Hobbes on Representation

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I

Thomas Hobbes, according to Hanna Pitkin in her classic work *The Concept of Representation*, provides us with ‘the first extended and systematic discussion of representation in English’.¹ It is in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, she has since claimed, that we encounter ‘the first examination of the idea of representation in political theory’.² Lucien Jaume in his more recent book on representative government speaks in similar terms. He too begins with *Leviathan*, and he too maintains that Hobbes ‘is the first philosopher to define a concept of representation’ and place it at the heart of a theory of government.³

These judgments seem to me to offer a doubly misleading impression of Hobbes’s achievement. In the first place they are far from historically accurate. By the time Hobbes published *Leviathan* in 1651, a number of English political writers had already developed a fully-fledged theory of representative government. Furthermore, they had put their theory to revolutionary use in the course of the 1640s to challenge the government of King Charles I and eventually to legitimise the conversion of England into a republic or ‘free state’ in 1649. My other criticism is that the judgments I have quoted give a distorted view of Hobbes’s own project in *Leviathan*. Far from enunciating a theory of political representation for the first time, what Hobbes is doing in *Leviathan* is presenting a critical commentary on a range of existing theories, especially those put forward by the parliamentarian opponents of the Stuart monarchy at the beginning of the English civil wars.⁴

To support these claims, I shall need to begin by speaking at some length about the parliamentarian writers of the English revolution, and thus about a number of political theorists who are scarcely household names. This being so, I perhaps need to emphasise that I do not take myself, in the first half of these remarks, to be providing mere ‘background’ to the understanding of Hobbes’s thought. Rather I am trying to question any strong distinction between the background of partisan political tracts on the one hand and Hobbes’s systematic works of political philosophy on the other. One way of summarising my argument would be to say that I am trying to illustrate the extent to which *Leviathan* is itself a partisan political tract, albeit a large and ambitious one.

II

The opponents of Charles I’s government first began to put into print their theory of representative government in the months surrounding the outbreak of civil
war in the Autumn of 1642. A number of legal writers contributed to the debate, notably Henry Parker and William Prynne, as did a large circle of divines, including John Goodwin, Charles Herle, Philip Hunton and William Bridge. To this roll-call must be added an extensive group of propagandists who have remained anonymous, among them the authors of such remarkable tracts as *Maximes Unfolded* and *A Soveraigne Salve*, both of which were published in the spring of 1643.5

I shall mainly focus on the most original and penetrating of these theorists, Henry Parker, whose principal treatise, *Observations upon some of his Majesties late Answers and Expresses*, was first published in July 1642. Like the clerical writers who followed his lead, Parker saw himself as needing to confront and deal with a recrudescence of the theory of the divine right of kings. According to this vision of politics, the existing social and political fabric is directly ordained by God. To challenge any part of it is therefore tantamount to challenging the divine will. As Charles I was to affirm in his *Answer* to Parliament in June 1642, his own authority must be recognised as the outcome of a trust ‘which God and the Law hath granted to Us and Our Posterity for ever’. The terms of the trust are such as to make him responsible to God alone, while assigning to Parliament a status no higher than that of a purely consultative body ‘dissoluble at Our Pleasure’.6

Responding to these arguments, the parliamentarian propagandists begin by presenting a contrasting account of the condition in which we are placed in the world by God. The analysis they offer can be expressed in negative as well as positive terms. Put negatively, their claim is that there is no reason to treat our existing system of law and government as a special gift of God’s providence. As Henry Parker insists at the outset of his *Observations*, although ‘the King attributeth the originall of his royalty to God’, the truth is that ‘God is no more the author of Regall, then of Aristocraticall power, nor of supreame, then of subordinate command’.7 John Goodwin agrees that ‘it is no ordinance or appointment of God that any particular Nation or society of men, should have either this or that speciall forme of government’, and that it follows from this that our present ‘Kingly Government’ can be ‘no ordinance of God in this sense’.8

Put positively, the parliamentarian argument is that what exists in nature is not states and governments but simply free communities endowed with all the necessary means to regulate their own affairs. ‘Power is originally inherent in the people’, Parker declares, ‘and it is nothing else but that might and vigour which such or such a societie of men contains in it selfe’.9 Philip Hunton repeats that, before the members of any such society ‘yeeld up themselves to a Person, to be commanded by his will’, they may be said to constitute ‘a free and not pre-engaged People’ who ‘at first had power over themselves’.10 Applying the argument to the people of England, William Prynne confirms that, like any other ‘free people’ they must originally have been in possession of the fullest ‘Nationall authority, power, and priviledges’, and hence the fullest ‘authority, power, and liberty’ to rule themselves.11

Why is it so important to these writers to begin by insisting on the natural freedom of the people? The answer comes in two halves. It enables them in the
first place to portray the establishment of civil associations entirely as an outcome of human decision and choice. If what exists in nature is not government but merely the capacity to institute it, then the people must count as the authors of whatever authority is subsequently placed over them. Parker speaks in exactly these terms at the start of his Observations when he claims that man, not God, ‘is the free and voluntary Author’ of whatever powers are ‘derived’ into the hands of kings and magistrates. The people are always ‘the Authors, or ends of all power’ and hence ‘the finall cause of Regall Authoritie’. The writer of Maximes Unfolded similarly assures us that ‘God is not so exact in the choice of Magistrates as to be their Authours’, preferring to leave it to the body of the people to decide by whom they wish to be governed. As he concludes—in a remarkably Hobbesian turn of phrase—it is always men who act as ‘the Authors, Instruments, matter, forme and end of Government’.

A number of the parliamentarian writers bear out this argument by stressing one further terminological point. If lawful government can be instituted only when the people as the authors of all power make a grant of their original authority, we can equally well say that the people must authorise their kings and magistrates to rule, and thus that governments are lawful and authoritative only to the extent that they have duly been authorised. William Bridge explains that the legal act which takes place when ‘Secular or Civill power’ is ‘given to one, or more, by the people’ is that ‘some are authorized to exercise jurisdiction in Common-wealths over others’. Philip Hunton underlines the strictness of the boundaries imposed by this arrangement on the jurisdictions of kings. When the people authorise a specific ruler, ‘then is his Authority limited’, and ‘neither are the instruments of his will exceeding those lawes, authorized’. Should he subsequently violate the terms of this authorisation or ‘definition of Authority’, then his resulting acts ‘are not Legall and binding, that is, are non-Authoritative’.

According to most of these writers, we can furnish a yet more precise account of the means by which particular bodies of people come to authorise their kings and magistrates. The crucial claim they introduce is that, as Parker phrases it, any grant of political authority requires an expression of ‘publike consent’, an explicit act of ‘common consent and agreement’ on the part of the entire populace. Hunton likewise affirms that every government ‘drawes its force and right from the consent and choice of that Community over which it swayeth’, and thus that ‘every Monarch hath his power from the consent of the whole body’ of the people. Prynne agrees that the only means by which ‘any free people whatsoever’ can ever become subject to a king is by means of their own ‘free election and consents’.

These acts of general consent must in turn be expressed in the form of contracts or covenants by which the people signal their acceptance of a king or other supreme magistrate. In Parker’s words, it is only through ‘the Pactions and agreements of such and such politique corporations’ that lawful governments can ever be set up. Hunton makes clear the polemical direction of the argument when he adds that ‘Kings have not divine words and binding Lawes to constitute them in their Soveraignty’. They can be instituted only by ‘the consent and
fundamentall contract of a Nation of men, which consent puts them in their power, which can be no more nor other then is conveyed to them by such contract of subiection' as the body of the people may find acceptable.\textsuperscript{20} One might well ask how an entire populace can hope to perform such a unitary legal act as contracting and hence consenting to government. Acknowledging the difficulty, the writers I am examining respond by insisting that the people must never be considered as a mere collection of individuals; they must always be recognised at the same time as a unified community or group. As Parker puts it, it is always possible to view them not merely \textit{divisi}, as single subjects, but also \textit{conjuncti}, as a \textit{universitas} or ‘politique corporation’.\textsuperscript{21} Bridge likewise begins by noting that we can think of the people either ‘\textit{divisi}’ or else ‘\textit{unitive}’.

The significance of the distinction, as Bridge explains, is that if we think of the people ‘conjunctively’ we can say that the agent consenting and contracting is ‘the Commonalty’ or ‘the Common-weale’ itself.\textsuperscript{22} The same implication is later spelled out by the author of \textit{Maximes Unfolded}. When the people act by ‘the common consent of all’, they may be said to act as a ‘union’ and by ‘their united power’ as a corporation, and hence in the manner of a single person acting with one will and voice.\textsuperscript{23}

As I began by emphasising, these writers have a second and connected reason for wishing to insist on the original and natural freedom of the people. If no one is ever born in subjection, then we cannot imagine that they would ever consent to relinquish the whole of their natural liberty. Rather we can safely infer that they would only ever covenant to authorise a strictly limited form of government. This argument is generally framed in the form of what might be described as a conjectural history of how lawful governments originally arose and came to assume their present shape. It is Henry Parker who provides the most detailed of these histories, and he sketches a narrative in which two separate chapters can be distinguished.

Parker begins by conceding that men, as fallen beings, would admittedly have found it necessary from an early stage to subject themselves to rulers and magistrates. ‘Man being depraved by the fall of \textit{Adam} grew so untame and uncivill a creature, that the Law of God written in his brest was not sufficient to restrayne him from mischiefe, or to make him sociable’.\textsuperscript{25} It soon became evident that ‘without society men could not live, and without lawes men could not be sociable, and without authority somewhere invested, to judge according to Law, and execute according to judgement, Law was a vaine and void thing’.\textsuperscript{26} These were the circumstances in which communities of people resolved to authorise some virtuous and trusted leader to create and administer a system of laws to uphold the peace.

As Parker adds, however, we must never forget that the people who authorised these leaders were, at the time of doing so, in possession of the fullest power to govern themselves. The inescapable implication is that all lawful kings must be lesser in standing than the people to whom their authority is owed. ‘We see that power is but secondary and derivative in Princes’, as Parker insists, and that ‘the fountaine and efficient cause is the people’. ‘From hence’, he goes
on, ‘the inference is just, the King, though he be *singulis Major*, yet he is *universis minor*’, lesser in standing than the *universitas* or ‘politique corporation’ from which his rights and powers are derived.27

This designation of kings as *maior singulis sed minor universis* was widely repeated in the ensuing constitutional debate. Parker probably took the tag from the *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*,28 but it later came to be better known from Prynne’s translation of the relevant passages from the *Vindiciae* in the Appendix to his *Soveraigne Power of Parliaments and Kingdomes*. There he cites the *Vindiciae* on several occasions for the view that ‘all the people are Superior to the king’, although ‘every one of them apart be inferior’.29 Picking up the argument, the author of *Maximes Unfolded* reverts to the original Latin, reiterating that the king ‘is *Major singulis, universis minor*’ and explaining that ‘Comparatively the King is the greatest’, but that he is ‘no King till he be made, neither are the Subjects so to be counted till they have made themselves such’.30

From this maxim the parliamentarian writers derive one further and even more significant inference. If the people are greater than their kings, then it must be within their powers at the time of covenanting to grant authority on strictly limited terms, the fulfilment of which becomes one of the duties of their monarch’s office. As Parker expresses the point, the relationship between any king and his people must always be a ‘fiduciary’ one. The body of the people ‘may ordaine what conditions, and prefix what bounds it pleases’, thereby placing their ruler under an obligation to govern according to the terms of this ‘conditionate’ trust.31 Charles Herle reiterates that the *universitas* of the people is always ‘greater, and more powerfull then the King’, and thus that kings are always ‘created upon certaine lawes and conditions’ by the people.32 William Prynne goes even further, concluding that the people, ‘if we take them collectively,’ are not only ‘above the king’ but are able in consequence ‘to restrain and question his actions, his Mal-Administrations, if there be just cause’.33

Does this imply that, if the king should fail to meet the terms and conditions of his trust, he can rightfully be resisted and removed by the people who originally trusted him? Speaking before the outbreak of civil war, Parker is extremely careful to avoid any such inflammatory claim. A few months later, however, we find such writers as Herle and Prynne vehemently proclaiming the right of the people to defend their interests by taking up arms against their king. No free people, Prynne contends, can ever be supposed to make an absolute transfer or relinquishment of ‘all their Nationall authority, power and priviledges’. They must always ‘reserve the supremest power and jurisdiction to themselves, to direct, limit, restrain their Princes supremacy & the exorbitant abuses of it, when they should see just cause’. Should their kings act without their consent and against their interests, they can and ought to call them to account and forcibly resist ‘by necessary defensive Armes’.34

Parker next postulates that, in spite of these precautions, the opening chapter in his conjectural history would certainly have ended in tyranny and war. ‘Man’, as he observes, ‘is by nature of restlesse ambition’, and those invested with power are always corrupted by it.35 We can therefore be confident that, although the
people initially authorised their kings to rule only according to the terms of their paictions or contracts, they would soon have found themselves ‘subject to unnaturall destruction, by the Tyranny of intrusted magistrates, a mischiefe almost as fatall as to be without all magistracie’. As Parker imagines it, a period of anarchy would then have ensued. Finding themselves betrayed, and lacking any constitutional means to redress their grievances, ‘the body of the people was ever constrained to rise, and by the force of a Major party to put an end to all intestine strifes’. But ‘many times calamities grew to a strange height,’ so that ‘after much spoile and effusion of bloud, sometimes onely one Tyranny was exchanged for another’. 

With his account of this crisis, Parker arrives at the second chapter in his conjectural history, the chapter in which a happy ending is finally reached. The people saw that they needed to find some less violent and more effective means of enforcing their sovereignty. The solution at which ‘most Countries’ eventually arrived was that of authorising public assemblies to govern in co-operation with their kings, balancing their power and if necessary holding them in check. The implementation of this solution is said to have taken place when the body of the people, acting once more as the authors of all power, granted authority to assemblies such as Parliaments to represent them and defend their interests, thereby preventing their rulers and magistrates from lapsing into tyrannical ways.

When Parker and his followers refer to the right of Parliament to represent the people, the immediate inspiration for their choice of vocabulary was almost certainly one of the ‘monarchomach’ treatises, most probably the Vindiciae contra tyrannos of 1579. The Vindiciae, which Parker sometimes echoes word for word, frequently speaks of the role of public councils to represent (repraesentare) the populus and their original sovereignty. But when the monarchomach writers employ this vocabulary, they are in turn drawing on a mighty reservoir of ancient and Medieval texts. If we wish to understand the range of concepts that the term repraesentare had by this time come to express, it is to these much earlier authorities that we need to attend first of all.

The primitive concept originally expressed by the verb repraesentare was that of re-presenting something, bringing something missing or absent back into the present. There are two main contexts in which we encounter this basic meaning of the word. One is in legal discourse, and especially in arguments about the payment of legacies and the repayment of debts. Both these acts were viewed in Roman law as instances in which a sum of money originally presented or promised by one party to another is re-presented to the appropriate beneficiary. Cicero already employs repraesentare and the corresponding noun repraesentatio to refer to the handing over of cash, and these are likewise among the standard uses of the terms in Justinian’s Digest.

The other context in which we encounter the same vocabulary is of much greater significance for my present argument. From an early date, we find the same words used to refer to the act of producing an image or likeness—a repraesentatio—of the external bodily appearance of someone or something. The implication in this case is that something absent is being re-presented to the gaze.
One much cited example can be found in the treatise on painting and sculpture that occupies Books 34 and 35 of Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis*. The artist Parrhasius is said to have painted a picture of some curtains that were so realistically represented (*repraesentata*) that his rival Zeuxis, not realising that he was looking at a painting, asked for the curtains to be drawn aside so that he could look at the picture he expected to see behind them.42

This anecdote brings us close to the heart of classical and neo-classical aesthetics, and to the almost magical potency (or ‘virtue’) that was held to attach to successful acts of representation in painting and sculpture. The power of art was taken to reside in its capacity to produce images that serve to re-present absent or purely imaginary persons or objects in such a way as to create the illusion that the viewer is actually seeing them. The underlying ideal of mimesis is perfectly captured by Franciscus Junius in his treatise on *The Painting of the Ancients*, first published in 1638. At the end of his survey Junius lays it down that ‘all those who meane to enter into a judicious consideration of matters of art, must by the means of these Images accustome their mind to such a lively representation of what they see expressed in the picture, as if they saw the things themselves and not their resemblance onely’.43

These were probably the principal ways in which the words *repraesentare*, *repraesentatio* and their cognates were employed in ancient Roman texts. From about the fourth century of the Christian era, however, we begin to find the same terms used in what appears at first sight to be a completely unconnected way. We find them applied, in particular by the so-called Doctors of the Church, to refer to the act of speaking or acting in the name of someone else, and more specifically to doing so with permission or authority.

One early example can be found in the letters of St. Ambrose. He writes to the people of Thessalonica to commiserate with them on the death of their bishop, who had successfully protected the province by negotiating with the barbarian tribes. Ambrose is worried lest no one will now be able to speak and act for them so effectively, and he expresses his anxiety by asking ‘who will now be able to represent us?’44 A yet clearer example can be found in the Epistles of Gregory the Great. Nominating a bishop to serve in Sicily, Gregory writes to reassure the local congregation that, by means of this appointment, ‘our authority will be represented by someone to whom we give instructions when we ourselves are unable to be present’.45

This was not the way in which the idea of speaking or acting in the name of someone else had initially been expressed in Latin. A set of theatrical metaphors had originally been invoked, most notably by Cicero, who had used them to illustrate what it means to speak for a client in a court of law, and what it means to say of a leading magistrate that he acts in the name of a *civitas*. Cicero’s immensely influential analysis centres around the term *persona*, a mask, the mask that actors wore in the ancient theatre to indicate what roles they had assumed. When I speak or act for others, Cicero suggests, it is as if I put on their mask, in consequence of which I may be said to ‘bear’ or ‘sustain’ their person—to play their part, to act in their name. This is the sense in which, as he explains in Book I
of De officiis, we can think of magistrates as players of public roles. ‘It is the due offyce of an officer’, as the first English translation of De officiis puts it, ‘to consyder that he beareth the personage of the city, and that he is bounde to sustayne and kepe his dignyte & worshyp to kepe the lawes’.46

Cicero is also much interested in the idea that, just as we may be said to have many officia or duties to perform, so we may be said to have many personae or roles to play. He invokes this vocabulary in numerous places,47 but perhaps most elaborately in the passage from Book II of the De oratore in which he makes the figure of Antonius confide how, as an advocate, he sets about preparing a case. Antonius explains that he first interviews his client, and then tries to work out not only what he ought to say himself, but also how his adversary is likely to riposte and how the judge may in turn react. He summarises this exercise by saying that he tries ‘as impartially as possible to play the part of each of the three persons involved, my own person, the person of my adversary and the person of the judge’.48

Cicero never employs the verb repraesentare in any of these contexts, but it is perhaps not difficult to see how the word eventually came to be used as an alternative way of capturing the idea that it is possible to ‘bear the person’ of someone else. If it makes sense to say that, when I speak or act for you, I am sustaining or bearing your person, then it arguably makes equally good sense to say that I am offering an image or repraesentatio of how you might have comported yourself. This, at any rate, was the semantic development that eventually took place. The outcome was that, by the early middle ages, the term repraesentare had come into standard use to refer not merely to the act of portraying someone’s appearance, but also to the act of speaking and acting in their name.

There is a long and complex story to be told about the later development of this vocabulary, especially in legal and ecclesiological debate. But from the perspective of my present argument the vital point is that, when the radical propagandists of the 1640s began to talk about the capacity of Parliament to represent the people, they frequently went out of their way to underline the fact that they were interested in both the meanings I have now isolated, and were much concerned at the same time with the relationship between them.

When these writers say that Parliament represents the people, what they basically mean is that it possesses the right to speak and act in the name of the kingdom or populace as a whole. As Parker puts it in his Observations, to affirm that ‘the Lords and Commons represent the whole Kingdome’ is to claim that they have been ‘vested with a right both to counsell and consent’ and that they ‘appeare in the right of the whole Kingdome’.49 Hunton later speaks in very similar terms in his Treatise of Monarchie. When we say that ‘the house of Commons is chosen by the people and they represent the people’, we are saying that the members of the Commons have the same ‘power to doe an act’ as was originally ‘in the people’ who chose and elected them.50

Sometimes the parliamentarian writers further clarify their meaning by depicting the members of the House of Commons as actors of a specific kind. They speak of them as ‘representatives’, or sometimes as ‘represnters’, a term they appear to have introduced into the English language for the first time.51
Parker describes them as ‘the Representatives’ of the Kingdom; Herle characterises them as ‘Representers’ who have been given the role of ‘representing all the Commons of England’; Hunton similarly describes the mixed constitution as a relationship between the king ‘and the Representatives of his whole Kingdom’ in Parliament.

At the same time, these writers often make it clear that they have an additional idea in mind. When they say that Parliament represents the people, they also mean that it constitutes a recognisable image or likeness of the populace as a whole. As they usually express the point, the two Houses may be said to offer a ‘representation’—a picture or portrait—of the body of the people. Parker speaks in exactly these terms in his Observations, describing Parliament as a ‘representation’ of the ‘real body of the people’ and as a ‘representation’ on a smaller scale of ‘the whole body of the State’. He is closely echoed by the author of A Soveraigne Salve, who likewise speaks of Parliament as a ‘representation’ of ‘the whole kingdom’. He in turn is echoed by a number of other parliamentarian writers, including Goodwin, Herle and Hunton, all of whom describe the two Houses as an image or representation of the kingdom, the nation or the people at large.

Several of these writers take the visual implications of their metaphor very seriously. Parker goes so far as to speak of Parliament as a work of art, praising its ‘purity of composition’, its ‘Art and order’, and the fact that it is so ‘admirably composed’. Developing this line of thought, he indicates that he has at least three visual ideas in mind, each of which turns out to carry powerful political resonances.

Parker’s first suggestion arises from the fact that the ‘real body of the people’ is too cumbersome and irregular in its movements to be capable of acting for itself. This consideration leads him to argue that an effective representation will need to take the form of a portrait on a considerably smaller scale. The aim, as he expresses it, should be to capture ‘the quintessence’ of the whole body of subjects. As he later explains in Ius populi, one reason why the English Parliament offers such a good ‘representation’ of the people is that the process of election enables ‘the rude bulk of the universality’ to be ‘reduced’ in just such an ‘artificial’ or artful way.

His second suggestion is that a good representation of the people, like any satisfactory portrait, will need to be a likeness in which no features are shown disproportionately or out of scale. He expresses considerable confidence that, in the case of the English Parliament, this proportionality has duly been achieved. Not only are the members of the House of Commons drawn ‘out of all parts’ of the country, but they come together in a body that is ‘equally, and geometrically proportionable’. It is a body in which ‘all the States doe so orderly contribute their due parts’ that, in the resulting representation of the people, ‘no one can be of any extreme predominance’. The outcome, as he later adds in Ius populi, is a ‘full and neer representation’ of the ‘real’ body itself.

Finally, Parker insists that an artful representation of the people will need to be something more skilfully contrived than a mere copy of their bodily appearance.
As with any good portrait, the aim must be to create a lively picture, as close to being a ‘speaking likeness’ as possible. This further metaphor conveys a warning that the people ought not to choose and elect, as members of the House of Commons, persons who are altogether like themselves. We do not want the simple to act for the simple. We want to ensure that ‘by vertue of election and representation, a few shall act for many, the wise shall consent for the simple, the vertue of all shall redound to some, and the prudence of some shall redound to all’. We want, in short, to ensure that those who are chosen are ‘choyce Gentlemen’ themselves. To which Parker resoundingly adds that in England this ideal of representation has been triumphantly realised in ‘this admirably composed Court which is now called a Parliament’.

Parker and his followers do not merely place end to end—as I have so far done—these two elements in the claim that Parliament represents the people. The core of their theory of representative government is constituted by the manner in which they join them together. The fundamental claim they advance is that, once we grasp the nature of this connection, we shall be able to see that there is a genuine sense in which (as the author of *A Soveraigne Salve* puts it) the decisions of Parliament possess a ‘politique infallibility’. Whatever courses of action the two Houses may decide to follow out, they cannot fail to uphold the interests of the people as a whole.

This was the key conclusion that their royalist critics sought to dismiss with ridicule. What, they wanted to know, could possibly justify such a mystical level of confidence? Responding to this objection, the parliamentarian writers arrive at the heart of their theory of representative government. They begin by reminding us that, when the people originally authorised Parliament to speak and act in their name, they brought into existence an assembly that remains a lifelike and exactly proportionate representation of their real body as a whole. It follows that, when this elected body acts, it cannot fail to act in precisely the manner that the real body itself would itself have acted. The reason, in short, why Parliament cannot fail to act in the best interests of the people is that Parliament simply is the people re-presented ‘to the life’.

Parker lays out exactly this argument in the latter part of his *Observations* when he turns to adjudicate the quarrel between the English crown and Parliament. There is no possibility, he assures us, that ‘any Parliament freely elected’ could ever ‘injure a whole Kingdome, or exercise any tyranny’. To suppose otherwise is to misunderstand not merely the wisdom but the nature of Parliament. The misunderstanding lies in failing to see that, ‘by the vertue of representation’, Parliament can be accounted ‘the whole body of the State’. The ‘vertue’ or power of representation is such that Parliament is ‘virtually the whole kingdom it selfe’.

It is perhaps not surprising that the use made by Parker and his followers of the term ‘virtually’ to describe the power of Parliament helped to bring about a dilution in the meaning of the term. Within a generation, anyone speaking of Parliament as ‘virtually’ the whole body of the people would have been taken to mean that it was ‘almost’ or ‘nearly as good as’ the body itself. By contrast,
what Parker means is that ‘by the vertue of representation’—that is, by the power or virtue of creating a speaking likeness—Parliament ‘is neither one nor few’ but ‘is indeed the State it self’. To say that Parliament is virtually the people is to say that, so far as its essential qualities and powers are concerned, Parliament is no different from the people in any way at all. Its voice can be regarded as strictly equivalent to ‘the voyce of the whole Kingdom’, and its recommendations can be regarded as strictly equivalent to those of the people as a whole.

This defence of parliamentary infallibility was not at first taken up or even very clearly understood by the pamphleteers who followed in Parker’s wake. But after he reiterated the argument in his Contra-Replicant of January 1643, it soon began to be more widely adopted and discussed. Writing in April 1643, the author of A Soveraigne Salve felt able to reassure his readers that ‘Parliament is not capable (could it be willing) to usurpe upon’ the rights of the people. This is because ‘by representation’ Parliament is nothing other than ‘the whole kingdome’, so that when sovereign power is held by Parliament it is still held ‘in the peoples owne hands’. Writing a month later, Herle reached the same conclusion in his Answer to Doctor Fernes Reply. No danger, he agrees, can arise from entrusting the fullest sovereignty to Parliament, because ‘their representations are of us, and interests the same with us’. Finally, Parker himself provided a yet further restatement of the argument in his Ius populi of 1644. The reason why Parliament ‘can have no interests different from the people represented’, he now maintains, is because ‘the Parliament is indeed nothing else, but the very people it self artificially congregated’.

The upshot of the conjectural history recounted by the parliamentarian writers is the claim that mixed monarchy is the best and most stable form of government. Parker enunciates the theory in its classic form in his Observations, as does Hunton in his Treatise of Monarchie. Both contend that sovereignty under the English constitution is in normal circumstances held jointly by the king and the two Houses of Parliament, and that each of these three Estates must give its consent before any proposed enactment becomes law. After the outbreak of civil war, however, a number of propagandists began to follow the more aggressive lead offered by Charles Herle in his Fuller Answer of December 1642. Herle accepts that the three Estates must normally work together, but insists that in any disagreement the will of the two Houses must predominate over the will of the crown. The main outcome of the argument I have been tracing is thus a theory of Parliamentary sovereignty. As Herle concludes, ‘the finall and casting result of the States judgement’ must always reside ‘in the two Houses of Parliament’.

III

Although the theory I have sketched was much elaborated in the course of the civil wars, it also came under instant and violent attack. The clerical defenders of divine right at once surged forward to repudiate every premise of the parliamentarian case. Griffith Williams, bishop of Ossory, was one of the first in
the field with his Vindiciae Regum, a counterblast to Parker and Goodwin published in February 1643. No power, Williams replies, can ever come from the body of the people. God is ‘the immediate Author of the Regall power’, so that ‘the power and authority of Kings is originally and primarily (as S. Paul saith) the ordinance of God’. 84 Furthermore, this ordination grants absolute authority to our present king, so that no one can ever resist him ‘without apparent sacriledge against God’. 85 If we now ask about the relationship between king and Parliament in this scheme of things, Williams is careful to allow that Parliament is of course ‘the representative body of all his Kingdom’. 86 However, since it is merely a body of subjects, it can never be anything more than a consultative assembly, and cannot exercise any binding powers at all. ‘As the King hath a power to call, so he hath a power to dissolve all Parliaments; and having a power of dissolving it when he will, he must needs have a power of denying what he pleaseth’. 87

Soon afterwards the Levellers launched a strongly contrasting but scarcely less withering line of attack. They generally begin, rather more concessively, by making it clear that they accept a good deal of the parliamentarian case. Richard Overton, for example, opens his Appeale of July 1647 by agreeing that the people must originally have been free and sovereign, and that they authorise Parliament to exercise their original sovereignty. 88 He likewise agrees that what makes the decisions of Parliament authoritative is not merely that the people grant authority to Parliament, but that the body they authorise is at the same time a recognisable image or likeness of themselves. This further condition is said to be indispensable, ‘for such as is the represented, such and no other must the figure or representation be, such as is the proportion, countenance and favour of the man, such and so must be the picture of the man, or else it cannot be the picture of that man, but of some other, or of something else’. 89

Overton’s next move, however, is to denounce the hypocrisy of supposing that the existing Parliament constitutes anything like a recognisable representation of the body and hence the will of the people. The fundamental will of the people, he retorts, is that their security and liberty should be preserved. But the two Houses have turned themselves into ‘so many traytors to the safety and weale of the people’. 90 This in turn means that they ‘cannot be the Representers of the Free-men of England’, for ‘such as are the representers of Free-men, must be substantial and reall Actors for freedome and liberty’. 91 It follows that the current conduct of Parliament lacks any legitimacy. The two Houses have ‘devested and degraded themselves from their betrusted authority of the people, and become no longer their representory Deputies, or Trustees, except tyranny and oppression be the very substance and end of their Trust’. 92

Among the opponents of the parliamentarian writers, no one engaged with their arguments more tenaciously, nor reacted to them with more implacable hostility, than Thomas Hobbes in Leviathan. Before examining Hobbes’s response, however, it is important to note that it is only in Leviathan that he concerns himself with the propagandists whom he was later to stigmatise in Behemoth as the ‘democratical gentlemen’. 93 There was no body of parliamentarian theory for him to criticise when he circulated his Elements of Law in 1640, nor even when he
published his *De Cive* at the beginning of 1642. By contrast, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that Hobbes’s entire theory of lawful government as he articulates it in *Leviathan* takes the form of a critical commentary on the parliamentarian arguments I have so far anatomised.

This is not to say that Hobbes contradicts the democratical gentlemen at every turn. On the contrary, he goes out of his way to emphasise that he fully accepts the basic premises of their thought. He endorses their rejection of divine right, agreeing that the state of nature must be one of equal freedom for all. He likewise agrees about the character of the freedom we would have enjoyed in our natural state. ‘The absolute Libertie of Nature’, as he declares in Chapter 21, consists in ‘an exemption from Lawes’, and is thus equivalent, as he later adds, to ‘the Liberty which the Law of Nature gave us’.

Hobbes is also in full agreement about the means by which our natural liberty can lawfully be replaced by a state of subjection to government. The only legitimate mechanism, he lays down in his chapter on sovereignty, is that ‘all the Rights, and Facultyes of him, or them, on whom the Sovraigne Power is conferred’ must be ‘conferred by the consent of the People assembled’ (p. 121). The same commitment is heavily underscored in a number of later passages. The chapter on civil law repeats that sovereigns in every kind of commonwealth must be ‘Constituted by the consent of every one’, while the chapter on rewards and punishments reiterates that ‘all Soveraign Power, is originally given by the consent of every one of the Subjects’.

So far these arguments would have been familiar to any reader of Hobbes’s *De Cive* or *Elements of Law*. There he had already maintained that the state of nature is a state of complete ‘natural liberty’, and that the only means by which this liberty can lawfully be curtailed is by the explicit consent of those who agree to submit themselves to government. To these arguments, however, he next proceeds to make a striking addition in *Leviathan*. Speaking of the way in which we express our consent, he goes on to invoke and endorse the precise political vocabulary that the parliamentarian writers had developed in the course of the 1640s. We act, he now agrees, as the authors of political authority, and we covenant in such a way as to authorise some designated man or assembly to represent us, thereby granting them the right and authority to speak and act in our name.

Developing this line of thought, Hobbes begins by echoing the account the parliamentarian writers had given of the people as the authors of all power. He willingly grants that, when we covenant to institute a commonwealth, we become ‘by this Institution Author of all the Actions, and Judgments of the Sovraigne Instituted’ (p. 124). Unless we are the authors of the powers to which we submit, those powers themselves will not be legitimate. The reason is that ‘no man is obliged by a Covenant, whereof he is not Author; nor consequently by a Covenant made against, or beside the Authority he gave’ (pp. 112–13).

Hobbes also agrees about the specific nature of the act of authorisation performed by those who assign political authority to others. When I covenant, the affirmation I make is that ‘I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to
him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner’ (p. 120). He subsequently confirms this analysis at the start of his discussion of the rights of sovereignty in Chapter 18. We may say, he adds, that a commonwealth is instituted when a representative is selected, at which stage ‘every one, as well he that Voted for it as he that Voted against it, shall Authorise all the Actions and Judgements, of that Man, or Assembly of men’ (p. 121).

Hobbes continues to follow the parliamentarian writers when he turns to consider what it means to speak of authorising someone to speak or act in our name. He opens his discussion in Chapter 16 by invoking the theatrical understanding of the issue that Cicero had originally put into currency. First he reminds us that in Latin the word persona ‘signifies the disguise, or outward appearance of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face’ (p. 112). He then explains that this is why ‘he that acteth another, is said to beare his Person, or act in his name’, and he quotes the passage from the De oratore in which Cicero had spoken of sustaining three persons, ‘my own, my Adversaries, and the Judges’ (p. 112). Hobbes’s first suggestion is thus that the act of authorising someone is that of granting them the right to personate someone else.

As he correctly observes, however, this originally theatrical terminology was eventually generalised to apply ‘to any Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters’ (p. 112). His considered view of what it means to authorise someone is thus that it is equivalent to appointing just such a ‘representer’ or representative. ‘To Personate’, he now explains, is for someone ‘to Act, or Represent himselfe, or an other’, so that a representative is an actor, ‘and he that owneth his words and actions, is the AUTHOR: In which case the Actor acteth by Authority’ (p. 112). To which he adds that anyone authorised to serve as such an actor is nowadays susceptible of being described in a variety of ways. His list of equivalencies includes ‘an Attorney, a Deputy, a Procurator’, but it is noticeable that he begins by singling out the term ‘Representer’, the term that the parliamentarian and Leveller writers had originally introduced into the debate (p. 112).

These arguments constitute a remarkable extension of Hobbes’s earlier analysis in The Elements and De Cive. There he had made no mention of authors, nor of authorisation, nor of representation and representatives. He had simply described the political covenant as an agreement on the part of those subjecting themselves to government to renounce and relinquish their rights. Previous commentators who have focused on Hobbes’s very different way of presenting his theory in Leviathan have generally concluded that he must have identified certain weaknesses, difficulties or even contradictions in the initial statement of his case, and must have decided to recast it in an effort to cope with them. By contrast with these somewhat speculative and question-begging hypotheses, my principal aim in what follows will be to suggest a different kind of explanation for the modifications that Hobbes introduced. What seems to me crucial is the extensive use he makes in the revised version of his theory of the distinctive political vocabulary developed in the meantime by his parliamentarian adversaries. What he is doing, I shall next attempt to show, is seeking to
discredit them by demonstrating that it is possible to accept the basic structure of their theory without in the least endorsing any of the radical implications they had drawn from it. It is this new rhetorical strategy in *Leviathan*, and the way in which it leads Hobbes to enunciate a strongly contrasting theory of representative government, that next needs to be investigated.

IV

To see how Hobbes follows out his new strategy, we need to begin by focusing on the one pivotal moment at which he parts company with the democratical gentlemen and their views about the genesis of lawful government. As we have seen, they had assumed that civil associations must initially have arisen out of free and natural societies or communities, and had inferred that the whole body of the people must therefore be regarded (in Parker’s phrase) as ‘the proper Subject’ of sovereign power. This, according to Hobbes, is an egregious error, and one of his basic purposes in presenting his melodramatic description of the state of nature in Chapter 13 of *Leviathan* is to lay the error bare. There is simply no such thing, he retorts, as the body of the people. If we look beyond the bounds of civil association, what we find is nothing more than a throng or multitude of ‘particular men’ (p. 90). Furthermore, it is a multitude in which, due to the similarity of everyone’s desires and powers, we are all ‘dissociate’ from each other and ‘every man is Enemy to every man’ (p. 89). As a result, the natural condition of mankind is not merely a state of men ‘in Solitude’, a state in which there is ‘no Society’ and ‘neither Propriety nor Community’; it is actually a state of perpetual war ‘of every man, against every man’.

The crucial significance, according to Hobbes, of failing to recognise the frightening truth about our natural condition is that it betrays the democratical gentlemen into giving a misleading account of the political covenant. As we have seen, they had argued that the body of the people, acting in the manner of one Person, contracts with a designated ruler and consents to submit to his rule. Hobbes is now able to dismiss this part of their analysis out of hand. Before becoming subject to sovereign power, he objects, the people ‘are not one Person’; they are nothing more than the individual and mutually hostile members of ‘a disunited Multitude’ (p. 122). It follows that the parliamentarian vision of ‘the whole multitude, as one party to the Covenant’ is, as he blankly asserts, ‘impossible’ (p. 122). To suppose otherwise is simply to misunderstand the natural condition of mankind.

If the political covenant cannot be an agreement between the body of the people and their designated ruler, what form can it possibly take? Hobbes’s ingenious answer is that it takes the form of a covenant between each and every individual member of the multitude. They agree among themselves ‘to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will.’ They make an agreement, that is, ‘by Covenant of every man with every man’ in such a way as to institute one
particular person or assembly to serve as their sovereign representative. Everyone agrees with everyone else ‘to submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their Judgements, to his Judgment’, with the result that the sovereign receives his authority from ‘every particular man in the Common-wealth’ (p. 120).

It is true that, once the individual members of the multitude agree to submit to a sovereign, this finally has the effect of converting them from a mere throng into one Person. This is because they now have a single will and voice—that of their sovereign representative—which counts as the voice of them all. ‘A Multitude of men’, as Hobbes’s summarises, ‘are made One Person, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented’ (p. 114). The outcome of the covenant is accordingly ‘a reall Unitie of them all, in one and the same Person’ (p. 120). As Hobbes continually insists, however, this is the sole way in which a multitude can ever be viewed as a unified body of people. He concludes by recalling the rival parliamentarian analysis and repudiating it at the same time. It is only ‘the Unity of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented, that maketh the Person One’ (p. 114). To which he adds that, in spite of what is generally believed, ‘Unity, cannot otherwise be understood in Multitude’ (p. 114).

So far these claims would again have been familiar to any reader of Hobbes’s previous attacks on the theory of popular sovereignty in *The Elements* and *De Cive*. There Hobbes had already argued that the people in their natural condition are a mere multitude, that the political covenant takes the form of an agreement between ‘every several man’ and that the act of instituting a sovereign alone has the effect of converting the multitude into a unified body of people. If we now return to *Leviathan*, however, we find that beyond this point Hobbes’s argument begins to move into completely new terrain. Once we recognise, he now suggests, that there is no such thing as the body of the people, we can hope to discredit the entire theory of authorisation and representation that the parliamentarian writers had put into currency in the course of the 1640s.

As we have seen, the parliamentarian writers had generally presented their theories of authorisation and representation in the form of a conjectural history of how lawful governments may be said to have evolved. According to the opening chapter in these narratives, the original body or community of the people, recognising the need for a legal order, initially covenanted with a designated ruler in such a way as to authorise him to speak and act in the name of the people as a whole. Hobbes has no quarrel with the claim that all lawful governments need to be explicitly authorised. What he cannot accept, however, is the suggestion that the act of authorising a sovereign representative can be performed by the whole body of the people acting as one. As he responds in Chapter 16—closely echoing the parliamentarian analysis and rejecting it at the same time—what this forgets is that ‘the Multitude naturally is not One, but Many’, and thus that the members of the multitude ‘cannot be understood for one; but many Authors, of every thing their Representative saith, or doth in their name’ (p. 114). Because there is nothing outside the bounds of civil association except the multitude, the sovereign can only be authorised by each and every individual member of the multitude, with ‘Every man giving their common
Representers, Authority from himselfe in particular; and owning all the actions the Representers doth in his name (p. 114). According to Hobbes’s social ontology, there is no other means for a sovereign to be authorised.

The significance of this way of understanding the covenant becomes apparent as soon as Hobbes turns to consider the radical implications drawn by the democratical gentlemen from their rival account of the body of the people as the original authors of all power. As we have seen, the first inference they had drawn was that, when the people covenant with a king, the body or universitas of the people must remain maior or greater in standing than the king himself. Hobbes offers no comment on this argument in The Elements or De Cive, but in Leviathan he immediately deploys his individualistic analysis of the covenant of authorisation to wave it aside. ‘There is little ground’, he scornfully replies, ‘for the opinion of them, that say of Soveraign Kings, though they be singulis maiores, of greater Power than every one of their Subjects, yet they be Universis minores, of lesse power than them all together’ (p. 128).

The reason why there is little ground for this opinion is that, because there is no such thing as the universitas or body of the people, we can only make sense of the statement in one of two equally unsatisfactory ways. One is to suppose that, when the parliamentarian writers talk about ‘all together’ in contrast with ‘every one’, they are referring not to the Person into which the multitude transforms itself when it authorises a sovereign representative, but simply to the multitude itself. But if this is so, then their argument can readily be dismissed. ‘For if by all together, they mean not the collective body as one person, then all together, and every one, signifie the same; and the speech is absurd’ (p. 128). The only alternative is to suppose that, when they say ‘all together’, they are referring to the Person into which the multitude transforms itself by authorising a sovereign representative. But if this is so, then their argument can be no less readily dismissed. For ‘if by all together, they understand them as one Person (which person the Sovereign bears,) then the power of all together, is the same with the Sovereigns power; and so again the speech is absurd’ (p. 128).

A second inference drawn by the parliamentarian writers had been that, when the people authorise a sovereign, it is open to them to negotiate the terms and conditions of his sovereignty and, as Hobbes puts it, to impose these conditions upon him ‘before-hand’ (p. 122). Turning to this argument in Chapter 18, Hobbes seeks to demonstrate that it is even more obviously entangled in absurdity. Suppose the members of the multitude make a covenant with a designated ruler who, after his institution, acts in such a way as to produce ‘a breach of the Covenant’ to which he initially agreed (p. 123). By this stage the ruler will have entered upon his sovereign rights, in consequence of which every one of his subjects will be obliged to ‘own’ and ‘avouch’ whatever actions he may choose to perform in their names, because he will be performing them ‘in the Person, and by the Right of every one of them in particular’ (p. 123). But this means that, whatever limitations on his actions he may have accepted beforehand, these agreements will now be null and void, because ‘what act soever can be pretended by any one of them for breach thereof, is the act both of himselfe, and of all the

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rest’ (p. 123). Any subject who now complains about his sovereign’s behaviour will be lodging a complaint, ludicrously enough, against himself. As Hobbes confirms in his Chapter on the liberty of subjects, ‘nothing the Soveraign Representative can doe to a Subject, on what pretence soever, can properly be called Injustice, or Injury; because every Subject is Author of every act the Soveraign doth; so that he never wanteth Right to any thing’.108

The last and most explosive implication drawn by the parliamentarian writers had been that, if a king should fail to honour the terms and conditions of his rule, he can be resisted by his own subjects and if necessary removed from power. Hobbes recurs once more to his rival analysis of authorisation to show that this is the greatest absurdity of all. He considers the argument both in relation to ‘casting off’ an incumbent monarch and in relation to punishing or putting him to death. It is self-contradictory, he first responds, for a people to suppose that they can ‘transferre their Person from him that beareth it, to another Man, or other Assembly of men’ (p. 122). They have already bound themselves ‘every man to every man, to Own, and be reputed Author of all, that he that already is their Soveraigne, shall do, and judge fit to be done’ (p. 122). To cast him off will thus be to fall into the confusion of authorising and repudiating his actions at one and the same time. It is equally self-contradictory for the people to think of punishing an incumbent monarch or putting him to death. Given that ‘every Subject is Author of the actions of his Soveraigne’, this simply leads to the same confusion as before. Any subject who seeks to punish his sovereign will be condemning him for ‘actions committed by himselfe’ (p. 124).

Hobbes has no better opinion of the second chapter in the conjectural histories narrated by his parliamentarian adversaries. As we have seen, they had gone on to postulate that, in order to check the tyranny of kings, the people eventually instituted Parliaments as images or representations of themselves, authorising them at the same time to speak and act in the name of the populace as a whole. Hobbes has no quarrel with the claim that Parliaments may be described as representative assemblies, and he agrees that assemblies no less than individuals may be authorised to serve as sovereign representatives.109 What he cannot accept, however, is the suggestion that Parliaments can be regarded as images or representations of the whole body of the people. As he has already explained in Chapter 16, there is no such thing as the body of the people, from which it follows that there cannot be any such body awaiting representation. Because nothing exists in nature except ‘a Multitude of men’, there is nothing to be pictured or represented except ‘every one of that multitude in particular’ (p. 114).

These commitments prompt Hobbes to question the entire parliamentarian analysis of the representation of the people. One of his contributions is a negative one, and may be said to take the form of a derisive silence. The parliamentarian writers, and later the Levellers, had endlessly debated the question as to what a satisfactory image or representation of the people needs to look like. How many social groups should be included in the picture? How large should the representative body be if it is to speak and act effectively for the ‘real’ body of the people? How can the correct proportionality be maintained between the
features of the representative body and the features of the real body being pictured or represented? These questions all presuppose exactly what Hobbes denies: that civil associations are created out of pre-existing and unified bodies of people. So he fails even to acknowledge the resulting debates. His silence must have struck his contemporaries as deafening, and it seems a weakness of existing commentaries on his theory of representation that they fail to mention it.

Hobbes’s individualistic premises also enable him to make a positive and still more challenging intervention in the debate. As we have seen, the parliamentarian writers had invariably taken it for granted that a satisfactory image or representation of the body of the people must itself be a body of people. By the end of the 1640s this assumption had become so deeply entrenched that we find them referring—in a now obsolete usage—to any body of people with the right to act in the name of a larger body as ‘A Representative’.¹¹⁰ They assume, in other words, that what it means for the body of the people to be represented is to have a smaller body of people acting in their name.

Hobbes counters that, since there is nothing to be represented but the individual bodies ‘of all and every one of the Multitude’, there is no reason why this act of representation should not be performed equally well by an individual body as by a body of people (p. 129). He draws this contrasting inference as forthrightly as possible when he turns in Chapter 19 of Leviathan to consider the different forms of lawful government: ‘It is manifest’, he proclaims, ‘that men who are in absolute liberty, may, if they please, give Authority to One man, to represent them every one; as well as give such Authority to any Assembly of men whatsoever; and consequently may subject themselves, if they think good, to a Monarch, as absolutely, as to any other Representative’ (p. 130).

In announcing this commitment, Hobbes is not in the least abandoning the idea that what it means to offer a representation of someone or something is to furnish an image or likeness of their external bodily appearance. On the contrary, he already assures us in the opening Chapter of Leviathan that to speak of ‘a Representation’ is equivalent to speaking of an ‘Apparence’ (p. 13). When he denounces the idolatry of the Gentiles in Chapter 45, we accordingly find him describing the pictures and images they fashioned as alleged ‘Representations’ of God.¹¹¹ When he speaks more specifically about political representation, he likewise maintains that any magistrate can be characterised as a ‘Representation’ and hence an ‘Image’ of his sovereign (p. 448). He adds that any sovereign can in turn be described as a ‘representation’ of his people, and he cautions such sovereigns against allowing any other representations of the same people to be produced.¹¹²

For Hobbes, however, what is crucial is that, when we speak of offering a representation of the people, we cannot be referring to the act of picturing a unified body, but only to the act of picturing the individual members of the multitude. But if this is so, then there is no reason why this act of representation should not be performed by an individual body with a representative character. Hobbes’s key concept is thus that of representativeness. He maintains, that is, that one way to represent the members of a multitude (in the sense of speaking and acting for them) will always be to appoint a single person who can represent (in
the sense of offering an image or likeness of) the individuals involved. A satisfactory ‘representer’, on this analysis, will simply be someone who can stand as a representative person, a person representative of each and every individual who is being represented.

So confidently does Hobbes set aside the usual corporatist pieties that it seems natural to ask if there may have been any obvious precedents for his line of thought. One intriguing possibility is that he may have been influenced by the English covenanting theologians of the early seventeenth century. A number of puritan divines, including Paul Bayne, William Bridge and Richard Sibbes, had developed out of Lutheran sources an argument about Adam and Christ as ‘common persons’ representative of all mankind. The pioneer among these writers was William Perkins, but perhaps the most suggestive development of their ideas can be found in Thomas Goodwin’s treatise of 1642 entitled Christ Set Forth, to which Hobbes’s analysis of representativeness in Leviathan bears some astonishingly close resemblances.

The figure of Adam, according to Goodwin, was the first ‘Common person representing all Man-kind’, while the figure of Christ was the second ‘Common person representing us’. One of the senses in which they were common persons is that both of them embodied the characteristics common to us all. All of us may therefore be said to be ‘included, and involved in them’, while they may be said to be ‘standing for all the rest’, who are ‘typified out’ by them. They constitute, in other words, an image or representation of each and every one of us. As Goodwin explicitly says of Adam, he is ‘not to be considered as a single Man, but as one that was All men, by way of representation.’

Goodwin proceeds to infer that, because of their representativeness, Adam and Christ were in turn able to represent us in the sense of bearing or sustaining our persons and acting in our names. He goes so far as to suggest that Christ ‘had no other end to come downe into this world, but to sustaine our persons, and to act our parts’. He was able, in other words, to act representatively, and hence in the name of us all. It is because we can think of Christ ‘as a Common person representing us’ that we can think of ourselves as ‘virtually, and representatively sanctified in him’.

While these are extraordinarily suggestive passages, the idea of Hobbes as a close reader of such theological texts may seem implausible. If there is a more likely source of inspiration, it may perhaps be found in Dudley Digges’s analysis of political representation in his treatise of 1643, The Unlawfulnesse of Subjects taking up Armes. Digges speaks about the representativeness of kings in the course of countering the parliamentarian suggestion that they are maier singulis sed minor universis. He responds that this doctrine is ‘evidently false’, because any supreme ruler possesses the entire power of the multitude, and is thus ‘the representative all’ and ‘legally the whole people’. Later he recurs to the point when summarising his reasons for believing that in the case of England ‘the King is not minor universes’. ‘There is a great difference’, he repeats, ‘between the reall and representative all’. Where the king is absolute, ‘there he is Populus Anglicanus, legally the English Nation’, and in that case we may say that ‘the King is the whole people, and what he doth is legally their Act’.
If we now return to *Leviathan*, we find Hobbes speaking in almost identical terms. He enthusiastically endorses the key assumption that it is possible for a single individual to exhibit general representativeness. He repeatedly affirms that a sovereign monarch can stand as a ‘Person Representative’, as ‘one Representative Person’, as ‘the Person representative of all and every one of the Multitude’. It is always possible, that is, for an individual sovereign to be ‘Representative of the whole number’, thereby typifying or exemplifying them all (p. 155). Closely echoing the language of the covenanting theologians, he adds that ‘the King of any Countrey’ can therefore be described as ‘the Publique Person’ who is ‘Representative of all his own Subjects’ (p. 285).

As this analysis reveals, Hobbes takes it for granted—as did the covenanting theologians—that the features of the multitude requiring to be pictured or represented are common to everyone, men and women alike. One implication is that the multitude can equally well be represented by a queen regnant as by a king. The frontispiece of *Leviathan* admittedly suggests that Hobbes’s own preference may be for the representative person to be a man. But he is careful to allow that a woman can equally well stand as the person representative of us all. He even suggests that, because women are sometimes more prudent than men, and because prudence is self-evidently a desirable attribute in a representative, women may in some cases be better suited than men to exercise dominion over others (p. 139).

Hobbes also agrees that, because a single person can be typical or representative of us all, such a person can in turn serve as what he describes—again following the covenanting theologians—as our ‘common Representer’ or ‘common Representative’. Here Hobbes has a more general as well as a more specific claim to make. His general claim is simply that any natural person can be assigned the right to speak and act in the name of us all, and can therefore serve as ‘an absolute Representative to all intents and purposes’. As we have seen, however, Hobbes also believes that, when the members of the multitude authorise someone to serve as their sovereign representative, this decision has the effect of transforming them into one Person, since it has the effect of endowing them with a single will and voice. His more specific claim is thus that the Person in whose name the sovereign acquires the right to speak and act will be the Person engendered by the multitude out of its agreement to be represented. As he expresses the point at the outset of Chapter 18, the sovereign is assigned ‘the Right to Present the Person’ that the multitude thereby brings into existence (p. 121).

The upshot of the conjectural histories recounted by the parliamentarian writers had been the conclusion that the best form of government must be a mixed monarchy. The people of England, they had added, eventually succeeded in establishing just such a monarchy, one in which the people were able to institute a representative assembly to check and balance the powers of their kings. Turning to this final argument, Hobbes abandons his normally objective manner of writing and allows himself to respond in what appear to be tones of real outrage. What this narrative completely fails to acknowledge, he objects, is that the act of instituting the monarchy of which King Charles I was the eventual
inheritor was already the act of authorising a representative. ‘I know not’, he retorts, ‘how this so manifest a truth, should of late be so little observed; that in a Monarchy, he that had the Soveraignty from a descent of 600 years, was alone called Soveraign, had the title of Majesty from every one of his Subjects, and was unquestionably taken by them for their King, was notwithstanding never considered as their Representative’.130

Once we recognise that Charles I was indeed the authorised representative of all his subjects, we can readily see according to Hobbes that the theories of mixed monarchy propounded by the democratical gentlemen are dangerously confused. He begins by referring to the most familiar version of the theory, according to which ‘the Power of making Lawes’ is made to depend (as he scornfully puts it) on ‘the accidentall consent’ of one man with two separate representative Assemblies.131 This system requires that ‘the King bear the person of the People’ while ‘the generall Assembly bear also the person of the People’ and ‘another Assembly bear the person of a Part of the people’ (p. 228). But this arrangement cannot be described as a viable system of ‘mixt Monarchy’, because it is not a viable system of government at all (p. 228). The effect is to institute ‘not one Person, nor one Soveraign, but three Persons, and three Soveraigns’, thereby creating ‘not one independent Common-wealth, but three independent Factions’, a perfect recipe for chaos and civil war (p. 228).

Hobbes admits, however, that this is not the understanding of mixed monarchy most favoured by the democratical gentlemen. They generally maintain that there are two elements in the mixture, king and Parliament, and that Parliament as the representative assembly of the sovereign people must predominate over the king. Hobbes replies that this is simply to repeat the same mistake. When the people of England instituted their monarchy, they granted to their kings ‘the Right to present the Person of them all’ (p. 121). But ‘where there is already erected a Soveraign Power, there can be no other Representative of the same people, but onely to certain particular ends, by the Soveraign limited’ (p. 130). The reason, Hobbes reminds us, is that otherwise the effect will be ‘to erect two Soveraigns; and every man to have his person represented by two Actors’ (p. 130). The only possible outcome will again be war, an outcome ‘contrary to the end for which all Soveraignty is instituted’.132

What, then, is the true status of Parliaments within hereditary monarchies? Turning to this question in Chapter 22, Hobbes again underlines the absurdity of supposing that they can ever be representative assemblies in the sense of having an independent right to speak and act in the name of everyone. The reason, he repeats, is that the monarch will already be ‘the absolute Representative of all the subjects’, from which it follows that ‘no other, can be Representative of any part of them, but so far forth, as he shall give leave’ (p. 156). Hobbes’s answer is thus that Parliaments can never amount to anything more than purely consultative bodies that monarchs may choose to summon from time to time if they happen to want some information or advice.

This is an astonishingly reactionary response. Despite everything that had happened in the meantime, Hobbes is simply reverting to the position that, as we
saw at the outset, the most high-flying defenders of divine right had taken up at the start of the civil war. There can be little doubt, however, that he fully intended to adopt as deflating a tone as possible in confronting the theory of Parliamentary sovereignty that had triumphed in the intervening years. He is willing, of course, to allow that any sovereign monarch, should he happen to think fit, may choose ‘to give command to the towns, and other severall parts of their territory, to send to him their Deputies, to enforme him of the condition, and necessities of the Subjects, or to advise with him for the making of good Lawes, or for any other cause’ (p. 162). He is even willing to concede that we can think of such deputies as representatives of the people, so that when summoned and brought together they may be said to constitute ‘a Body Politique, representing every Subject’ (p. 162). But he is unrepentant in insisting that we cannot possibly think of them as having an independent right at any stage to speak and act in the name of the populace as a whole. As he never tires of reminding us, to grant them this status would be to institute ‘two Soveraigns, over the same people; which cannot consist with their Peace’ (p. 162).

V

Hobbes’s theory of representative government might appear to leave him with an awkward difficulty. Of whom, on his account, is sovereignty to be predicated? To put the question the other way round—as Henry Parker had done—who is ‘the proper Subject’ of sovereign power? The defenders of divine right had responded that sovereignty is the defining attribute of kings. But according to Hobbes no king enjoys a status any higher than that of an authorised representative. The democratical gentlemen had retorted that the body of the people is the original and natural subject of sovereignty. But according to Hobbes there is no such thing as the body of the people. If, however, sovereignty is the property neither of the king nor of the people, who can possibly lay claim to it?

To this conundrum Hobbes supplies an epoch-making answer. To see how he arrives at it, we need to begin by recalling two distinctive features of his analysis of the covenant. The first is that, when the members of the multitude authorise a man or assembly to serve as their representative, the effect is to transform them from a mere aggregation into one Person, because they are now endowed with a single will and voice (p. 114). Hobbes’s other distinctive contention is that the sovereign is the representative of the Person engendered or ‘generated’ by the multitude out of this agreement to be represented. When, in short, the members of a multitude institute a sovereign, they become one Person and acquire a representative to ‘bear’ or ‘carry’ or ‘present’ that Person at one and the same time.

What we need to know, therefore, is the name of the Person engendered by the multitude out of their agreement to authorise a representative. This will be to know the true subject of the sovereignty that the sovereign representer merely holds the right to exercise. Hobbes finally lets us into the secret in the pivotal and magnificently resonant passage in Chapter 17 in which he describes the moment
at which the political covenant takes place. When the members of the multitude agree ‘every man with every man’ to authorise an individual or an assembly to represent them, the name of the Person they generate is ‘a COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS’ (p. 120). Hobbes thereupon summarises his doctrine in two crucial definitions that immediately follow. First we are told that ‘a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS)\textsuperscript{135} can be defined as ‘One Person, of whose Acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author’ (p. 121). Then we are told that the name of the person who ‘bears’ or ‘carries’ this Person is the sovereign, who may consequently be said to ‘Present the Person’ of the Commonwealth or State (p. 121). As Hobbes later confirms, the sovereign may therefore be described as ‘the Publique Person’ who serves as ‘the Representant of the Common-wealth’ (p. 399).

It is true that the living person of the sovereign is always liable to occlude the purely fictional Person of the Commonwealth or State. As Hobbes acknowledges, ‘a Common-wealth, without Soveraign Power, is but a word, without substance, and cannot stand’ (p. 245). But this consideration only renders him the more anxious to insist that sovereigns are nothing more than actors who body forth the actions of Commonwealths.\textsuperscript{136} When a natural person or assembly of persons receives authorisation to represent a Commonwealth, the actions they perform in the name of the Commonwealth will always be attributable to the Commonwealth itself. Hobbes makes this commitment unambiguously clear at the outset of his discussion of civil law in Chapter 26. Although the Commonwealth ‘can do nothing but by the Person that Represents it’ the Commonwealth remains the Legislator, and ‘the name of the person Commanding’ is ‘Persona Civitatis, the Person of the Common-wealth’.\textsuperscript{137} We may therefore say—and Hobbes repeats the phrase throughout the chapter—that civil laws are always ‘the commands of the Common-wealth’, and that it is only ‘the Common-wealth, and his Command, that maketh Law’.\textsuperscript{138}

Hobbes tells us in the Epistle Dedicatory to Leviathan that ‘I speak not of the men, but (in the Abstract) of the Seat of Power’ (p. 3). He concludes by insisting that this seat is occupied not by any natural person or body of persons, but rather by the disembodied and fictional Person whose generic name is the State.\textsuperscript{139} However, he is conventional enough to believe that, like the offspring of any lawful union, the Person ‘generated’ by the union of the multitude deserves its own name as well. Following out his metaphor of marriage and procreation, he accordingly goes on to perform the appropriate act of baptism. He announces in his gravest tones that, ‘this is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that Mortall God, to which wee owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defence’ (p. 120).

Hobbes’s allusion is to the sea monster described in Chapter 41 of the Book of Job, which he treats as an image of terrifying and overwhelming strength. The claim that we need to submit to such an absolute form of power had been denounced by the newly sovereign House of Commons as recently as its Declaration of March 1649. ‘Such an unaccountable Officer’, Parliament had warned, would be ‘a strange Monster to be permitted by mankinde’.\textsuperscript{140} Hobbes

\textsuperscript{135} Quentin Skinner
unhesitatingly picks up and hurls back the taunt. The main burden of his political theory is that we have no option but to permit our sovereign to personate just such a monster if we are to have any prospect of living together in security and peace.

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NOTES

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2 Pitkin 1989: 140.
4 This suggestion has already been valuably pursued in Baumgold 1988.
5 Where a tract was published anonymously but its authorship has subsequently been established, I place the name of the author in square brackets when giving references.
6 Charles I 1643: 287.
7 [Parker] 1642b: 1.
8 Goodwin (John) 1642: 8.
10 [Hunton] 1643: 13, 23.
11 Prynne 1643: I, p. 91.
12 [Parker] 1642b: 1, 2, 3.
13 Maximes Unfolded 1643: 14.
14 Bridge 1643b: 3.
17 [Hunton] 1643: 15, 19.
18 Prynne 1643: I, p. 91.
22 Bridge 1643a: 1.
23 Bridge 1643a: 2–3.
27 [Parker] 1642b: 1, 2.
Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos 1579: 89, 193.
Prynne 1643: Appendix, p. 143.
Maximes Unfolded 1643: 26
[Parker] 1642b: 2, 4.
[Herle] 1643a: 18.
Prynne 1643: I, p. 104.
Prynne 1643: I, p. 91.
See [Parker] 1642b: 5 on ‘the whole Kingdome’ as ‘the Author’ and ‘essence it selfe of Parliaments’.

Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos 1579: 47, 94, 194.
See Digest 1985: 35. 1. 36. 1, vol. III, p. 187, where repraesentare is used to refer to the making over of a legacy. Cf. also Digest 1985: 33. 4. 1. 2, vol. III, p. 115, where repraesentatio, i.e. immediate payment, is viewed as the special merit of receiving a legacy from a dowry.

Junius 1638: 345.
Ambrose 1845: col. 958: ‘hunc nobis quis poterit repraesentare?’


[Hunton] 1643: 47.

Their use of the term predates the earliest uses recorded in the OED, and may be the earliest of all.

[Parker] 1642b: 11.
[Herle] 1643b: 30.
[Hunton] 1644: 50.
[Parker] 1642b: 15, 45.
A Soveraigne Salve 1643: 8.

[Parker] 1642b: 15.
[Parker] 1642b: 15, 23.
[Parker] 1642b: 15.
[Parker] 1642b: 11.
[Parker] 1642b: 15.
A Soveraigne Salve 1643: 22.
For this contention see also [Herle] 1642: 16–17.

This charge was first pressed by the author of *Animadversions* 1642: 4, 10 and was subsequently much repeated.

The *OED* dates from the 1650s and 1660s the standard use of the term to refer to something that is almost (but not in fact) equivalent to something else.

For a partial exception see Goodwin (John) 1642: 2, 28.


A Soveraigne Salve 1643: 4, 8, 17.

For a partial exception see Goodwin (John) 1642: 2, 28.


Here and hereafter, when referring to one particular page of *Leviathan*, I give the reference in the body of the text.

This is not to say that *The Elements of Law* and *De Cive* lack the concepts of authorisation and representation. It is arguable that, when Hobbes maintains in these works that the will of everyone is ‘included’ in the will of the sovereign, and that the king ‘is’ the people, he is already speaking in effect about kings as authorised representatives. See, for example, Hobbes 1969a: 124–5 and Hobbes 1983: 190. My claim is only that Hobbes never uses the vocabulary of authorisation and representation in these works, in both of which he describes the act of covenanting as the act of giving up or relinquishing our rights. See Hobbes 1969a: 104 and Hobbes 1983: 134. It might be added that, to the
extent that the concepts of authorisation and representation are implicit in these earlier
texts, their presence is in some tension with Hobbes’s explicit commitment to the view that
the act of covenanting involves a mere relinquishment of rights.

102 See, for example, Gauthier 1969: 99, 120, 126; Zarka 1999: 325, 333.
103 [Parker] 1642b: 44.
156, 158, 172.
110 See, for example, the Act Abolishing the Office of King in Gardiner 1906, which speaks
(p. 386) of the right of the people to be ‘governed by its own representatives or national
meeting in council’ and declares (p. 387) that ‘supreme authority’ now resides ‘in this and
the successive representatives of the people’.
112 Hobbes 1996: 130, 162.
114 Goodwin (Thomas) 1642: 48, 49.
115 See also Bridge 1649: 117, who describes Adam as ‘a Common person’ in that ‘he
was made up of soul and body; and so are we, His body had legs, and arms, and other
members; and we have member for member; we have head for head, and arms for arms, and legs
for legs: And so, he sinning, we have sin for his sin, pride for his pride, and unbelief for his
unbelief’.
116 Goodwin (Thomas) 1642: 57, 58.
117 Goodwin (Thomas) 1642: 59.
118 Goodwin (Thomas) 1642: 60, 58.
119 Goodwin (Thomas) 1642: 73.
120 It is evident, however, from Chapter 42 of Leviathan that Hobbes must have
immersed himself in a wide range of theological texts in the 1640s.
121 See also An Answer to a Printed Book 1642—which has been ascribed to Dudley
Digges—for a discussion (pp. 13–14) of the ‘fiction of law’ by which the people are said to
accept, and indeed to enact, what is done in their name.
123 [Digges] 1643: 149.
126 But perhaps the head of the sovereign is shown as that of a man simply because
this would have been expected.
127 Hobbes 1996 speaks of sovereign Queens in Chapter 20 (p. 140) and specifically
mentions Queen Elizabeth of England in Chapter 47 (p. 479).
129 Hobbes 1996: 114, 156.
131 Hobbes 1996: 228. Hobbes first refers to this version of the theory at pp. 115
and 127.
132 Hobbes 1996: 130; cf also p. 156.
133 [Parker] 1642b: 44.
Hobbes on Representation


135 For this formula see Hobbes 1996: 9.

136 See Hobbes 1996: 172 for a particularly clear distinction between sovereigns and commonwealths, together with the claim that the person of the sovereign always represents the Person of the commonwealth.


139 That Hobbes’s State is a Person ‘by fiction’ is convincingly argued in Runciman 2000.

140 A Declaration 1649: 14.

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