses explicitly demanding submission to authority. Hobbes and James rely on these passages to uphold their political theories, referencing the conduct of early Christians as well. One of the strongest biblical passages in the New Testament used by both thinkers to promote obedience to sovereigns can be found in Romans chapter 13, which states:

> **1** Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. **2** Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: **4** For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if

> thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. **5** Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. **6** For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. **7** Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. (Romans 13:1-7 KJV).

While both thinkers appeal to Romans 13 to justify obedience, Hobbes approaches it from a more pragmatic point of view, prioritizing civil peace. By contrast, King James considers it a Christian moral duty. Hobbes quotes this chapter of Romans in the third part of *Leviathan*, i.e., "Of a Christian Commonwealth".[7] More specifically, he does so in a section where he attempts to demonstrate how Christian ministers do *not* have the right to command, but the duty to obey, even if the ruler is not a Christian, but an infidel.[8] Similarly, King James mentions Romans 13 in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, noting how Paul commanded obedience for conscience sake during the time of Nero, a persecutor of Christians, "that bloody tyrant" in James' own words.[9] In his *De Triplici Nodo, Triplex Cuneus*, King James cites Romans 13, explaining how subjects were bound to obey, whether the Princes were good, like Joshua and Moses, or wicked, like Pharaoh and the unbelieving Emperor Julian, "an Apostata, an Oppressour, and an Idolater".[10] Just like James, Hobbes stresses how even though there were heathen kings in those times, "the Christians of old deposed not Nero, nor Diocletian, nor Julian, nor Valens, and Arian".[11] Once again, tolerance towards these 'unrighteous' kings was justified by Hobbes with these words about early Christians and their attitude towards the existing government:

> Or if the Apostles wanted temporal forces to depose Nero, was it therefore necessary for them, in their epistles to the newly made Christians, to teach them (as they did) to obey the Powers constituted over them, (whereof Nero at that time

[7] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 413.
[8] Ibid., p. 414.
[9] King James VI and I, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 71.
[10] King James VI & I, *Triplici Nodo, Triplex Cuneus*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 93.
[11] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 486.

> was one,) and that they ought to obey them, not for fear of their wrath, but for conscience sake? Shall we say they did not only obey, but also teach what they meant not, for want of strength? It is not therefore for want of strength, but for conscience sake, that Christians are to tolerate their heathen Princes, or Princes (for I cannot call any one whose Doctrine is the Publique Doctrine, an Hæretique) that authorize the teaching of an Errour.[12]

As Hobbes points out, the fact that even under wicked kings Christians were told to obey is robust evidence that the Bible itself does not permit or support rebellion. Thus, it is pretty clear how, "for conscience sake", obedience to sovereigns, Christian or not, was an imperative according to both Hobbes and King James. However, as Judd Owen notes, unlike James, Hobbes avoids condemning Rome's religious persecution, since it sought to maintain peace and obedience.[13] Owen points out that Roman religious tolerance was almost universal, except towards Jews and Christians. He infers that, like the Roman Empire, Hobbes too sees their rebellious disposition as a problem to solve.[14] All of this demonstrates how Hobbes prioritizes political stability over Christianity, contrasting with James' strong emphasis on moral duties like obedience.

To further strengthen his position on obedience, Hobbes also appeals to Titus 3.[15] This passage was shown to confirm that believers were commanded by the Apostle Paul, allegedly inspired by the Holy Spirit, to be subject to the higher powers and to obey them. Its first couple of verses read as follows:

> **1** Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, **2** To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. (Titus 3:1-2 KJV).

The use of this verse reflects Hobbes' strategy of discouraging disobedience, portraying submission as a moral and practical requirement against political chaos. Additionally,

---

[12] Ibid.
[13] J. Judd Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy: Transformation from Hobbes to Tocqueville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 53.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 169 and 414.

right after mentioning Romans 13, Hobbes quotes 1 Peter 2, where Christians were reminded to submit a third time:

> **13** Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; **14** Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. (1 Peter 2:13-14 KJV).[16]

With these verses, Hobbes underscores how apostles were not told to make laws or to become governors, but to obey and promote obedience to the ordinance of man. In *Basilicon Doron*, James similarly exhorts his oldest son Henry, heir to the throne, to "teach obedience".[17] Besides describing the behavior of New Testament Christians, in *The Trew [True] Law*, James claims that the prophets never incited rebellion against the prince, no matter how wicked he was.[18] For example, James argues, in the Old Testament the prophet Jeremiah threatened the chosen and peculiar people of God with all destruction for rebellion to the king of Babel, although he was an idolatrous persecutor, a foreign king, and a tyrant.[19] Strikingly, according to the King, Jeremiah even commanded believers to pray for the tyrant's prosperity![20] This reference reveals how most of James' perspective revolves around sin and divine judgement. In fact, in James' opinion, wicked kings are a curse from God because of the people's sins and that the only lawful courses of action under said kings are patience, prayer and amendment of lives.[21] This outlook not only frames obedience as a moral duty based on biblical teachings but also demonstrates how James' view is more theologically grounded than Hobbes' more pragmatic focus on peace. Ultimately, by promoting the virtue of longsuffering, James' stance perhaps indirectly fosters the Hobbesian goal of civil stability.

In addition to broader teachings from prophets and New Testament epistles, King James and Hobbes also mention specific instances of Jesus himself legitimizing obedience to

---

[16] Ibid., pp. 413–414.
[17] King James VI & I, *Basilicon Doron*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Year), p. 38.
[18] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 70.
[19] Ibid., p. 71.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., p. 79.

civil sovereigns. Jesus' words were important, since many considered him the ultimate King of kings, the highest authority, the infallible Word, God manifest in the flesh. In part II of *Leviathan*, Hobbes brings up the example of the Scribes and Pharisees.[22] For context, in the Gospels, John the Baptist and Jesus repeatedly condemned the religious authorities of the time as hypocrites and vipers. Nonetheless, despite all those harsh remarks, Hobbes explains how Jesus, the highest divine authority, still bid the people to observe what the elders said, promoting obedience to them (Matthew 23:2-3). Again, in part III of *Leviathan*, Hobbes states: "and therefore our Saviour commanded them to do all that they should say, but not all that they should do. That is, to obey their Laws, but not follow their Example".[23] Thus, laws are to be obeyed regardless of the lawmakers' moral conduct and character. Another argument used by Hobbes and James to promote obedience is the famous biblical quote "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25), where the king's power to tax arbitrarily was endorsed by the Lord, even though Caesar was a heathen stranger.[24] This passage is important since it proves, once more, that even with a pagan king, civil duties like taxation still remain in place, confirming the idea that political submission is distinct from religious allegiance. The use of this verse can be seen in James' *Triplici Nodo*, where he adds that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world, referencing the statement made to Pilate in John 18:36.[25] Lastly, Hobbes writes that the king's word alone was sufficient to take anything from any subject, referencing Matthew 21.[26] In this chapter, Jesus, as "king of the Jews", needed a donkey to enter into Jerusalem. He commanded his disciples to get it for him, prophesying that the third party would justly obey the request and hand them the animal simply because the Lord had asked for it. For Hobbes, this episode reinforces the view that the king's authority alone is enough to command and receive obedience. The integration of these verses from Jesus corroborates their overall thesis that obedience to human authority eclipses the ruler's character. However, while Jesus himself commanded civil obedience in the New Testament, Hobbes and James also draw upon the Old Testament to prove their point about submission, particularly with the story of Israel's first monarchy.

[22] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 169.
[23] Ibid., p 469.
[24] Ibid., p. 169.
[25] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 95.
[26] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 169.

2.2 Obedience in the Old Testament and Paternalism

One of the most important passages in the Old Testament that both thinkers quote is First Samuel chapter 8, where the Israelites asked for a king. God granted their request through the prophet Samuel, while warning them about the burdens of monarchy. When discussing "The Rights of Monarchy from Scripture" in part II of *Leviathan*, Hobbes quotes 1 Samuel 8:11-17 to justify the king's despotism.[27] In these verses, the rights of the king were said to have been granted by God himself through the mouth of the prophet Samuel:

> **10** And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. **11** And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. **12** And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. **13** And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. **14** And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. **15** And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. **16** And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. **17** He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. (1 Samuel 8:10-17 KJV).

Some of these listed rights include employing men for warfare, business, and agriculture; using women to cook and bake; the possibility to take whatever produce and food the king desires; the power of taxation; the power to wage warfare; and the authority to turn his subjects into his servants. James quotes this same passage in *The Trew Law*, where he writes that the words found in 1 Samuel 8 "plainly declare the obedience that the people

[27] Ibid., p. 168.

owed to their king and all respects".[28] Hobbes, too, states that God clearly gave the king "absolute power", especially if considering the last phrase with the word "servants".[29] Notably, in verse 19 of this same chapter we read:

> Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; (1 Samuel 8:19 KJV).

This passage shows how the Israelites gave their explicit consent to obey even after hearing and understanding that the king would have absolute power, since they desired to be like the other nations. Hobbes also makes sure to hint at the secular basis for government here, implying that the king was legitimized by the acceptance from the people below, who rejected God above and his direct rule. This aspect of consent and divine right will be covered more extensively in the next chapter of this thesis. In essence, 1 Samuel 8 reinforces the sovereign's rule in relation to his subjects, a concept that both thinkers expands through biblical analogies to family relations.

For both thinkers, authority is meant to resemble a natural familial hierarchy, with the political sovereign assuming the role of a father over his child-like subjects. To further strengthen the argument that obedience is necessary, Hobbes appeals to Colossians 3:20 and 3:22 more than once, where, respectively, children are told to obey their parents and that servants must obey their masters.[30] The two verses read as follows:

> **20** Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. (Colossians 3:20 KJV).

> **22** Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; (Colossians 3:22 KJV).

These parallels effectively liken the relationship between children and their parents, or servants and their masters, to the relationship between subjects and their sovereigns. These metaphors were appealing to Hobbes since they strengthen the notion that just as

[28] James, *The Trew Law*, pp. 66–68.
[29] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 168.
[30] Ibid., p. 168, p. 413.

children and servants owe unconditional obedience to their parents and masters, respectively, so do subjects owe loyalty to their rulers. Moreover, with these references, paternal dominion was not only circumscribed to the household alone, but it was also applied to the commonwealth as a whole. Likewise, James also strategically references several verses about obedience to parents throughout his works. In *Basilicon Doron* (*Royal Gift*), when discussing various unpardonable sins, he writes:

> the false and unreverent writing or speaking of malicious men against your Parents and Predecessors: ye know the command in Gods lawe, *Honour your Father and Mother*:[31]

Notably, one of the ten commandments given to the Israelites through Moses was to honour your parents, as found for the first time in Exodus 20:12, and later in the New Testament in Ephesians 6:2. James quotes this commandment in *Basilicon Doron*, where he also exhorts his son to honour those *in loco Parentum* (in the place of parents), such as "governors, up-bringers and Præceptors".[32] James further espouses this concept of paternal dominion in his *Trew Law* as well, where he notes: "The king towards people is rightly compared to a father of children, and to a head of a body composed of diverse members".[33] Besides adding the analogy of the relationship between members of a body and the head, King James also compares the relationship between sovereigns and subjects to the relationship between a husband and a wife.[34] Also, regarding this theme, the apostle Paul commands women to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). Hence, just as a wife was demanded to follow her husband's lead, a subject was expected to obey his sovereign. These analogies, and particularly the fatherhood framework, cleverly support their visions of sovereignty, with the ruler acting as a fatherly protector.

While both thinkers support an absolute monarchy, James appears to focus more on the paternalistic aspect of kingship, acknowledging a difference between kings and tyrants. At the same time, Hobbes emphasizes the despotic nature of rulership. He blurs the

[31] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 23.
[32] Ibid., p. 47.
[33] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 76.
[34] King James VI & I, *Speech to Parliament of 19 March 1604*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 136.

distinction between despotism and kingship, writing an entire chapter of *Leviathan* titled "Of Dominion Paternall, and Despoticall".[35] On the other hand, Sommerville claims that "James' political philosophy was a nuanced and moderated absolutism, with an emphasis on the monarch's duty to rule according to law and the public good".[36] As a matter of fact, besides talking about the king's rights, James frequently places "considerable stress on the duties of rulers", towards their subjects and, above all, towards God.[37] In *The Trew Law*, James writes: "the princess [princes'] duty to his subjects is so clearly set down in many places of the Scriptures and so openly confessed by all the good princes".[38] However, just because the king has a duty towards his subjects and their welfare does not mean that subjects are free to disregard their duty towards their prince and rebel against him. In fact, James firmly upholds the view that rebellion is as unnatural and monstruous as sons revolting against their father to slay him.[39] Another clever analogy James uses is with body parts: rebellion, in his view, is like cutting one's own head off, hence, a suicide.[40] James' more moderate absolutism diverges from Hobbes' rejection of a distinction between paternalism and despotism. This difference between the two allows us to see James' commitment to morality, as opposed to Hobbes' more pragmatic concern with the consolidation of power. Nevertheless, despite their different emphases, one leaning more on the loving paternalistic side and the other on the despotic, the two agree about the division of powers, viewing it as a threat to effective governance.

Hobbes and King James plainly reject the idea of a separation of powers within the commonwealth, insisting that sovereignty must be unified to prevent rebellion and disorder. As already seen in 1 Samuel 8, the king bears executive and military powers. Appealing to the Old Testament, Hobbes references 1 Kings 3:9, where Solomon, the son of King David, prayed to God for wisdom and discernment as a child:

[35] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 162.
[36] Johann P. Sommerville, back cover of *King James VI and I: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[37] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, p. xvii.
[38] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 64.
[39] Ibid. p. 77.
[40] Ibid.

> Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? (1 Kings 3:9 KJV).

It is worth noting that with this prayer, according to Hobbes, Solomon implied that kings possessed not only judiciary power, but legislative power as well.[41] Hobbes firmly opposes the idea of a separation of powers, following the logic that "a kingdom divided cannot stand", a famous scriptural saying from Jesus seen in Mark 3:24-25, Matthew 12:25 and Luke 11:17.[42] James likewise does not conceive of a division of powers, saying "What God hath conjoined, let no man separate", referencing a biblical concept about monogamy found in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9.[43] This insistence on unity of power is essential to both King James and Hobbes as it stems from their fear that separating powers quickly leads to discord and rebellion. Another aspect covered by both thinkers is the king's obedience. Besides having full legislative power, Hobbes and King James both believe that the sovereign is supposed to be above civil law, unlike the masses below him. By placing the king above the law, both thinkers seek to prevent potential challenges to the sovereign's authority, consequently reinforcing civil stability. James and Hobbes argue that the king possesses a unique status, existing in a hierarchical position between God and his subjects. James, as a king himself, shares his thoughts on the role of a monarch in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* and in his *Basilicon Doron*. Sommerville writes: "Kings, James argued, had a duty to rule in the public interest and (except in cases of necessity) to abide by the law of the land. But no one had the power to coerce them into performing these duties", although a good king should, and would, do so according to James.[44] On the other hand, Hobbes does not emphasize the moral duties of the king, instead reinforcing his strict absolutist vision. Despite Hobbes' more extreme stance, both thinkers remain uncompromising against divided sovereignty, insisting that rulers must remain unchallenged by the people or the law to secure the blessings of peace and order.

---

[41] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 168.
[42] Ibid., p. 148.
[43] King James VI & I, *Speech to Parliament of 19 March 1604*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 136.
[44] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, pp. xvii and xviii.

Both thinkers assert that resisting or questioning the ruler, whether through moral or legal arguments, threatens civil stability, and they condemn such defiance as either sedition (Hobbes) or blasphemy (James). In part III of *Leviathan*, when covering the topic of Divine Positive Law, Hobbes writes:

> I conclude therefore, that in all things not contrary to the Morall Law, (that is to say, to the Law of Nature), all Subjects are bound to obey that for divine Law, which is declared to be so, by the Lawes of the Common-Wealth.[45]

By saying this, Hobbes subtly shifts power away from his subjects and even from God towards the king, since, as seen in the last sentence, divine law is said to be made binding by the sovereign alone. In this context, Judd Owens helpfully suggests that according to Hobbes the belief in a power superior to the sovereign constitutes a danger to the commonwealth, potentially threating it and breaking the sovereign's hold over his subjects.[46] In chapter XXIX, called "Of those things that Weaken, or tend to the Dissolution of a Common-wealth", Hobbes criticizes private judgement of good and evil actions as a seditious and poisonous disease, a doctrine repugnant to civil society.[47] He identifies obedience to one's own private conscience and subjective personal opinions as a serious problem. Mansfield clarifies that for Hobbes, "all opinion of good and bad is by nature private opinion; coming from naturally equal men" and that Hobbes "wished to suppress private judgments of good and bad in politics because such judgments endanger civil peace".[48] Additionally, Hobbes goes as far as to state that even mere contempt against the legislator is a sin, as seen in chapter XXVII of *Leviathan*, a section dealing with crimes.[49] However, a few pages later, Hobbes still allows for a type of freedom of conscience, distinguishing outward actions from internal thoughts and intentions, writing:

> For internall Faith is in its own nature invisible, and consequently exempted from all humane jurisdiction; whereas the words, and actions that proceed from it, as breaches of our Civill obedience, are injustice both before God and Man.[50]

---

[45] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 236.
[46] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy*, p. 31.
[47] Ibid., pp. 265 and 266.
[48] Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., "Hobbes and the Science of Indirect Government," *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 1 (March 1971): 99, 108.
[49] Ibid., p. 238.
[50] Ibid., p. 435.

Hobbes argues that disobedience in word and action is unjust before men and in the eyes of God. According to Judd Owen, for Hobbes "justice, quite simply, is obedience to the sovereign, and injustice is disobedience".[51] Regardless of the king's religious affiliation, intolerance against him is inadmissable for Hobbes, "For Christians, or men of what religion soever, if they tolerate not their king, whatsoever law he maketh, though it be concerning religion, do violate their faith, contrary to the divine law, both natural and positive".[52] In a similar fashion, in his *Speech in the Star Chamber of 1616*, James claims that disputing the king's power, with presumption and contempt, parallels the sins of atheism and blasphemy against God.[53] Referencing Exodus 22:28, in *The Trew Law*, he affirms:

> And to conclude, the practise through the whole Scripture prooveth the peoples obedience given to that sentence in the law of God: *Thou shall not rayle upon the Iudges, neither speake evill of the ruler of thy people*.[54]

Notably, both thinkers fail to mention the example of John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest born among men (Matthew 11:11), who openly rebuked corrupt religious authorities (Matthew 3:7) and publicly condemned king Herod's immorality (Matthew 14:4, Mark 6:18). This omission might be seen as evidence of how James and Hobbes selectively use Scripture to suit their own political doctrine on obedience, intentionally overlooking 'righteous' dissent. Their uncompromising stance on tolerance towards authority and their rejection of freedom of speech naturally leads to their shared condemnation of regicide, i.e., the murder of a king. Both view this practice as the most extreme, unjust, and unnatural form of rebellion.

To reinforce the necessity of obedience to the sovereign, Hobbes and James aptly bring up the biblical example of David from the Old Testament. This story is presented to condemn regicide, that is to say, the worst form of rebellion and disobedience

---

[51] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy*, p. 25.
[52] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 485.
[53] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, p. xxiv; King James VI and I, *Speech in Star Chamber (1616)*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 214.
[54] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 71.

conceivable. According to the first book of Samuel, David was not yet king (at least publicly speaking), since the first king of the Israelites, Saul, still ruled even though he had lost favor with God due to disobeying the Lord's commandment to wipe out the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). Afterwards, Saul became envious of David, especially following the latter's victory against Goliath the giant (1 Samuel 18). Saul degenerated and wanted to kill David, but the latter never killed Saul, even when it was in his power to do so and save himself (1 Samuel 24). David forbade his servants from slaying Saul in 1 Samuel 24:6:

> And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD. (1 Samuel 24:6 KJV).

King James also mentions how David still greatly revered Saul, referring to him as his master, as his lord, and as the anointed (chosen, selected) of God, even though God had rejected Saul as king according to 1 Samuel 15:26.[55] After Saul's suicide (1 Samuel 31), David officially became king of Judah (2 Samuel 2), and later of all Israel (2 Samuel 5). Despite David's future moral shortcomings as a monarch, notoriously his adulterous affair with Bathsheeba and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11), David was, and still is, a highly esteemed biblical figure among Christians of all denominations and even followers of other Abrahamic religions. By presenting the example of David, "a man after God's heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), in a subordinate position, Hobbes cleverly conveys to his readers, and a Protestant audience in particular, how regicide is unrighteous.[56] Unsurprisingly, James also writes that David did not slay Saul and that he even showed reverence towards Saul, who was cruelly persecuting him for no good reason.[57] For both thinkers, the lesson of David and Saul serves as a straightforward warning against rebellion and regicide. King James and Hobbes reinforce the principle that, regardless of personal grievances and persecution, the anointed ruler is not to be harmed. Theoretically, this passage should have dissuaded the defiance of religious minorities, who often attempted to justify rebellion in the name of their faith.

---

[55] Ibid., p. 70.
[56] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 168.
[57] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 70.

2.3 Sources of Rebellion

In this section we will consider the main causes behind political rebellion. Hobbes and James both consider religious minorities as potential sources of sedition, since these groups frequently claimed divine justification for their disobedience to the state. Judd Owen writes that according to Hobbes, far too much of Christianity as it was understood and practiced, was politically disastrous.[58] In chapter XVIII, "Of the Rights of Sovereigns by Institution", when discussing how subjects cannot change their form of government, Hobbes heavily criticizes the attitude of those who would disobey their sovereign for the sake of a direct covenant with God.[59] Hobbes labels the seditious subjects' 'covenant with God' as a blatant excuse, even an unjust lie, since he holds that a covenant requires a mediator, who could only be the sovereign, acting as a bridge between the subjects and God.[60] Similarly, King James shares analogous concerns about religious factions. He denounces what he calls "rebellion under cloak of religion".[61] He also identifies another 'excuse', namely that of "relieving the Commonwealth out of distress", which he argues would only double distress and desolation through violence and civil war.[62] James perceived this rebellious attitude in the religious minorities of his days, such as the Puritans, the Anabaptists and certain Catholics, some of whom would have rather waged a so-called holy war than have an ungodly peace.[63] Additionally, according to Wormald, the Scottish King had political rivalry with the extreme Presbyterians, known as Melvillians.[64] James called Puritans proud pests who breathed sedition and calumnies, describing them as supporters of democracy, parity and confusion, and opposers of unity and order.[65] In *Basilicon Doron*, James enjoins his successor to the throne to punish such "in case they refuse to obey the Law, and will not cease to stirre up a rebellion or

[58] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy*, p. 22.
[59] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 142.
[60] Ibid.
[61] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 71.
[62] Ibid., p. 79.
[63] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 6–7.
[64] Wormald, *Two Kings or One?*, p. 196.
[65] Ibid., p. 26–27.

schisme".[66] An important thing to point out here is that, according to Somerville, James grew up listening to arguments justifying legitimate rebellion, and so he was quite familiar with them. Somerville writes:

> In his early years, King James was educated by George Buchanan, one of the most famous classicists of the age. Buchanan was also an outspoken critic of royal absolutism. Like the leading Scottish reformer John Knox, Buchanan argued that a people may take arms against a ruler who fails to promote the true religion. He held that in Scotland wicked kings had commonly been called to account by their subjects. When the king grew up, he came to reject the ideas of Buchanan, Knox, and like-minded authors.[67]

Despite his exposure to such theories, "James' early experience in Scotland alienated him from the thinking of such men as Knox and Buchanan".[68] Like James, Hobbes rejected these views, strongly agreeing that religious dissent represents a major source of conflict. By denying claims of divine justification for rebellion, Hobbes and James defended their convictions about absolutism and civil obedience in the name of stability. Their beliefs also influenced their common rejection of the Vatican's claim to civil authority, since the Pope was seen as an external force able to incite disobedience and rebellion from abroad.

James and Hobbes then both rejected the Pope's influence as dangerous, arguing that obedience must be reserved for the civil sovereign rather than any foreign religious figure. In part III of *Leviathan*, in chapter XLII, "Of Power Eclesiasticall", when discussing how the New Testament became canonical, Hobbes claims:

> And therefore the Scripture of the New Testament is there only Law, where the lawfull Civill Power hath made it so. And there also the King, or Soveraign, maketh it a Law to himself; by which he subjecteth himselfe, not to the Doctor, or Apostle, that converted him, but to God himself, and his Son Jesus Christ, as immediately as did the Apostles themselves.[69]

---

[66] Ibid., p. 7.
[67] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, p. xv–xvi.
[68] Ibid., p. xvi.
[69] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 436.

Here, Hobbes writes that the king's legislative power and status are above civil law. In fact, according to Hobbes, although the king is naturally positioned at a lower level than Jesus, he stands above his subjects and even above the evangelist apostles themselves. Furthermore, with this same passage, Hobbes argues that Scripture becomes legally binding when and only if the sovereign makes it so, subordinating the Bible itself to political authority.[70] Moreover, he undermines obedience to the Pope by claiming that civil sovereigns are ecclesiastical princes. In chapter XLII of *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes:

> For if the Apostle had meant, we should be subject both to our own Princes, and also to the Pope, he had taught us a doctrine, which Christ himself hath told us is impossible, namely, *to serve two Masters.*[71]

The impossibility of serving two masters at the same time is a concept that was famously tackled by Jesus himself (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). By appropriating Jesus' terminology, Hobbes tries to consolidate the idea that obedience should be reserved to the civil sovereign alone, rather than threatening civil peace via the pretext of obedience to God, or to external spiritual leaders like the Pope. According to Judd Owen:

> One obvious reading of Hobbes is that he too seeks to channel religion in support of political obedience through a single-minded reinterpretation of Christianity as requiring obedience to the sovereign and little else.[72]

Hobbes frequently appeals to Scripture throughout *Leviathan*, and his strategic reinterpretation of biblical passages reflects his overriding goal of justifying obedience to the sovereign alone. In a sense, Hobbes advocates for a form of anti-Catholic national sovereignty by claiming that civil sovereigns cannot commit heresy, "For heretics are none but private men that stubbornly defend some doctrine prohibited by their lawful sovereigns".[73] This argument addressed potential Catholic-driven terrorism as well as other religious threats to civil peace, as had already been seen in the case of the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605 against King James and Parliament, a 'tyrannicide' attempted by a group of Catholics and Jesuits.[74] Analogously, King James also vehemently opposed

---

[70] Ibid., p. 572.
[71] Ibid., p. 470–471.
[72] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Democracy*, p. 35.
[73] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 485; see p. 486.
[74] See Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, pp. xx–xxi and xxx.

papal authority, being a first-hand witness of the threat it posed to his own life and the Commonwealth's stability.[75] In the years that followed, the King tried "to prove from Scripture that the pope is Antichrist".[76] According to Somerville, exactly like Hobbes, James "also vigorously rejected Catholic theories which legitimated the use of force by subjects against their sovereigns. Like many of his contemporaries, he looked to strong monarchical power to prevent religious civil war and maintain order".[77] James considered "Active resistance to monarchs" as "always sinful".[78] The "Romish" religion, or Papism, a derogatory term for Roman Catholicism, had promoted this 'sinful resistance', notoriously in 1605. Sommerville writes:

> In *Triplici Nodo*, James attempted to prove that Scripture and the writings of the church fathers require subjects to obey their rulers and not the pope in all temporal matters. [...] the king argued that the pope's claim to be able to depose civil sovereigns had no foundation in early Christian tradition.[79]

Their unanimous rejection of papal authority further stresses the subjects' obligation to obey the state. Hobbes and King James both emphasize how obedience to the sovereign supersedes allegiance to any external spiritual leader, reinforcing their arguments for royal absolutism. Yet, while both thinkers reject external religious interference, their interpretation of civil versus divine obedience is different.

Despite the many Scriptures commanding submission to political leaders, one key challenge remains: the biblical passage found in Acts 5:29. Hobbes and James address this verse differently, with the latter focusing on the acceptance of punishment in case of a 'rightful' transgression due to obedience to God, while Hobbes insists on strict civil obedience. In Acts 5:29, the apostles told the religious authorities of their time, "we ought to obey God rather than men". King James' stance on the conflict between obedience to God and man differs from Hobbes' reinterpretation. Sommerville explains that in James' view:

---

[75] James, *Triplici Nodo*, p. 85.
[76] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, p. xxi.
[77] Ibid., p. xvii.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., p. xxii.

> If our king commands us to do things which contravene the law of God, we must disobey him, for we should always obey God rather than man. But if the monarch calls us to account for our disobedience, we should meekly accept whatever punishment he inflicts upon us.[80]

King James does not write that we should only obey God sometimes, but rather he unequivocally claims that obedience to God is always a moral obligation, regardless of the earthly consequences. Regarding this dilemma, Hobbes states:

> The most frequent prætext of Sedition, and Civil Warre, in Christian Commonwealths hath a long time proceeded from a difficulty, not yet sufficiently resolved, of obeying at once, both God, and Man, then when their Commandments are one contrary to the other.[81]

Although Hobbes explicitly recognizes that the Bible and civil law can be at odds with each other, he doubles down on his stance on strict obedience to human authority. Judd Owen writes that, "most astoundingly", the Hobbesian sovereign would have to be obeyed even if he commanded the sin of idolatry or the profession and practice of a false, non-Christian religion.[82] By contrast, James holds a milder stance than Hobbes in case of a conflict between submission to civil law and obedience to God's commandments. In fact, Sommerville writes:

> Basing his case on Scripture, reason and history, the king argued that subjects must obey their monarch's 'commands in all things, except directly against God' and that they could never actively resist him.[83]

Allowing for certain exceptions, in this case James remains more faithful to the wording of Acts 5:29 than Hobbes, especially if considering stories found within Scripture. For example, in the Book of Daniel, faithful men, such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, disobeyed artificial authority to obey God. Yet they boldly accepted their punishment, from which God delivered them unharmed. Another similar case can be found in the Book of Exodus, when the faithful Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's

---

[80] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, p. xvii.
[81] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 489.
[82] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Society*, p. 22.
[83] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, p. xvii. *The Trew Law*, p. 72.

command to kill every male new-born, choosing to fear God instead of the Egyptian king.[84] Given the extent of Hobbes' biblical knowledge, it is likely that he was aware of these stories, so omitting them from *Leviathan* is quite telling. Here, perhaps, is the most striking difference in this chapter on obedience between the two thinkers, revealing the deeper motives behind their written work. Their different solution to the clash between human and divine authority was likely also influenced by their beliefs about salvation from hell, another topic on which they did not agree, and to which we can now turn.

A significant discrepancy between King James and Hobbes which affected their broader political thought is related to soteriology, i.e., the study of the doctrine of salvation from hell. According to Owen, for Hobbes, the way to eternal life, or eternal salvation, is obedience to the sovereign besides belief in Jesus as the Christ or Messiah.[85] In part III of *Leviathan*, shortly after discussing the difficulty of simultaneously obeying both God and man, Hobbes writes: "All that is Necessary to Salvation, is contained in two Vertues, Faith in Christ, and Obedience to Laws".[86] After quoting these words, Owen claims that "the generically worded requirement of 'obedience to laws' turns out to mean (lo and behold!) obedience to civil laws".[87] Fundamentally, while attempting to reconcile obedience to God with obedience to men, Hobbes transforms obedience to the laws of sovereigns into a matter of salvation, even a requirement for heaven.[88] Although Hobbes acknowledges that perfect obedience is impossible for humans, he still stresses the importance of continual repentance (which he believes implies an effort to turn from sin) and a willingness to obey the law for the attainment of eternal life.[89] This blending of religious and civil obedience reflects his political agenda of reinforcing the sovereign's authority under the guise of spiritual duty. On the contrary, King James rejects Hobbes' soteriological view. He reveals his beliefs about eternal salvation from hell in *Basilicon Doron*, grounding his stance upon Scripture alone. There, King James writes:

---

[84] See Exodus 1:17-22 KJV.
[85] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Society*, p. 35. See *Leviathan*, p. 500-501.
[86] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 490.
[87] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Society*, p. 66.
[88] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 502.
[89] See Ibid., pp. 490, 491, 502.

> But because no man was able to keepe the Law, nor any part thereof, it pleased God of his infinite wisedome and goodnesse, to incarnate his only Sonne in our nature, for satisfaction of his iustice in his suffering for us; that since we could not be saved by doing, we might at least, bee saved by beleeving.[90]

James believes that salvation is through faith alone, and that it does not depend on our conduct, our "temporall obedience" or our disobedience, unlike Hobbes who argues that believing and obeying are both necessary.[91] James' exegesis aligns with verses such as John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, Acts 16:31, Romans 4:5, Galatians 2:16, Titus 3:5, and many more passages that explain how the biblical way to eternal life is not by works or deeds, but by grace through faith in Jesus. Hobbes' pragmatic and vague fusion of obedience to laws with salvation sharply contrasts with James' accurate adherence to the biblical gospel. Ultimately, this theological divergence between the two thinkers displays how their political philosophies are molded by distinct perspectives, with one using Scripture to ensure an earthly fear-based civil peace, and the other defending eternal salvation through *Sola Fide*. Their contrasting convictions on salvation also mirror their differing approaches toward classical philosophy and the moral basis of sovereignty. We will examine this in the next paragraph.

Hobbes criticizes appeals to what he calls "uncertain history", traditions, superstition, paganism and heathen philosophers like Aristotle, in a fashion that echoes Colossians 2:8, which says: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ".[92] Likewise, King James elevates Scripture's wisdom and minimizes worldly philosophy by writing "as among the prophane philosophers and poets, ye shall not finde so rich a storehouse of precepts of naturall wisedome, agreeing with the will and divine wisdom of God".[93] He believes that the law of God is without error.[94] James and Hobbes write that Scripture is inspired by God, or the Holy Ghost, with the former thinker mentioning 2 Timothy 3:16

[90] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 14.
[91] James, *Triplici Nodo*, p. 95.
[92] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 76, 93, 573, 571, 573.
[93] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 15.
[94] King James VI & I, *Speech to Parliament of 21 March 1610*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 186.

in *Basilicon Doron*,[95] and the latter in chapter XXXIV of *Leviathan*, with the addition of 2 Peter 1:21 as well.[96] Despite their agreement on the inspiration of God's word, unlike James, Hobbes opposes classical political philosophy and its traditional distinction between tyrants and kings. In part II of *Leviathan*, Hobbes criticizes discontented people who, seditiously, claim that monarchy coincides with tyranny.[97] Yet, as the Conclusion of *Leviathan* reveals, he even dislikes the mere distinction commonly made between tyranny and monarchy.[98] Berns writes:

> This rejection of what Hobbes calls Aristotle's distinction between governments which rule for the benefit of the subjects and those which rule for the benefit of the rulers makes the distinction between a tyrant and a legitimate monarch politically meaningless.[99]

According to Berns, Hobbes continually attacks the doctrines of Aristotle as subversive, false and dangerously entrenched.[100] For example, Hobbes criticizes Aristotle's opinion that laws should govern rather than men.[101] Moreover, he argues that tyranny is sovereignty, and vice versa.[102] Therefore, sentiments against tyranny are in reality sentiments against the commonwealth itself, so, fundamentally, against the ultimate Hobbesian goal of public peace. On the other hand, James does not completely dismiss philosophical traditions. In fact, he upholds the Aristotelian distinction between monarchy and tyranny as fundamental for righteous kingship. In his written works, James distinguishes between lawful, good kings and selfish, usurping tyrants. Some of his thoughts on tyranny can be found in *Basilicon Doron*, where he says: "Use justice, but with such moderation, as it turne not in tyrannie".[103] James writes that a tyrant "thinks his people ordained for him a prey to his passions and inordinate appetites, inverts all good laws to serve only for his unrulie private affections", while a good king, instead, thinks about the common interest, dies in peace, is lamented by his subjects, and is admired by

---

[95] Ibid., p. 13; see p. 14.
[96] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 319, 334.
[97] Ibid., p. 151.
[98] Ibid., p. 591; see p. 570.
[99] Laurence Berns, "Thomas Hobbes," in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed., ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 409.
[100] Ibid., p. 410.
[101] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 571.
[102] Ibid., p. 591.
[103] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 43.

his neighbours.[104] Further illustrating the gap between a good king and a tyrant as envisioned by King James, Sommerville writes:

> A good king, he (James) said, would think that 'his greatest contentment stands' in the prosperity of his subjects, and would regard 'the common interest' as 'his chiefest particular interest' (p. 20). A tyrant, on the other hand, would pursue his own advantage at the expense of his subject's welfare, 'by inverting all good Lawes to serve onely for his unrulie private affections' (p. 20). Even against tyrants, rebellion was unlawful, but it was very likely to occur (p. 21), and God was certain to inflict harsh punishment upon wicked rulers (p. 21).[105]

In *Basilicon Doron*, James also points out how the books of Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament of the Bible show multiple examples of (a few) good kings and (many) bad kings.[106] Moreover, to instruct his son, heir to the throne, to become a good king, James warns him of sins to avoid and not to tolerate, especially in himself as a monarch. The list includes witchcraft, wilful murder, incest, sodomy, poisoning, false coins, effeminacy, fornication, adultery, drunkenness and idleness.[107] Hence, we can observe how James stresses the duties of the king far more than Hobbes, who rather focuses on increasing tolerance towards the sovereign, regardless of whether he be good or evil, just or tyrannical. Ultimately, while both thinkers condemn rebellion and insist on obedience, their justifications slightly diverge. Hobbes subordinates all religious and moral questions to state authority, while King James maintains a more biblical vision of sovereignty that demands both power and virtue.

[104] Ibid., p. 20–21.
[105] Sommerville, Introduction to *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, p. xix; see *Basilicon Doron*, pp. 20–21.
[106] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 15.
[107] Ibid., pp. 23, 39, 41, 51, 53, 56.

3. On the Clash Between Divine Right and the Social Contract

Having seen how Hobbes and King James share a similar position on obedience and rebellion, we will now examine a significant rupture between the two regarding the divine right of kings and the social contract. The question of whether political authority derives its legitimacy from God or the people represents a central point of contention between these two thinkers. This divergence reflects a broader struggle between tradition and modernism, religion and secularism, spirituality and materialism, divine authority and human autonomy. King James, a devout Protestant, bases his beliefs about monarchy on Scripture, appealing to biblical passages to defend the doctrine of the divine right of kings and the idea that monarchy is divinely ordained. Though often decried as an atheist by many, Hobbes also uses Scripture instrumentally to support his novel political thought. However, he does so in a way that discredits the word of God (the Bible) as the foundation that legitimizes political authority as coming from God. This chapter examines how Scripture is used by James to justify the divine right and by Hobbes to promote the social contract theory. To begin with, it will first be necessary to explain what these two theories consist of (Chapter 3.1). Afterwards, it will analyze how Hobbes and James perceived and interpreted the Bible (Chapter 3.2). Finally, the chapter will explore underlying rifts and similarities between their worldviews (Chapter 3.3).

3.1 Social Contract vs Divine Right

Central to Hobbes' political theory is the social contract, i.e., an artificial agreement or covenant among individuals who willingly give up their power to create a state and live more comfortably among each other. One premise for Hobbes' *Leviathan* is, in fact, an anarchic state of nature that coincides with a brutal state of war preceding civil society. According to Hobbes, the way to escape the "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"[108] condition of life he envisioned is by means of a human pact, which would then generate

[108] *Leviathan*, p. 103.

a commonwealth, or what Hobbes refers to as that great leviathan and mortal god.[109] The latter, either in the form of a single man or an assembly, is supposed to represent an enforcer of the social contract, a terrifying coercive power whose role is the maintenance of peace and order through the suppression of men's ambition, avarice, anger and passions.[110] Hobbes writes that "a commonwealth is said to be instituted, when a multitude of men do agree, and covenant".[111] This sentence encapsulates his belief on the origin of government as a secular phenomenon, prompted by materialistic concerns like physical survival. Hence, in an almost democratic manner, with their consent, individuals unite to legitimize the sovereign, conferring power upon him and limiting their own. Hobbes defines a contract as the mutual transferring, translation, or change of right.[112] Even though many people take the idea of a social contract for granted today, at least in liberal democratic orders, in Hobbes' time this line of thinking was quite revolutionary. The traditional mainstream view had been that the ruler's power did not derive from the common people or peasants, but rather top-down from God above, or some sort of metaphysical force.

Unlike Hobbes, King James subscribes to the notion that the king's political power derives from God and God alone. He is a staunch advocate of the divine right of kings, namely the belief that a monarch's right to rule comes exclusively from God and not from earthly sources like his subjects. King James believes that monarchy is the best political system possible, built out of the Scriptures, and that it is the true pattern of divinity, meaning that its hierarchic structure resembles God's power over creation.[113] In his political writings and speeches, James frequently stresses that kings are little gods who sit in the throne of God. For instance, in *Basilicon Doron* he writes that his eldest son Henry, heir to the throne, has been appointed by God to sit on His throne, "as Moses saith" (Deuteronomy chapter 1) and be a little god judging and ruling over other men.[114] Fundamental to his *Political Writings* is the view that the king is in his position of authority mainly thanks to God's grace or favor, in line with 1 Corinthians 3:6, which

[109] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 140.
[110] Ibid., p. 112.
[111] Ibid., p. 141.
[112] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 109, 110.
[113] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 63, 64.
[114] James, *Basilicon Doron*, pp. 12, 24, 25.

says: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase”. He believed this to be the case in his own life and reign; for example, when referring to the unification of England and Scotland, instead of praising himself, he asserted that “God hath united it all [the Island of Great Britain] in my Person and Crowne”.[115] According to this God-centered worldview, kingship and its success or “worldly glorie [glory]” largely depends on God’s grace, rather than depending on people and their merits.[116] James quotes Psalm 127:1 in the first book of *Basilicon Doron*, “Of a King’s Christian Duetie Towards God”, writing: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”.[117] In his *1604 Speech to Parliament*, he repeats 1 Corinthians 3:6 to prove that God is responsible for blessing kingdoms with outward and interior peace, and that God maintains the thrones of princes, safeguarding their power.[118] Likewise, this same verse appears in his *1607 Speech*, where he again claims that without God’s blessing the builder builds in vain, as written in Psalm 127:1.[119] Additionally, in 1610, he attributed immense power to God affirming in Latin that “Cor regis in manu Domini”, that is, the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, which also happens to be a sentence found in Proverbs 21:1.[120] It is not surprising then that James opposes theories of the social contract, which *de facto* strip sovereignty and power away from God to give it to the people. In *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* he dedicates a great many words to this subject. James criticizes the contractual theory and conditional monarchy because it places the king and the people involved on equal footing. For James, the presence of two contracting parties means one or the other could potentially justify breaking the pact in case of some alleged breach.[121] More worrisome, according to James it enables people to claim a right to judge, yet he argues that the Almighty is the only lawful judge of kings.[122] He perceives a slippery slope in making the people parties to a contract, as this would make them judges, *ergo* usurping the office of God, and facilitating or excusing rebellion against the king’s authority. Even though Hobbes condemns

[115] James, *1610 Speech*, p. 201.
[116] *Basilicon Doron*, p. 13.
[117] *Basilicon Doron*, p. 12.
[118] James, *1604 Speech*, pp. 137, 138.
[119] James, *1607 Speech*, p. 160.
[120] James, *1610 Speech*, p. 179.
[121] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 81.
[122] Ibid.

rebellion and his contract is irrevocable, the mere fact that sovereignty stems from the people is profoundly problematic for James.

For context, King James had been exposed to theories against royal absolutism from the teachings of men like Buchanan (1506–1582), a famous Scottish historian and classicist. However, he came to reject their so-called "siren songs" as he grew older, condemning them as "foolish writers".[123] In *The Trew Law*, King James writes:

> as foolish writers say, the people might unmake the king, and put an other in his roome: But either of them as unlawful, and against the ordinance of God, ought to be alike odious to be thought, much lesse put in practise.[124]

Buchanan and similar thinkers like John Knox (1514–1572) "argued that a people may take arms against a ruler who fails to promote the true religion".[125] James' educator, Buchanan, held that, in the case of misconduct, kings should be accountable to their subjects and that this had commonly been the case in Scotland; yet James came to see this as an inversion of a divinely ordained hierarchy, holding that kings ought to be answerable only to God, and not their subjects.[126] Like James, Hobbes too, though promoting his social contract theory, purported that kings could only sin against God, quoting Psalm 51:4, and labeling rebellion as always unacceptable.[127] In a society where some believed God had ceased to speak through prophets, His revelation to humanity was considered by many Christians complete in the books of the Bible. This shared belief elevated Scripture to the highest authority, not only in matters of faith but also in matters of governance. The next sub-chapter will delve into Hobbes' and James' relationship with Scripture.

3.2 Scripture and Interpretation

This section will further detail the Hobbesian and Jacobean perception of the Bible's

[123] Sommerville, Introduction, pp. xvi–xvii; see James, *The Trew Law*, pp. 62 and 74.
[124] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 74.
[125] Sommerville, Introduction, p. xvi.
[126] James, *1604 Speech*, p. 142; *1616 Speech*, p. 211.
[127] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 174.

authority, in particular to argue in defense of their respective political views. According to Sommerville, "James held that absolute monarchy was sanctioned by Scripture, and also by reason and history".[128] Likewise, Hobbes writes that "all truth of doctrine depends either upon reason or upon Scripture".[129] Whether Hobbes actually whole-heartedly believed in the Scriptures or not, he explicitly stated that the books of the Bible were written by men endued with the same Spirit, in line with 2 Peter 1:21.[130] Furthermore, Hobbes writes:

> I see not therefore any reason to doubt, but that the Old, and New Testament, as we have them now, are the true Registers of those things, which were done and said by the Prophets, and Apostles.[131]

Assuredly, James and Hobbes appeal to historical examples and reason as well, but ultimately, what both resort to most adamantly are appeals to Scripture, presenting it as an infallible source of wisdom and guidance. Both thinkers elevate God's word above the wisdom of men, in a way that evokes Colossians 2:8. For instance, James says:

> as among all the prophane Philosophers and Poets, ye shall not finde so rich a storehouse of precepts of naturall wisedome, agreeing with the will and divine wisedome of God.[132]

In the case of James, being a devout Christian, his continual appeal to the Bible is understandable, and it likely would have been persuasive in a country dominated by Protestantism, given its emphasis on *Sola Scriptura*. As *Basilicon Doron* reveals, the King believed that godly kings were commanded "to reade and meditate in the Law of God".[133] Being well versed in the Scriptures and obeying them was crucial to him, as he believed that a good Christian made a good king.[134] Besides seeing Scripture as a guide for his every-day personal life, he saw it as a blueprint for politics too. For instance, he told his son to "keepe your land cleane of all South-sayers [soothsayers], according to the

[128] Sommerville, Introduction, p. xxviii.
[129] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 596.
[130] Ibid., p. 319.
[131] Ibid., p. 318.
[132] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 15.
[133] Ibid., p. 13.
[134] See Ibid., p. 12.

commaund in the Law of God, dilated by Ieremie [Jeremiah]".[135] Moreover, in his *1616 Speech*, he said that laws must flow from God's law, since bad springs entail bad rivers.[136] Meanwhile, Hobbes' use of Scripture appears somewhat contradictory or ironic at first glance. However, he plainly states: "We believe the Bible to be the Word of God" and that "we erre, not knowing the Scriptures", referencing Christ's statement from Matthew 22:29 and Mark 12:24.[137] Furthermore, in various sections of *Leviathan*, Hobbes was careful to remark that he was not advancing his own position, but that he was building his doctrines on the principles found within the authoritative Holy Scriptures.[138] Nonetheless, his repeated appeals to Scripture often appear to be a peculiar reinterpretation aimed at defending his system of governance rather than a pure exegesis of the biblical text. Jude Owen examines what he calls Hobbes' "elaborate reinterpretation of Christianity". In *Making Religion Safe for Society*, this scholar writes:

> Hobbes presents his own doctrine of salvation, prophecy, miracles, the authority of Scripture and of the clergy. Hobbes may grant the sovereign great latitude with respect to religious policy, but Hobbesian Christianity has its own distinct catechism.[139]

According to Owen, this was done with the intent of weakening religious zeal, which had represented a problem for Hobbes, especially in his days when many desired to disobey political authority.[140] Paradoxically, however, Hobbes relies on the same Scripture that endorses religion to promote skepticism and rationalism. As in the case of Hobbes, James' reliance on Scripture is also pronounced. In *Basilicon Doron*, he advances his belief on the purpose and origin of Scripture, quoting John 5:39 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

> *Search the Scriptures*, sayth Christ, *for they beare testimonie of me*: and, *the whole Scripture*, saith Paul, *is giuen by inspiration of God, and is profitable to teach, to conuince, to correct, and to instruct in righteousnesse; that the man of God may be absolute, being made perfite unto all good workes*.[141]

---

[135] Ibid., p. 32.
[136] James, *1616 Speech*, pp. 208, 210.
[137] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 492 and 506.
[138] Ibid., p. 597; see pp. 504 and 277.
[139] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Society*, p. 41.
[140] Ibid.
[141] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 13.

Thus, even though James and Hobbes differ theologically and politically, both thinkers treat Scripture as a cornerstone for political legitimacy, praising it and using it throughout their written works. Their frequent references reflect a British society permeated by religion and faith in the word of God.

While both thinkers agree that Scripture is the highest authority for political thought, their interpretation of biblical passages related to political legitimacy differ. Examining their approaches to biblical interpretation is essential to understand how each thinker justifies or rejects divine right monarchy. James, though a king, desires to submit himself to God's word and God's law. Despite appealing to the Bible in *Leviathan*, Hobbes effectively places it beneath the sovereign by giving him the sole authority to interpret it. He writes that nescience and misinterpretation of Scripture lead to error and spiritual darkness, revealing how important the issue of interpretation and awareness is to him.[142] Therefore, the question that Hobbes attempts to answer in *Leviathan* is: where does Scripture receive its authority from?[143] A couple of pages later he gives this resolute answer:

> Which question cannot bee resolved, without a more particular consideration of the Kingdome of God; from whence also, wee are to judge of the Authority of Interpreting the Scripture. For, whosoever hath a lawful power over any Writing, to make it Law, hath the power also to approve, or disapprove the interpretation of the same.[144]

In this claim, Hobbes inverts the traditional theological order, placing the monarch above the word of God. As Oakeshott notes, for Hobbes, Scripture is "nothing apart from interpretation", and "if the law of God is revealed in Scripture, it is revealed only in an interpretation of Scripture".[145] If the final interpretation of Scripture lay in the hands of the sovereign, then his say has more weight than God's own words, effectually subordinating divine revelation to human authority, turning the Bible into a pliable artifact, subject to sovereign approval. However, the Bible itself affirms that "ye need not that any man teach you" (1 John 2:27 KJV) because the Holy Ghost guides believers

[142] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 505 and 506.
[143] Ibid., p. 320.
[144] Ibid., p. 322.
[145] Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), pp. 52–53.

towards the truth. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes that "whosoever in a Christian Commonwealth holdeth the place of Moses, is the sole Messenger of God, and Interpreter of his Commandements".[146] Following his own reasoning, Hobbes would be required to accept the interpretation of his sovereign. Yet, ironically, a sovereign like King James, whom Hobbes praised and lived under for many years, would have rejected many of Hobbes' interpretations, rendering them void from the Hobbesian point of view.[147] James, although upholding the king's supremacy in legislative and religious affairs like Hobbes, says something different about the interpretation of the Scriptures.[148] In *Basilicon Doron*, he instructs his son Henry to simply interpret Scripture with Scripture, without recommending any appeals to external sources, books or people, "for the Scripture is ever the best interpreter of it selfe".[149] In this way, in contrast to Hobbes, Scripture still retains interpretative authority, even over the highest political office. King James advises the prince, his son, to blame his own incapacity in case he is not able to understand or interpret a portion of Scripture correctly, implicitly admitting the fallibility that even kings and princes are potentially prone to, while at the same time affirming the inerrancy of the Bible.[150] However, another ironic twist remains. In 1604, King James authorized the translation of Scripture from the original Hebrew and Greek into modern English, seemingly placing himself above the sacred text, as translation can be influenced by biases. This historic act, while serving a religious and traditional purpose, confirmed his role as the *lex loquens* (the speaking law) in civil and ecclesiastical affairs.[151] Thus, in accordance with Hobbes' view about the King establishing religion, legitimizing Scripture and making it law, James indeed held not only the highest political position, but also a privileged interpretive position.[152] Nevertheless, unlike Hobbes, the King never claimed exclusive interpretive power, but instead saw his status as an opportunity to fortify and disseminate the Bible's authority.

[146] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 393.
[147] Ibid., p. 161; see Sommerville, Introduction, p. xv.
[148] Sommerville, Introduction, p. xviii.
[149] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 15.
[150] Ibid.
[151] See James, *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, pp. 64, 138, 160, 183, 211.
[152] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 226–227, 429, 430.

Now, this paragraph will examine a previously discussed passage of the Bible, concentrating on the divine right instead of obedience though. As seen in the last chapter of this thesis, an important part of the Bible that Hobbes and James reference is 1 Samuel 8. Regarding this section, James references 1 Timothy 3:16 and he writes:

> That these words, and discourses of Samuel were dited by Gods Spirit, it needs no further probation, but that it is a place of Scripture; since the whole Scripture is dited by that inspiration, as Paul saith: which ground no good Christian will, or dare denie.[153]

This portion of the Scripture from the Old Testament is important to the two political thinkers, since it contains a fundamental story on the origins of monarchy among God's chosen people, the Israelites. The passage on Israel's first monarchy within the Scriptures reads as follows:

> **8** And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. **2** Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba. **3** And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. **4** Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, **5** And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. **6** But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. **7** And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. **8** According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. **9** Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. (1 Samuel 8:1-9 KJV).

[153] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 66–67.

Several things transpire from these verses, and it is worth noting how the two different thinkers underscore certain aspects above others. Hobbes, for instance, does not miss the opportunity to point out how the request from the Israelite people to have a king reign over them was accepted by God (verse 7), underscoring the agency of the *demos*, or the people, in establishing a new form of civil society, rather than it being the outcome of a purely top-down process.[154] The political philosopher writes that "the people of Israel refused any more to have God be their king".[155] This is an astute move on Hobbes' part that does not require a radical reinterpretation of Scripture, as the fact that God consented in giving them a king is itself explicit in the biblical text, especially in verse 7. This narrative is useful to substantiate Hobbes' claim that power and rights are conferred to the sovereign by the consent of the assembled people.[156] This bottom-up mentality resurfaces in other sections of *Leviathan* as well. Hobbes, for example, writes about the people's quasi-democratic revolt several times by claiming that "the Israelites had rejected God" with "the demanding of a king" and "the election of Saul".[157] In fact, besides demonstrating how Scripture speaks about the people's desire to have an earthly king, Hobbes also draws attention on the outright deposition of their Heavenly King (God), who had been their direct ruler before king Saul, ever since Moses, as Hobbes points out various times throughout *Leviathan*.[158]

Like Hobbes, King James quotes 1 Samuel 8 as well, but more so to highlight the fact that God commanded monarchy to become an unshakable and irrevocable yoke once the Israelites accepted it, even if they were to grow tired of their king due to his perceived wickedness or his unjust reign. In fact, after listing the absolute rights of the king (verse 9-17), the concluding verses of 1 Samuel chapter 8 run as follows:

> **18** And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. **19** Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;

[154] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*., p. 339.
[155] Ibid., p. 98.
[156] Ibid., p. 141.
[157] Ibid., pp. 339, 447, 340, 341.
[158] Ibid., pp. 339–341, 507.

> **20** That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles. **21** And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD. **22** And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city. (1 Samuel 8:18-22 KJV).

James does not neglect that the people voluntarily asked for a king, as is made clear in verse 19. Nonetheless, he focuses more on the fact that God allowed for it, still maintaining His authority, and further showcasing it by adding a condition of acceptance and tolerance towards monarchy for all future (Israelite) generations, as seen in verse 18. Indeed, James writes that "they shall not have leave to shake off that yoke, which God through their importunitie hath laide upon them".[159] In this way, King James does not stress or justify the rejection of God by His people as much as Hobbes does.[160] Instead, he criticizes their attitude and defends monarchy, once established, as an imposed condition with no righteous or lawful escape clause in the sight of God.

3.3 Two Worldviews

Although both thinkers acknowledge that the Israelite people verbally accepted monarchy, their interpretations of the political implications differ significantly. According to Hobbes, sovereignty originates out of mutual consent and an artificial agreement instituted among humans; while for James, monarchy is established by God's command, rendering any later revocation contrary to God's will. These differing interpretations reveal an underlying theological split that influences their political convictions. On the one hand, Hobbes' vision of politics is earthly, pragmatic and survival oriented. *Leviathan* marginalizes God and shifts the focus away from metaphysical matters toward physical self-preservation, specifically against the Hobbesian evil of civil war, using an artificial and mortal god, the leviathan, to establish civil peace. This should not come as a surprise, as Hobbes is a strong proponent of the philosophy of materialism. According to this

[159] See James, *The Trew Law*, pp. 66–67.
[160] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 398.

philosophical system, everything in existence is made of matter. As a matter of fact, in chapter 46 of *Leviathan* when tackling the "Errors concerning Abstract Essences", Hobbes writes that "the Universe, that is, the whole masse of all things that are) is Corporeall, that is to say, Body".[161] On the other hand, James retains an extremely God-centric worldview, where the fear of God leads him to eschew sin and vice in himself and in his subjects too. As his *1610 Speech to Parliament* reveals, he believes that "the beginning with him [God] makes all other actions to be blessed", demonstrating his conviction on the importance of prioritizing God above all else.[162] For the King, what mattered in the realm of politics was not simply limited to physical matters and the survival of the flesh, or the body. Certainly, material elements were not completely ignored by James, since the physical protection of his subjects was still considered a crucial duty, as seen in *Basilicon Doron* when discussing internal and foreign injuries, dangers and wars.[163] James was also among one of the first Europeans to expose the dangers of tobacco, which had not been smoked in Europe before being imported from the New World.[164] Additionally, his subjects' emotional state was also important to James, as he believed he was ordained for their "earthly felicity and happiness".[165] Bodily and psychological health were certainly a concern, but the true priority ultimately lay in the spiritual well-being of his nation. In line with his benevolent, paternalistic and pastoral view of kingship, James writes:

> as a loving Father, and careful watchman, caring for them more than for himselfe, knowing himselfe to be ordained for them, and they not for him; and therefore countable to that great God, who placed him as his lieutenant over them, upon the perill of his soule to procure the weal of both soules and bodies, as farre as in him lieth, of all them that are committed to his charge.[166]

This passage from *The Trew Law* perfectly encapsulates his belief about the role and duties of a king. The words "ordained for them", "his lieutenant" and "accountable to that great God" reveal how ingrained the theory of the divine right is in his mind. James

[161] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 561.
[162] James, *1610 Speech*, p. 199.
[163] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 32.
[164] See King James, *A Covnterblaste To Tobacco*, in *The Workes of the Most High and Mightie Prince, Iames* (London: Robert Barker and John Bill, 1616), p. 214.
[165] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 84.
[166] Ibid., p. 65.

himself affirmed that "books are vive Idees of the authors minde".[167] Interestingly, he saw his function as a promoter of the prosperity of the bodies and of the souls of his subjects, whom he considers his children, his family, his flock, his wife, his body, his patients, while he identified himself as a god, a father of the fatherland, a shepherd, a loving husband, a head, a physician, in the same way God relates to Christians.[168] From here, therefore, we can see why he considered monarchy to be the pattern of divinity, as the relationship between the king and his subjects was seen as an earthly image of the spiritual relationship between the Lord and believers. While Hobbes' greatest fear was civil war and "violent death", James feared God, an invisible power, above all.[169] The latter moreover believed that, as Solomon said, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10 KJV).[170] Being a monarch, he believed that if he sinned or became a hypocritical tyrant he inevitably would have received a worse punishment on earth from God compared to others lower on the hierarchy.[171] Thus, compared to the cold and materialistic view that Hobbes subscribed to, James was careful to keep God as a central protagonist in earthly matters like politics. He strove for a blameless conduct and upheld a political philosophy rooted in spiritual stewardship, righteousness and the eternal welfare of his subjects' souls.

Having looked at how political order mirrors divine order, we can move on to a schism between James' religious fervor and Hobbes' secular mindset. Being zealous for Religion, James was very much grieved by the possibility that men were "falling away from Religion" in his days.[172] On the contrary, what stands out in Hobbes' written work is his secularization of politics. To demonstrate this phenomenon, Hobbes relies on the biblical account of the transition from the theocracy of the Israelites, starting with Moses and the decentralized system of judges, to Israel's first monarchy with King Saul. He recalls this narrative to substantiate his claim that the kingdom of God was interrupted on earth the moment the Israelites revolted by asking Samuel for an earthly king.[173] This means that,

[167] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 9.
[168] See James, *1610 Speech*, p. 181; *The Trew Law*, p. 77; *Basilicon Doron*, p. 25; *1604 Speech*, p. 136.
[169] See Berns, *History of Political Philosophy*, p. 399.
[170] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 13.
[171] See Ibid., p. 12; *1610 Speech*, p. 183.
[172] James, *1616 Speech in Star Chamber*, pp. 223 and 227.
[173] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 340.

after the events of 1 Samuel 8, no present kingdom on earth could rightfully claim to be the kingdom of God, like in the case of the Holy See, or the Roman Catholic institution. Hobbes writes that the kingdom of God is His civil sovereignty over a peculiar people by pact or covenant.[174] He uses many different verses to repeatedly prove that God's kingdom has been interrupted and that it is going to be restored in the future, which is why Jesus exhorted believers to pray for His kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2), inferring that it did not continue after the election of Saul.[175] Furthermore, Hobbes claims that the kingdom of God is literally "a real, not a metaphorical, kingdom", as taken in both the Old and New Testament.[176] To show that God was the King of their commonwealth before Saul, Hobbes uses 1 Samuel 12:12 which says: "... ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king".[177] Besides Samuel, Hobbes also mentions other Old Testament prophets, who predict the restitution of God's kingdom on earth.[178] Isaiah 24:23, Micah 4:7, and Ezekiel 20:33 all foretell the Lord's future physical reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, specific geographic locations upon the earth. Strikingly, Hobbes reinterprets and expands Ezekiel 20:37 to read as follows:

> I will reign over you, and make you to stand to that Covenant which you made with me by Moses, and brake in your rebellion against me in the days of Samuel, and in your election of another King.[179]

Moreover, Hobbes also cites verses from the New Testament, such as Luke 1:32-33, John 19:19 and Acts 17:7, to prove the future restoration of a literal Kingdom of God on earth.[180] Hobbes' emphasis on the covenant between men and God emerges from the interpretation of these verses. He holds that the covenant had been broken in the days of Samuel, when the people requested a king to be like the heathen nations. In the Conclusion of *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes:

---

[174] Ibid., pp. 277, 337.
[175] Ibid., p. 340.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid., p. 339.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid., pp. 339–340.
[180] Ibid., p. 340.

> In the 35. Chapter [of *Leviathan*], I have sufficiently declared out of the Scripture, that in the Common-wealth of the Jewes, God himselfe was made Soveraign, by Pact with the People; who were therefore called his Peculiar People, to distinguish them from the rest of the world, over whom God reigned not by their Consent, but by his own Power. And that in this Kingdome Moses was Gods Lieutenant on Earth; and that it was he that told them what Laws God appointed them to be ruled by.[181]

Once again, Hobbes highlights the pact, or covenant, and mediator instrumental in establishing the state. Importantly, in the section of *Leviathan* called "Of the Kingdom of Darkness", Hobbes makes a distinction between the present Church and the Kingdom of Christ.[182] This was a blow against the Pope's claim to power, since Hobbes argued that he erroneously pretended "the present Church to be, as the realme of Israel, the Kingdom of God".[183] Unlike the Roman church, Hobbes contended that the Kingdom of God on earth, or "that peculiar government of God", started with Moses and ended with Saul, and that it would have eventually restarted with Jesus on earth at judgement day.[184] In this context, Hobbes writes: "But a spiritual commonwealth there is non in this world; for it is the same thing as the kingdom of Christ, which He Himself saith is not of this world, but shall be in the next world, at the Resurrection".[185] Famously, Jesus himself told Pontious Pilate, the governor of Judea, "my kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), and Hobbes did not fail to quote this in support of his position.[186]

Hobbes' secularization is also evident in his attempt to subordinate religion to politics. He relies on biblical passages to prove that even Scripture itself places priests at a lower level than their earthly king.[187] However, though a monarch, James did not elevate himself above everything, rather elevating God and following His word for all political and religious matters. For him, the highest authority on earth was Scripture. He was not a

[181] Ibid., p. 592.
[182] Ibid., p. 508.
[183] Ibid., p. 509.
[184] Ibid., pp. 396, 507, 516, 523.
[185] Ibid., p. 484.
[186] Ibid. p. 427.
[187] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 478.

Roman Catholic, but the king did not stress the subordination of religion to politics nor the interruption of the Kingdom of God as much as Hobbes did. In his *Trew Law*, one can observe how much the Old Testament still mattered for James for his current reign. There, he writes:

> Now then, since the erection of this Kingdome and Monarchie among the Iewes, and the law thereof may, and ought to bee a paterne to all Christian and well founded Monarchies, as beeing founded by God himselfe, who by his Oracle, and out of his owne mouth gave the law thereof.[188]

Whereas Hobbes secularized politics, using Scripture as a tool to support civil peace, James sacralized governance, subordinating politics to God's word. The latter thinker believed monarchy, as instituted in Israel, still remained a divinely ordained structure to his day. In contrast to Hobbes' postponed kingdom of God and his advocacy for the secular origin of political legitimacy, James did not see monarchy as a human convention, but rather as a continuation of divine rule. In his *1616 Speech in the Starre-Chamber*, the king stated:

> From this imitation of GOD and CHRIST, in whose Throne wee sit, the government of all Common-wealths, and especially Monarchies, hath bene from the beginning setled and established. Kings are properly Iudges, and Iudgement properly belongs to them from GOD: for Kings sit in the Throne of GOD, and thence all Iudgement is derived.[189]

This part of James' speech fits his will to spiritualize politics. Here, unlike Hobbes, he implies continuity instead of rupture, seeing present kings as spiritual successors sitting on the throne of God on earth and ruling over God's new chosen people, i.e., Christians. Furthermore, he underscores how monarchs derived their role as judges from God, again reinforcing the permanence and divine origin of civil authority.

Besides contributing to the secularization of politics, Hobbes also championed egalitarianism. In his *Leviathan*, when discussing the natural condition of mankind, he

[188] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 70.
[189] James, *1616 Speech*, p. 205.

introduced the radical notion of natural equality. This concept lacked the popularity it has nowadays, especially given the Aristotelian and Platonic anti-democratic sentiments that prevailed in past Western intellectual circles.[190] In chapter XIII, "Of the Naturall Condition of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery", in the first part of *Leviathan*, Hobbes famously wrote:

> Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of the body, and mind; as that though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself.[191]

This passage is a testament to Hobbes' innovative thinking. Firstly, Hobbes writes that nature, the creation, and not God, was actually responsible for human equality, turning nature itself into an active maker. Attributing a god-like attribute to nature, a femine, passive and created being, he stripped agency away from God, the masculine Creator. Though not directly related to Scripture, this egalitarian view goes hand in hand with the secular foundation of politics. Fascinatingly, in a way, Hobbes was also a forerunner of the social construct theory, since he claimed that artificial civil lawes produce hierarchies and inequality.[192] So, while in the state of nature and of war humans are relatively equal and highly similar to each other, both physically and mentally, after the establishment of an artificial commonwealth this is not the case anymore. Essentially, natural equality subsequently turns into conventional and artificial, or unnatural, inequality. This is an important aspect that must be noted, because Hobbes' egalitarian thought indirectly erodes James' concept of divine right. In fact, according to this latter theory, the right to rule is not only by God, but by blood! We can clearly see this being the case according to James' own words. For example, in 1605 he claimed that God and blood legitimized him

[190] Berns, *History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 399, 403.
[191] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 100.
[192] Ibid., p. 125.

as king, rather than equal men and a contract between them.[193] In those days, and for millennia before, this had been the common practice. Monarchy was hereditary, besides being accepted as divinely ordained. James purportedly wrote an entire book (*Basilicon Doron*) dedicated to his descendant, Henry, who was heir to the throne solely by virtue of being his own firstborn male son. Hence, in contrast to Hobbesian reasoning, in his written material, James evinces a traditional, patriarchal, and deeply inegalitarian view. Natural inequality was not just related to civil status or the difference between God and man, but even between humans themselves, men and women, classes, and even kin. In fact, James wrote: "But consider that vertue followeth oftest noble blood: the worthiness of their antecessors craveth a reverent regard to be had unto them".[194] And again: "ye shall oft finde vertue follow noble races, as I have said before speaking of the Nobilitie".[195] As seen in *Basilicon Doron*, when discussing what type of men to hire as servants in the court, James stresses the importance of choosing virtuous people from good families and out of a noble stock or lineage without a history vices. With a classist, if not almost racialist and eugenic, rhetoric, James writes:

> it is most certaine, that vertue or vice will oftentimes, with the heritage, be transferred from the parents to the posteritie, and runne on a blood (as the Proverbe is) the sickenesse of the minde becoming as kindly to some races, as these sickenesses of the body, that infect in the seede: Especially choose such minors as are come of a trew and honest race, and have not had the house whereof they are descended, infected with falshood.[196]

This genetic component is crucial to his politics, along with Scripture. Though the Bible contains some universalist and egalitarian principles, it also warrants kingship by bloodline and hereditary succession, as observed throughout many Old Testament books. Additionally, the Scriptures frequently make stark distinctions between collectives, nations, individuals, sexes, and moral standing in the sight of God. Blood and Scripture are pillars of James' thought, culminating in a long-term and generational view of politics. In *The Trew Law*, he claims:

---

[193] James, *1605 Speech*, p. 147.
[194] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 29.
[195] Ibid., p. 37.
[196] Ibid., p. 35.

> And it is here likewise to be noted, that the duty and alleageance, which the people sweareth to their prince, is not only bound to themselves, but likewise to their lawful heires and posterity, the lineall succession of crowns being begun among the people of God, and happily continued in divers christian common-wealths.[197]

Thus, his view was all-encompassing, as it considered every age, past, present and future. His generational outlook correlated to an eternal and spiritual approach to political affairs. Nevertheless, it simultaneously humbled him, as he inevitably perceived himself as but a small link in the providential long chain of time and kings, charged with caring for his "posteritie for ever".[198]

This paragraph will now examine another major discrepancy between James and Hobbes related to human beings. Besides egalitarianism, individualism also covertly eroded traditional politics and the principle of the divine right. For James, the concept of generation (a word of Greek origin) was not exclusively related to time, but also to collective groups of people. By contrast, Hobbes holds a pessimistic and "an individualistic reading of human nature", seeing humans in the state of nature as atomized individuals at war against each other.[199] When they unite, it is primarily due to the selfish necessity of securing a safer existence. According to Berns, Hobbes denies that men are naturally social or political creatures.[200] Additionally, Hobbes concentrates on the present more than James. A reason for this could be Hobbes' belief about the afterlife. Whereas James only sees two eternal possibilities, heaven and hell, Hobbes does not believe in an eternal condition of torment for the unsaved.[201] In Part IV of *Leviathan*, i.e., "Of The Kingdom of Darkness", he states: "I can find no where that sayth man shall live in torments Everlastingly".[202] This annihilationist view of his downplays the risk and severity of hell, reducing the fear of it, and shifting focus away from God, the afterlife and spiritual matters, towards mankind, the present and the physical realm. In fact, "eternal [spiritual] death then turns out to be not so much, if at all, worse than natural

[197] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 82.
[198] James, *1607 Speech*, p. 166.
[199] Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, p. 133; see pp. 64–67.
[200] Berns, *History of Political Philosophy*, p. 398–399.
[201] James, *Basilicon Doron*, p. 49.
[202] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 522.

[physical] death".[203] Hobbes' belief is unorthodox since hell had traditionally been considered a place of fiery and everlasting punishment (Matthew 5:41, Matthew 5:46). In his *1604 Speech to Parliament*, James talks about the importance of winning souls to God and upholding the true Religion and biblical doctrine for the sake of the souls of his subjects.[204] Therefore, all things considered, it is safe to say that while on the one hand Hobbes is egalitarian, individualist and secular, James is an elitist, a collectivist and a religious thinker.

This paragraph now turns to the similarities between Hobbes and James. In fact, despite all the substantial differences discussed above, the two converged on several key political conclusions, albeit reaching them from contrasting premises and assumptions. As is often the case, the picture is more nuanced than a simple black-and-white division. Both thinkers display complexity in their thinking, each offering rich and multifaceted visions of politics. In seeming contradiction with other parts of *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes:

> The Monarch, or the Soveraign Assembly only hath immediate Authority from God, to teach and instruct the people; and no man but the Soveraign, receiveth his power *Dei gratiâ* [by the grace of God] simply; that is to say, from the favour of none but God: All other, receive theirs from the favour and providence of God, and their Soveraigns; as in a Monarchy *Dei gratiâ & Regis* [by the grace of God and the king]; or *Dei providentiâ & voluntate Regis* [by the providence of God and the will of the king].[205]

In his attempt to subordinate external and internal religious leaders like the pope and English bishops to the king, Hobbes simultaneously promotes a veiled version of divine right. Here, Hobbes outright claims that the sovereign receives his power by the grace or from the favour of God alone. To further underscore the king's supremacy over any other religious figure, Hobbes emphasizes the king's role as the only mediator between God and men, as a bridge connecting the transcendent to the physical realm. Moses is brought

---

[203] Berns, *History of Political Philosophy*, p. 419.
[204] James, *1604 Speech*, p. 141; King James VI & I, *A Meditation upon the 27. 28. 29. Verses of the XXVII. Chapter of Saint Matthew: Or a Paterne for a Kings Inauguration*, in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 237.
[205] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 198; see p. 610.

up by Hobbes as an example of a mediator, or *pontifex* in the etymological sense, between the Lord and the people.[206] Hobbes claims that a covenant with God requires "mediation of somebody that representeth God's person; which none doeth but God's lieutenant, who hath the sovereignty under God".[207] This traditional rhetoric nearly resembles James' stance. For the sake of clarity, in another attempt to subjugate pastors and bishops to the sovereign, Hobbes says:

> But the King, and every other Soveraign, executeth his Office of Supreme Pastor, by immediate Authority from God, that is to say, *in Gods right*, or *Jure Divino*. And therefore none but Kings can put into their Titles (a mark of their submission to God onely) *Dei gratiâ Rex, &c*. Bishops ought to say in the beginning of their Mandates, *By the favour of the Kings Majesty, Bishop of such a Diocesse*; or as Civil Ministers, *In His Majesties name*. For in saying, *Divinâ providentiâ*, which is the same with *Dei gratiâ*, though disguised, they deny to have received their authority from the Civill State; and sliely slip off the Collar of their Civill Subjection, contrary to the unity and defence of the Common-wealth.[208]

This passage above sheds light on various aspects of Hobbes' thinking. First, Hobbes is not just referring to a specific Christian king, but to "every sovereign". Second, he claims that all sovereigns are supreme pastors, so they have political and religious supremacy within their realm, regardless of their faith. Third, astonishingly, he strategically endorses the divine right of kings here, stating that the king's authority and power derive from God; he even uses the words "in God's right" and "*jure divino*". Fourth, he condemns sly persons who usurp authority by using illegitimate titles. Last but not least, in the last sentence of the passage quoted above, Hobbes' recurrent concern re-emerges, as he writes about the threat posed against "the unity and defence of the Commonwealth".

As Hobbes shares some similarities with James, the latter also crosses into Hobbesian territory on occasion. In fact, in *The Trew Law*, the King acknowledges the secular origin of political sovereignty:

---

[206] Ibid., p. 167.
[207] Ibid., p. 142.
[208] Ibid., p. 453.

> Although it be trew (according to the affirmation of those that pryde themselves to be the scourges of Tyrants) that in the first begging of Kings rising among Gentiles, in the time of the first aage, divers commonwealths and societies of men choosed out one among themselves, who for his vertues and valour, being more eminent than the rest, was chosen out by them, and set up in that roome, to maintaine the weakest in their right, to throw downe oppressours, and to foster and continue the societie among men; which could not otherwise, but by vertue of that univitie be wel done: yet these examples are nothing pertinent to us; because our Kingdome and divers other Monarchies are not in that case, but had their beginning in a farre contrary fashion.[209]

From this passage, it is evident that James recognizes the historical fact that in some areas, at least in Gentile nations, kings had been legitimized democratically by an artificial source, since men gathered together and chose the best leader based on his merits. However, he holds that this had neither been the case in his United Kingdom nor in many other kingdoms. Just a few sentences later, he says that in his country a wise king had come in among the "barbares" (barbarians), first establishing the state and form of government, and making laws afterwards.[210] On James' part, this historical realism is an admission of the non-divine foundation of monarchy, with a strong figure bringing law and order out of barbaric confusion, somewhat resembling Hobbes' narrative on the chaotic state of nature/war and the establishment of a leviathan or sovereign. Thus, while James strongly defends the divine right, he at least implicitly concedes that political order arises out of necessity and strength, which resembles the Hobbesian depiction of the transition from the state of nature to civil society.

We can also observe how the story of David and Saul, besides forbidding regicide, also supports the divine right of kings. Having already seen how David exemplifies godly obedience in his dynamic with Saul, it is also fundamental to realize that his kingship serves as a model for both Hobbes and King James, revealing once again the nuanced overlap between the two's political thought. Hobbes references 1 Samuel 16:13-14, where

[209] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 72–73.
[210] Ibid., p. 73.

David was anointed king, while the right to reign left Saul.[211] Once again he propagates the theory of divine right, saying: "God giving his graces to him whom He chose to govern His people, and taking them away from him [Saul] whom He rejected".[212] King James also references this same biblical story, writing that "Saul was chosen by God for his virtue, and meet qualities to governe his people" and that "the election of that King lay absolutely and immediatly in Gods hand".[213] In addition to his election, James writes that "God had declared his reprobation [rejection] unto him", further demonstrating how the right to rule, or not, was ordained from God above.[214] Moreover, on the very same page, James claims twice that God was the one who gave them a king and that it was wrong to oppose God's ordinance and shake off His yoke.[215] James basically attributes all the power to God, claiming that without His permission and ordinance they could not have obtained a king, and that only God had the power to make him or unmake (remove) him.[216] These statements denounce rebellion against the king and they frame humans as powerless compared to their heavenly Creator. Like Hobbes, James mentions Saul's dethroning. Firstly, referencing 1 Samuel chapter 15, he writes: "when Samuel by God's command pronounced to the same king Saul, that his kingdom was rent from him, and given to another [David]".[217] And secondly, he references 1 Samuel chapter 24: "And David, notwithstanding hee was inaugurate in that same degraded King's roome".[218] James' *Star Chamber Speech* shows that he believes that "Kings borrow their power from God", describing a clear chain of command with God at the top of the hierarchy, and the king, whether David, Solomon or James himself, placed right below Him on the divinely ordained pyramid.[219] In addition to David's godliness, James praises Solomon's wisdom as an example to follow in ruling and serving God.[220] And, lastly, the King appeals to several verses written by holy men of God to justify his Christian monarchy and the divine right:

---

[211] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 356.
[212] Ibid.
[213] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 67.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., p. 67–68.
[216] Ibid., p. 68
[217] Ibid., p. 70.
[218] Ibid.
[219] James, *Speech in Star Chamber*, p. 206.
[220] Ibid.

> Kings are called Gods by the propheticall King David, because they sit upon GOD his Throne in the earth, and have the count of their administration to give unto him. Their office is, *To minister Iustice and Iudgement to the people*, as the same David saith: *To advance the good, and punish the evill*, as he likewise saith: *To establish good Lawes to his people, and procure obedience to the same* as divers good Kings of Iudah did: *To procure the peace of the people*, as the same David saith: *To decide all controversies that can arise among them*, as Salomon did: *To be the Minister of God for the weale of them that doe well, and as the minister of God, to take vengeance upon them that doe evil*, as S. Paul saith. And finally, *As a good Pastour, to goe out and in before his people* as is said in the first [book] of Samuel: *That through the Princes prosperitite, the peoples peace may be procured*, as Ieremie saith.[221]

As the end notes of his *Political Writings* make clear, in this passage James references Psalms 82:6, Psalms 101 twice, 2 Kings 18, 2 Chronicles 29, 2 Kings 22 and 23, 2 Chronicles 34 and 35, Psalms 72, 1 Kings 3, Romans 13:4, 1 Samuel 8 and Jeremiah 29.[222] So, in just a few sentences, he showers his readers with a stack of miscellaneous appeals to Scriptures from the Old Testament and the New Testament related to monarchy. In the King's own words, Scripture is used herein to lay down "the trew grounds of the mutuall duetie, and alleageance betwixt a free and absolute Monarche, and his people".[223]

In conclusion, the contrast between Hobbes and King James VI & I on the source and purpose of government mirrors a deeper divide between a more atheistic or materialistic worldview and a traditional Christian one. Hobbes' promotion of a rational and pacifistic man-made covenant conflicts with James' zealous faith in the divine right of kings. The former underscores the secularization of politics from an egalitarian and individualist lens, while the latter opposes it. However, despite these intellectual conflicts, their common reliance on Scripture stands out the most throughout their written works. Their

[221] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 64.
[222] *King James VI and I Political Writings*, "Notes to pp. 62–85," p. 283.
[223] James, *The Trew Law*, p. 64.

extensive usage of the Bible testifies to its dominance and its perceived authority in their time and country, still shaping early modern political thought. Moreover, their rhetoric overlaps at times, especially when describing the role of the sovereign, rebellion and the irrevocability of sovereignty. Ultimately, however, their visions on monarchy diverge quite significantly: one generated from a contract among equal individuals, and the other ordained from God above and imposed on unequal people within a particular generation and bound to a certain collective. Thus, in sum, their divergent doctrines reveal not only two theories of governance, but two fundamentally different visions of man, power, and God.

4. Conclusion: Divine Order or Human Design?

This thesis started by exploring how two early modern thinkers, King James VI & I and Thomas Hobbes, employed Scripture to justify their different models of political authority. On the one hand, throughout his parliamentary speeches and his written works, James claimed that his authority and the authority of other kings derived from God above, being handed down through the centuries by royal bloodline. On the other hand, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes departed from traditional political thought, arguing instead that the people below were the ultimate source of the sovereign's power and legitimacy. Therefore, the principal divergence between the two then can be summarized in the clash between the theory of the divine right and the social contract theory. This distinction reflected a broader divide between faith and atheism, which ultimately contributed to the secularization and demystification of politics. However, Hobbes and James did not entirely disagree. For instance, both of them stressed the crucial duty of subjects to obey their earthly king, who was meant to hold temporal (political) and ecclesiastic (religious) power simultaneously. Nowadays, Western political systems have followed the footsteps of Hobbes more than James' by firmly adopting the idea of a social contract, underscoring the importance of the consent of humans in the decision-making process. In liberal democratic orders, the legitimacy of the ruling class has a secular basis. Additionally, in contrast with James' thought, and even Hobbes', the strict separation of church and state has now become a cherished accomplishment in liberal democracies. Overall, this thesis demonstrated a threefold process from a traditional and God-centered approach all the way to our modern worldview, where God's involvement in politics has been marginalized significantly, with Hobbes representing a middle step between these two historical phases.

What stands out most from *James Political Writings* and *Leviathan* is the central role that Scripture played for both thinkers. This centrality reflected the values of their culture, a context where the Bible was not only considered a guide for one's personal life, but also for all other affairs, including political ones. To put it succinctly, faith meant a great deal

for the individual and the collective, in the private and the public spheres of life. Both thinkers exalted Scripture, but while James submitted to it, Hobbes reinterpreted it to support his own political system. The former's genuine devotion towards God is evident throughout his written material, in which he dared not depart from biblical teachings, at least not intentionally. Conversely, Hobbes exhibited a more materialistic and atheistic approach to the interpretation of Scripture. From this differing ideological starting point, differences were bound to follow. While James held that Scripture was the best interpreter of itself, keeping it as the highest authority on earth, Hobbes wrote that the sovereign decided its meaning and canonized it, effectively placing a mortal man above God's everlasting words. To use another example, James identified himself as God's lieutenant on earth, authorized by birth and divine will; Hobbes, instead, saw monarchy as a construct born out of a mutual contract and driven by the fear of the war of every man against every man. Unlike James, the latter writer repeatedly stressed the interruption of God's kingdom in the world, arguing that political legitimacy came from the people, the *demos*. Furthermore, Hobbes subordinated divine (natural) law to civil power, while James upheld the law of God, as found in the Bible, above all artificial laws.

Another recognized element is the recurring presence of nuance and interpretive ironies. For instance, Hobbes claimed that only the sovereign could interpret or legitimize Scripture; yet James (his praised king) would have denounced many of Hobbes' interpretations of Scripture, let alone disagree with some of his political views. This aspect reveals a possible underlying flaw in *Leviathan*, since even Hobbes himself failed to meet his own standard of passive acceptance and absolute obedience to his "most wise king".[224] According to Owen, "Hobbes presents his own doctrine of salvation, prophecy, miracles, the authority of Scripture and of the clergy. Hobbes may grant the sovereign great latitude with respect to religious policy, but Hobbesian Christianity has its own distinct catechism".[225] Thus, in light of his theological innovations, Hobbes did not adhere to the principle of complete submission to the sovereign's religious authority. The second irony relates to James from the Hobbesian perspective. In fact, this king authorized the

[224] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 161.
[225] Owen, *Making Religion Safe for Society*, p. 41.

translation of the Old Testament and the New Testament into Early Modern English, demonstrating how he was temporarily above the inspired word of God, in line with Hobbes' thinking. However, James tried to humbly submit himself to its content, whether it was found in his newer Authorized Version of 1611 or in older versions of the Bible. For King James, God's word prevailed as supreme in his life. Certainly, James saw himself as higher than any other living human in his dominion, yet he maintained humility relative to Scripture. What emerges from these ironies is the tension at the heart of early modern political philosophy: the struggle to reconcile human sovereignty with divine authority. James and Hobbes both viewed Scripture as a foundational cornerstone, yet their opposing assumptions led them down different paths. In doing so, they marked two stages of a broader cultural transformation. One with God ruling above kings, and the other with kings above God. This shift, still visible in our day, invites modern readers to wonder if the fruits of God's growing absence from public life have been positive or negative.

An underlying sentiment that permeates their theories is fear. Hobbes' political thought broke with tradition as it sought to establish and keep peace and security at all costs, even at the expense of biblical morality. Unlike many of his religious counterparts, like King James, Hobbes calibrated the discussion in such a way as to foster fear of insecurity and violent death, a very primal and tangible peril, shifting the focus away from the fear of invisible entities, or "imaginary powers"[226], such as spirits, angels and devils, towards fear of the leviathan.[227] Laurence Berns acknowledge the importance of this emotion in Hobbes' work, describing it as "the most powerful passion".[228] This element is also seen in James' biblical political thought; however, the object of his fear was far different compared to Hobbes'. In fact, above all, he promoted reverence and fear towards God, an invisible being. And yet, in a seeming paradox, James simultaneously promoted love towards God. Additionally, he firmly believed that witchcraft was a sin worthy of death (Exodus 22:18) and that he had to actively oppose dark spiritual forces. For instance, according to Godfrey Davies, James believed that his Danish bride, Anne, was hindered

[226] Ibid., p. 24–25.
[227] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 112.
[228] Berns, *History of Political Philosophy*, p. 399.

from voyaging towards Great Britain because of storms caused by witches.[229] In contrast to Hobbes' materialism, in 1597 King James wrote a book called *Daemonologie* (*Demonology*) where he emphasized the devil's influence, warning his readers about spiritual warfare and the grave dangers of sorcery. In the preface, he wrote "against the damnable opinions" of maintaining "the old error of the Sadducees, in denying spirits".[230] To explore the more profound significance of their opposing views, three thought experiments will be presented to draw out further theological implications behind each political model.

First, assuming the veracity of Scripture, or believing that it is the inerrant written word of an infallible God, then James' exegesis and interpretation thereof, along with his consequent political model, are more consistent with the Bible as a whole. In contrast, Hobbes frequently twisted Scripture in strange new ways to suit his ends, disregarding context and supplanting the fear of God with the fear of man. For someone who trusts in the full divine inspiration of Scripture and holds to the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, siding with James and his divine right monarchy is the more coherent choice. Simply put, to live in accordance with one's Christian faith and avoid cognitive dissonance, a faithful believer would, in theory, be willing to obey a Christian monarch who rules thanks to the divine right and his lineage.

Second, if the ultimate goal of politics is civil peace, then even if Scripture were not true, simply following the Bible collectively would result in an obedient population striving for an upright conduct, motivated by the fear of God's alleged punishments. Selling divine right to the masses would be a noble lie at best and pure deception at worst; but, in either case, such a falsehood, if believed, would be practical in fostering acceptance of the hierarchy in place. Moreover, this pragmatism ties into another debate, namely, whether the fear of God and the afterlife is stronger than the fear of physical death to keep the masses in line. The risk of the Hobbesian secular basis is twofold: on one hand, humans

[229] Godfrey Davies, "The Character of James VI and I," *Hungtinton Library Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (October 1941): 41.
[230] King James I, *Daemonologie* (1597; reprint, Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1597), p. 1.

are generally considered inferior to God, thus a man-made system legitimized by less powerful creatures would be seen as having a weaker foundation; secondly, a secular basis could be seen as flimsy since it gives men more agency than God, potentially making them even more prideful. As a result, contrary to its intended purpose, weakening divine right gives way to greater instability, moral decay, and pride among men. Therefore, even if Scripture were false, widespread belief in it and the fear of God would still result in greater humility, discipline, and order. The problem, then, is not religion itself, but the failure to implement the Bible correctly.

Third, a person might ask himself if he would rather live as a subject under the rulership of the Hobbesian leviathan or King James. Though Hobbes acknowledged that it was in the sovereign's best interest to have strong subjects, he also promoted despotism by attacking the distinction between tyranny and monarchy under the guise of perpetual peace and unity.[231] On the other hand, though heavily paternalistic, King James upheld the distinction between a bad king and a good king, striving to be on the right side of the spectrum. Now, granted that the answer to the aforementioned question may be a matter of subjective preference (a potential cause of instability), it is still worth answering: which of the two is the lesser evil? With the excuse of securing order and safety, the frightening leviathan, a god-like sovereign, could freely sin and crush individual liberties. Even though this might have been the case under James as well, at the very least, his rulership was not deliberately characterized by a disregard of ethics for the sake of peace. As all humans, rulers or not, King James was flawed and imperfect, but guided by the ideals of virtue, spiritual duty and moral leadership. Instead, while efficient for those who are afraid of violent physical death, Hobbes' amoral system is potentially cruel, soulless and godless.

At first glance, the comparison between Thomas Hobbes and King James VI & I might seem unnecessary, since the debate between human and divine authority could be seen as settled, with the divine right representing a legacy of a bygone era, an outdated way of

[231] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 153 and 591.

thinking now overcome by modern societies. However, today, the issues they raise are returning to the center of political and cultural reflection. On the one hand, the increasing faith in science, along with the spread of atheism and agnosticism, has led much of the Western world to reject faith in God or the Bible, in turn weakening the concept of divine authority as the foundation of law and politics. Nevertheless, alongside rationality, secularization has also produced a moral vacuum, cultural relativism, and polarization. On the other hand, religion has by no means disappeared. In many regions of the world, Scripture continues to shape collective identity and political dynamics. In parallel, anti-democratic sentiments are spreading, especially among the youth. More and more young people no longer believe in democracy as an ideal model of government. Some recent studies, like the one from Foa and Mounk, demonstrate a growing openness towards military and authoritarian regimes, provided they guarantee stability and security.[232] In this context, the question comes up again: if forced to accept a non-democratic form of government, which would be preferable? A principled ruler guided by a sense of spiritual responsibility, like James, or a secular despot, like the Hobbesian one? Even in the 21st century, what appears to be a dispute buried in history actually turns out to be a relevant choice between power rooted in what is believed to be eternal and one founded on the physical.

In conclusion, this thesis showed a discrepancy between two conceptions of sovereignty and a crossroads between two worldviews: a spiritual and faith-based one against a secular and unbelieving one. This study has sought to show how Scripture has been used in opposite ways by two important thinkers: as a foundation by James, and as a tool by Hobbes. Yet, the stakes are not merely theoretical. In an age where authority's moral and spiritual foundations are being challenged, the choice between divine and artificial sovereignty comes up again in new but no less decisive forms. Perhaps, after all, what we fear most – God or death – will always determine the kind of leader we choose to follow.

[232] Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Danger of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (July 2016): 5-17.

Bibliography

Berns, Laurence. “Thomas Hobbes.” In *History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, 3rd ed., 409-428. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Davies, Godfrey. “The Character of James VI and I.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (October 1941): 33-63.

Foa, Roberto Stefan, and Yascha Mounk. “The Danger of Deconsolidation.” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 5–17.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Christopher Brooke. London: Penguin Classics, 2017.

James VI and I. *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*, in *The Workes of the Most High and Mightie Prince, Iames*, 214-223. London: Robert Barker and John Bill, 1616. Accessed May 16, 2025: https://archive.org/details/workesofmosthigh00jame/page/214/mode/1up.

James VI and I. *Daemonologie*. Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1597.

James VI and I. *King James VI and I: Political Writings*. Edited by Johann P. Sommerville. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

King James Bible Online. “King James Bible Anniversary.” Accessed May 10, 2025. https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/King-James-Bible-Anniversary/.

Mansfield, Harvey C. Jr. “Hobbes and the Science of Indirect Government.” *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 1 (March 1971): 97-110.

Oakeshott, Michael. *Hobbes on Civil Association*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000.

Owen, Judd. *Making Religion Safe for Democracy: Transformation from Hobbes to Tocqueville*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Wormald, Jenny. “James VI and I: Two Kings or One?” *History* 68, no. 223 (1983): 188-209

The Holy Bible, King James Version. Thomas Nelson, 1987.