

Health and Illness of the *Leviathan*. Hobbes's Use of the Commonplace Metaphor of the Body Politic'.

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1. Metaphor as Commonplace in 'Leviathan'

Thomas Hobbes's use of the metaphor of the state as a body, or, in its lexicalised form, the *body politic*, in *Leviathan* (1651) has been described variously as marking the final phase of the classical commonplace metaphor of the state as a human body or as the start of a new tradition in the history of thought, reflecting the change from the ancient humoral model of disease to a more 'modern' one.¹ Such periodisations, based as they are on presupposed 'grand narratives' of historical progression, tend to gloss over the textual and pragmatic details of the metaphor use in question. This paper will instead concentrate on the way Hobbes employed the argumentative potential of the *body politic* metaphor to advance a new perspective on politics. In focusing on this discursive function of what was by Hobbes's time an already established metaphor, I hope to elucidate some of the mechanisms of subverting a commonplace's traditional mainstream meaning. As Moss (this volume) highlights, the method of compiling and using commonplaces as developed over the course of the 16th century appealed to and

¹ For the former view cf. e.g., D. Hale, *Body Politic: A Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature* (The Hague, 1971), pp. 128-130; S. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York, 1978), pp. 77-78; for the latter, J. G. Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic. Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 141-143.

often claimed for itself traditional authority.² Although the initial “conservative” bias of commonplace-based argumentation had been thoroughly eroded in the moral and political disputes during the reformation³, the technique of arguing *against* established authorities by way of commonplace still required the existence of a ‘common’ frame of reference and established knowledge so that its more or less radical modification could be identified and understood.

Before we can begin to analyse Hobbes’s use of the *body politic* metaphor, we need to clarify his attitude to metaphor in general. Such an explication is necessary as Hobbes is considered by some modern metaphor-theorists as one of the chief ‘empiricist’ detractors of metaphor and of figurative language use in general.⁴ The reason for this notoriety lies in the metaphor-critical pronouncements in *Leviathan* that appear to demonstrate Hobbes’s opposition to metaphor as an ‘*abuse of speech*’, for instance when he compares it, together with ‘*senslesse and ambiguous words*’, to *ignes fatui* that distract from proper reasoning and mislead their victims into ‘wandering amongst innumerable absurdities’, so that the end is ‘*contention, and sedition, or contempt*’.⁵

However, against this seemingly absolute condemnation of metaphor has to be set Hobbes’s equally emphatic acknowledgement that in ‘*Demonstration, in Councill, and all rigourous search of Truth ...sometimes the understanding have need to be*

² A. Moss, *Power and Persuasion: Commonplace Culture in early modern Europe*, in: this volume, pp. XXX-XXX.

³ A. Moss, *Power and Persuasion: Commonplace Culture in early modern Europe*, pp. XXX-XXX.

⁴ M. Johnson, ‘Introduction: Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition’, in: Johnson, M., ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* (Minnesota, 1981), pp. 3-47 (pp. 11-12); similarly, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 11-2; D. E. Cooper, *Metaphor* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 17-8; M. Leezenberg, *Contexts of Metaphor* (Amsterdam, 2001), p. 1; A. Goatly, *Washing the Brain. Metaphor and Hidden Ideology* (Amsterdam and New York, 2007), p. 28.

⁵ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck, revised ed. (Cambridge, 1996), p. 36; for similar condemnations of *misleading* ‘metaphors’ cf. *ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 31, 35-36. Page references to *Leviathan* in all the notes refer to the 1996 edition.

opened by some apt similitude'.⁶ *Similitudes*, i.e. in modern terminology *similes*, are not disqualified by Hobbes at all; on the contrary, he endorses their use for showing good *Wit* and 'rarity of (...) invention'.⁷ Such praise of 'similitude' as a rhetorical strategy was in line with the humanist tradition of using similes as argumentative commonplaces.⁸ In his English paraphrase of Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric*, published anonymously in 1637,⁹ Hobbes had defined a similitude as 'a *Metaphor dilated*', and metaphor itself as characteristic of perspicuous 'oration', for 'in a *Metaphor* alone there is *perspicuity, Novity, and Sweetnesse*'.¹⁰ By the time of writing *Leviathan*, however, Hobbes had, as his above-quoted verdict on metaphors as *ignes fatui* shows, developed a more critical view of 'metaphor'. It now stands in opposition to the concept of 'similitude', as the latter still is regarded by Hobbes a means of achieving the ideal of argumentative perspicuity. It is therefore plausible to interpret 'similitude' as covering the non-deceptive uses of figurative language, including what

⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 52.

⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 50-51. For the status of the category of *Wit* in Hobbes's 'reconsideration of eloquence' cf. Q. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 369-375; for Hobbes's vindication of perspicuous 'similitude' against deceptive 'metaphor' cf. A. Musolff, 'Ignes fatui or apt similitude? — the apparent denunciation of metaphor by Thomas Hobbes', *Hobbes Studies* 18 (2005), pp. 96-113 (pp. 105-113).

⁸ A. Moss, *Power and Persuasion: Commonplace Culture in early modern Europe*, pp. XXX-XXX.

⁹ Cf. Hobbes, 'A Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique', in: Harwood, J. T., ed., *The Rhetorics of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Lamy* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1986), pp. 33-128. For discussions of the impact of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Hobbes's later work, especially on *Leviathan*, cf. L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: its Basis and its Genesis*, transl. Sinclair, E.M. (repr. Chicago, Ill., 1952), pp. 35-36; J. T. Harwood, 'Introduction: Thomas Hobbes's *Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique*', in: Harwood, J. T., ed., *The Rhetorics of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Lamy* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1986), pp. 1-32 (pp. 13-32); Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, pp. 239-242.

¹⁰ Hobbes, 'A Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique', pp. 109-110.

is today called ‘metaphor’. The accusation against Hobbes that he was an opponent of ‘metaphor’ in the modern sense thus appears to rest on a double-confusion between his changing specialised uses of the term ‘metaphor’ (i.e. in the Aristotle paraphrase as positively valued part of oratory, in *Leviathan* as a rhetorical trick of deception) and the more general, modern meaning of ‘metaphor’ as the ‘mapping’ or ‘blending’ of concepts from different ‘domains’ of knowledge and experience.¹¹

Hobbes’s alleged hostility to metaphor and figurative language is (or rather, would be, were it true) also in blatant conflict with his massive use of rhetorical tropes in most of his writings but particularly in *Leviathan*, where figures such as metaphor, metonymy, simile, analogy and allegory, to mention only the most prominent ones, abound. The very title of his *opus magnum* is derived from the name of the allegorical sea monster mentioned in the Biblical book *Job* (40-41) as the ‘King of all the children of pride’, who still has to obey God’s commands.¹² The frontispiece¹³ and the first part of the introductory chapter present the state (‘Common-wealth’) as a giant model of a human body that comprises in it the smaller bodies of subjects/citizens. But why did Hobbes give such prominence to a metaphor that lacked at least one of the central features of metaphor praised in Aristotle’s *The Art of Rhetoric*, i.e. ‘Novity’? For the metaphor of the state as a body was anything but novel even in Hobbes’s time. Its history¹⁴ can be traced back to pre-Socratic thinkers in Ancient

¹¹ For classic cognitive accounts of metaphor as conceptual mapping/blending cf. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* and G. Fauconnier and M. Turner, *The Way we think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York, 2002).

¹² Cf. Hobbes’s reference to *Job* in *Leviathan*, pp. 9, 221.

¹³ Cf. appendix.

¹⁴ For overviews of the metaphor’s conceptual development up to the seventeenth century cf. Hale, *The Body Politic*, pp. 18-107; G. Dhorn van Rossum and E.-W., Bockenförde, ‘Organ, Organismus, Organisation, politischer Körper’, in: Brunner, O., Conze, W. and Koselleck, R., eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 4, (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 519-622 (pp. 519-554); R. Guldin, *Körpermetaphern: Zum Verhältnis von Politik und Medizin* (Würzburg, 2000), pp. 1-79; A. Koschorke, S. Lüdemann, T. Frank, and

Greece, then to Plato and Aristotle's writings and to the Aesopian 'fable of the belly', which was retold by Hellenistic and Roman historians, and was passed on, via the Stoics and medieval philosophers, to Renaissance authors, including Shakespeare (cf. *Coriolanus* I, 1: 101-169). In another tradition that originated in St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians and was carried further by the Church Fathers and later theologians, the Church was defined as the mystical 'body of Christ', and this definition was transferred by jurists onto of socio-political entities.¹⁵

Based on these traditions, the *body-state* metaphor was established as a commonplace to advocate discipline, co-operation and solidarity among the *body's members*. Most accounts of the *body politic's anatomy* written during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, from John of Salisbury's (c. 1115-1180) treatise *Policraticus* to the *Dialogue Between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset* by Henry VIII's chaplain, Thomas Starkey (1495-1537), stressed the necessity of the *head* caring for all, even the lowest *members of the body*, i.e. the *feet/peasants*.¹⁶ Up to the sixteenth century, the *body politic* was mainly attributed to the ruler as his/her mystical quality in addition to having a *body natural*.¹⁸ By the seventeenth century, the concept came to mean the state itself: this was the basis of Hobbes's theory of '*Pacts and Covenants*, by which the parts of this Body Politique were at first made'.¹⁹

E. Matala de Mazza, *Der fiktive Staat. Konstruktionen des politischen Körpers in der Geschichte Europas* (Frankfurt am Main, 2007), pp. 15-102.

¹⁵ Cf. Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1978), **vol. 1**, pp. 3-62; C. Nederman and K. L. Forhan, eds., *Readings in Medieval Political Theory 1100-1400* (Indianapolis, 1993).

¹⁶ John Of Salisbury, *Policraticus. Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and transl. Nederman, C. J. (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 66-67, 69, 125-126; T. Starkey, *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, ed. Mayer, T.F. (repr. London, 1989).p. 123.

¹⁸ Cf. E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (repr. Princeton, N.J., 1997), pp. 7-23; S. Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, transl. Litchfield, R. B. (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2001), *passim*.

¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 9.

2. The anatomy and functioning of the body politic in *Leviathan*

Leviathan contains two major passages that depict the ‘COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS)’ as an ‘Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall’:²⁰ one at the start of the introductory chapter and a further one in Chapter 23, which treats ‘*Of the PUBLIQUE MINISTERS of Sovereign Power*’. A few further references to organs and functions of the *body politic* are scattered throughout the book. Tables 1 and 2 give an overview over these conceptual mappings:

Table 1: *Body parts/fluids*

<i>SOURCE CONCEPTS</i>	TARGET CONCEPTS
<i>Body</i>	Common-Wealth
<i>Soul</i>	Sovereignty
<i>Joynts</i>	Magistrates
<i>Nerves</i>	reward, punishment
	Publique Ministers: Protectors, Vice-Roys, and Governors
<i>Hands</i>	Publique Ministers: executioners etc.
<i>Eyes</i>	Publique Ministers: govt. Spies
<i>Eare</i>	Publique Ministers: govt. receivers of petitions
<i>Blood</i>	mony, gold and silver
<i>Muscles</i>	lawful Systemes, and Assemblyes of People

Table 2. *Life functions*

<i>SOURCE CONCEPTS</i>	TARGET CONCEPTS
<i>Strength</i>	wealth, riches
<i>Safety</i>	businesse
<i>memory</i>	counsellors

²⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 9.

<i>reason and will</i>	equity and laws
<i>Health</i>	concord
<i>Death</i>	civill war
<i>God's Fiat (Genesis)</i>	pacts, covenants
<i>Voice</i>	judges
<i>nutritive faculty</i>	Power of levying mony
<i>motive faculty</i>	Power of conduct and command
<i>rationall faculty</i>	Power of making Lawes
<i>procreation, children</i>	colonies

Some salient *body parts*, such as the *head*, *heart* and *feet*, which had been regularly included in traditional versions of the *body-state* analogy, are missing and there is one minor discrepancy: the source concept of *nerves* is used to depict both a political function (reward, punishment) and the state functionaries themselves (*Publique ministers*). Furthermore, the second list contains as many psychological and social functions as physical ones. It is thus evident that there is no a systematic anatomical account in *Leviathan* – a fact that motivated David Hale in particular to list Hobbes among those who put ‘an end to sustained or serious use of organic imagery in political discussion’.²¹ But then Hobbes nowhere claimed comprehensiveness or competence in this respect: his considerable interest in (natural) sciences centred on mathematics and physics, not biology or medicine.²² To decide, for instance, in what sense nerves can be considered bodily functions or ‘parts organically’ was not his concern: all that he needed for his argumentation in *Leviathan* were source concepts that fitted the target concepts of state institutions he wanted to analyse.

Even if some *body parts* appear to be underspecified or absent, the *body politic* depicted in the text of *Leviathan* is just as complex as that on the frontispiece, which shows (against varying emblematic backgrounds, depending on the year of the imprint) the crowned figure of a man from the waist upwards, holding a sword and a crosier in his hands, with arms and the trunk consisting of a multitude of miniature

²¹ Hale, *The Body Politic*, p. 130.

²² Cf. Q. Skinner *Visions of Politics*, three vols, vol. 3: *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge, 2002), vol. 3: *Hobbes and Civil Science*, pp. 5-37.

figures symbolising the people.²³ If we assume that the *head* of this figure is the ‘seat’ of the *soul* that is mentioned in the introductory chapter, we may perceive a rough equivalence of the pictorial and textual allegories, despite the missing *head* in the text. The ‘headlessness’ of the *body politic* in the textual presentation in *Leviathan* could also be motivated by the fact that since the decapitation of Charles I in 1649, two years before the publication of Hobbes’s treatise, the contemporary English *body politic*’s dynastic sovereign was literally without his (natural) head. However, as Ernst H. Kantorowicz has pointed out, even during the civil war, the head of the ‘King body politic’ was retained by Parliament as a state symbol on the great seal and coins: ‘the king body natural in Oxford had become a nuisance to Parliament; but the King body politic was (...) still present in Parliament, though only in his seal image’.²⁴ What mattered was the sovereign’s political ‘will’, i.e., the *soul* of the ‘Artificiall Man’, and as the symbolic seat of that soul, the *head* of the *body politic* was not necessarily a problematic concept even after the ‘King body natural’ had lost his.

In any case, the *body politic* that Hobbes presents is an artificial one in both the frontispiece and the text. The picture of a man consisting of many little figures is evidently an allegorical representation, and the textual exposition of the analogy similarly stresses the ‘constructedness’ of the correspondence between the two bodies:

NATURE (the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World) is by the *Art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal. For seeing life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principall part within; why may we not say, that all *Automata* (Engines that move themselves by springs and wheelles as doth a watch) have an artificiall life?²⁵

²³ Cf. appendix for the title page of the first edition. For detailed analyses of the frontispiece cf. R. Brandt, ‘Das Titelblatt des Leviathan’, *Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* 15 (1987), pp. 164-186; N. Malcolm, ‘The Title Page of *Leviathan*, Seen in a Curious Perspective’, in: Malcolm, N., *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 200-233.

²⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, pp. 20-23.

²⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 9.

The 'Artificial Animal' of the state is a machine construed by Man, by means of which he tries to imitate 'that *Fiat*, or the *Let us make man*, pronounced by God in the Creation'.²⁶ Where God simply uttered a command in order to create human beings, Man is forced to put together laboriously a socio-political construction. Much has been made of Hobbes's acknowledgement of the contemporary mechanistic conception of the body, as promoted by René Descartes (1596-1650), and of Hobbes's acquaintance with and admiration for William Harvey's (1578-1657) theory of blood circulation.²⁷ But surely the most important point for Hobbes in using the *body-state* metaphor was not an application of the latest anatomic insights (if indeed these were as recognizable for contemporaries as for later historians of thought who had the benefit of hindsight).²⁸ Rather, what recommended the mechanistic model as a source concept to Hobbes was the fact that it suited perfectly the target focus of his political argument, i.e. the notion of the 'Common-Wealth' based on an artificial covenant that was not derived from the 'state of nature', where life was 'solitary, poore, nasty,

²⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 10.

²⁷ Cf. Hale, *The Body Politic*, pp. 109, 129-130; D. Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), p. 124; Guldin, *Körpermetaphern*, pp. 80-89; Goatly, *Washing the Brain*, pp. 362-363.

²⁸ The assumption of a unitary modernization of medicine in the early 17th century that underlies this motivation of Hobbes's insistence on the mechanical nature of bodies is by no means unproblematic. A. Cunningham ('William Harvey: The Discovery of the Circulation of Blood', in: Elmer, P. and Grell, P.E., eds., *Health, disease and society in Europe 1500-1800: A source book* (Manchester and New York, 2004), pp. 173-178 (pp. 176-7)) has pointed out that Harvey, far from accepting Descartes' mechanistic views, saw his discovery of blood circulation as a reformulation and essentially, reaffirmation, of Aristotle's views regarding the functions of the heart. The subsequent mechanistic reinterpretation of Harvey's theory should not be projected retrospectively onto his discovery, let alone attributed to Hobbes's knowledge of it. Its transfer onto political imagery seems even more speculative.

brutish, and short'.²⁹ The artificial body of the state based on the covenant was meant to *relieve* Man from that very condition of unchecked nature, i.e. constant warfare. Hobbes's emphasis on the artificiality and the mechanical principle of the 'Commonwealth' does not contradict the organic aspects of the *body politic* metaphor – it just implies that he saw both the physical and the political body as a product of 'Art' – with God and humanity as the respective 'artificers'.

The correspondences between anatomic and functional aspects of the human body and the state that we have sketched so far are neither systematic nor particularly innovative as regards the source concepts employed: Hobbes picks and chooses from the commonplace tradition what is suitable for his analysis of the state as a hierarchical and functional whole. However, his *body-state* analogies are not exhausted by these general references; *Leviathan* also includes a vivid account of the *body politic's illnesses*, which we need to take into consideration in order to assess the overall argumentative import of the metaphor.

3. *The pathology of the Leviathan*

Hobbes devotes a whole chapter of *Leviathan* to '*things that Weaken, or tend to the DISSOLUTION of a Common-wealth*',³⁰ which is not surprising in view of his own experience of the English Civil War that forced him into exile and, after his return to England in 1652, led to a precarious existence first under Cromwell's, then Charles's II rule.³¹ He begins his political *diagnosis* by discussing *Defectuous Procreation*, i.e. 'Imperfect Institution' of states, which he equates with the lack of power and

²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 89.

³⁰ Chapter 29, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 221-230.

³¹ Cf. A. P. Martinich, *Thomas Hobbes* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 13-23; also Hobbes's own commemoration of one of its victims, Sydney Godolphin (1610-1643), 'who hating no man, nor hated of any', was 'slain in the beginning of the late Civil warre, in the Publique quarrell, by an undiscerned, and an undiscerning hand' (*Leviathan*, p. 484).

resources of the sovereign.³² Secondly, he considers ‘*Diseases of a Common-wealth, that proceed from the poison of seditious doctrines*’.³³ He refutes six doctrines that question the moral and political authority of the sovereign and then goes on to discuss the underlying causes of sedition. Here, *illness* imagery plays a significant role. The first cause that Hobbes highlights is the ‘Example of different Government’ in other nations,³⁴ which is so seductive that people cannot leave it be, ‘though they be grieved with the continuance of disorder; like hot blouds, that having gotten the itch, tear themselves with their own nayles, till they can endure the smart no longer.’³⁵ The reference to *hot blouds* appears to be an oblique allusion to the theory of the *humours*, which surfaces in *Leviathan* on a few further occasions, e.g. when unlawful ‘systemes’ or assemblies are described as ‘Wens, Biles, and Apostemes, engendered by the unnaturall conflux of evill humours’.³⁶ However, the ‘*hot blouds*’ passage itself derives its vividness less from humoral theory than from the graphic account of scratching an open wound.

This focus on graphic symptoms is also prominent in Hobbes’s discussion of the second cause of *poisoning* by seditious doctrines, i.e. ‘the Reading of the books of Policy, and Histories of the antient Greeks, and Romans’, which incite ‘young men and all others that are unprovided of the Antidote of solid Reason’ to emulate their rebellions without considering the resultant ‘frequent Seditions, and Civill warres’.³⁷ Ancient republicanism appears *poisonous* to Hobbes, because it justifies regicide or,

³² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 222. In an earlier chapter Hobbes used *Procreation* as a synonym for the ‘Children of a Common-wealth’, i.e., at the target level, ‘*Plantations, or Colonies*’ (*Leviathan*, p. 175).

³³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 223.

³⁴ Hobbes provides historical and contemporary examples (e.g. the Low Countries as a model for English revolutionaries (*Leviathan*, pp. 225-226)).

³⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 225.

³⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 165; cf. also Hobbes’s reference to the link between different kinds of ‘Madnesse’, including ‘melancholy’, as one of the four classical humors, and an ‘evill constitution of the organs of the Body’ (*Leviathan*, p. 54).

³⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 225-226.

as its supporters euphemistically (from Hobbes's viewpoint) call it, 'Tyrannicide': this 'Venime' he 'will not doubt to compare to the biting of a mad Dogge, which is a disease the Physicians call *Hydrophobia*, or *fear of Water*'.³⁸ Hobbes parallelizes the symptoms in a strictly analogical way:

For as he that is so bitten, has a continuall torment of thirst, and yet abhorreth water; and is in such an estate, as if the poison endeavoureth to convert him into a Dogge: So when a Monarchy is once bitten to the quick, by those Democraticall writers, that continually snarle at that estate; it wanteth nothing more than a strong Monarch, which neverthelesse out of a certain *Tyrannophobia*, or fear of being strongly governed, when they have him, they abhorre.³⁹

Hobbes's extended horror scenario of the 'Democraticall writers' biting a state 'to the quick' calls into question not only Hale's assertion that in *Leviathan* the *body-state* 'comparisons are not insisted upon',⁴⁰ but also Sontag's inclusion of Hobbes in a list of pre-modern thinkers who employed illness metaphors benignly to encourage 'rulers to pursue a more rational policy'.⁴¹ Rather, in the comparison of his ideological adversaries with *mad dogs*, whose *venom* can *kill* the state, Hobbes seems to come close to suggesting that such dangerous *beasts must be put down*, lest they ruin the *body politic*. The *poisoning* scenario seems to have been as potent an image to justify the elimination of a category of groups of people in the 17th century as it was in the 20th century, when the Nazis spoke of 'the Jew' as entering and poisoning the bloodstream of the supposed 'Aryan' race (and endeavoured to stop this *disease* by eliminating its supposed *carriers*).⁴²

³⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 226.

³⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 174.

⁴⁰ Hale, *The Body Politic*, p. 128.

⁴¹ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, pp. 75-76.

⁴² For analyses of the *blood poisoning* myth in Nazi-ideology cf. C. Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin and New York, 2000), pp. 460-464; F.

However, whilst the vividness as well as the conclusiveness of an infection of *Tyrannophobia* as the political equivalent of physical *Hydrophobia* may come close to that of modern ‘master illness’ metaphors,⁴³ Hobbes still adheres to the humanistic tradition of introducing the metaphor didactically with the assertion that he ‘will not doubt to compare’. He thus highlights the fact that his analogy is based on a comparison, *not* a literal description. Its purpose is that of a warning, rather than, as Sontag saw in the 20th century uses of illness as a metaphor, the desire to ‘impute guilt, to prescribe punishment’.⁴⁴ Hobbes employs the analogy to drive home his warning as forcefully as possible but the readers are invited to consider it critically for themselves.

Hobbes’s discussion of the third type of serious political *diseases* starts out from medical speculation: as there ‘have been Doctors, that hold there be three Soules in a man: so there be also that think there may be more Soules (...) than one’.⁴⁵ The import of this comparison is a polemic against the Church’s claims to ‘*Supremacy* against the *Sovereignty*’, which he sees as the chief cause of fanaticism that leads to civil war.⁴⁶ In Hobbes’s view, ‘this is a Disease which not unfitly may be compared to the Epilepsie, or Falling-sickness’, because in both cases ‘an unnaturall spirit’ causes ‘violent, and irregular motions’ of the *members*, thus putting the victim (the person or the state) in danger of falling (e.g. into fire/water or into ‘the Fire of Civill warre’).⁴⁷ The implication is that the sovereign must remain the sole *soul* of the state; any other rival authority is seen as a mortal danger to the *health* of the *body politic*. The last major challenge to the sovereignty as the political *soul* of the state that Hobbes

Rash, *The Language of Violence: Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf* (New York, 2006), pp. 125-156; A. Musolff, ‘Which role do metaphors play in racial prejudice? - The function of anti-Semitic imagery in Hitler’s “Mein Kampf”’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 41/1 (2007), pp. 21-44 (pp. 36-40).

⁴³ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁴ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 80.

⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 226.

⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 226-228.

⁴⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 227.

considers is the idea of dividing government between two or three powers. These are likened to life-functions, i.e. the powers of ‘levying mony, (which is the Nutritive faculty,)’, ‘of conduct and command, (which is the Motive faculty,)’ and ‘of making Lawes, (which is the Rationall Faculty,)’.⁴⁸ As with the ‘State vs. Church’ rivalry for the *soul*, Hobbes dismisses any such arrangement as a dangerous ‘irregularity of Common-wealth’.⁴⁹

After having discussed defective *procreation*, *poisoning* and rivalry of several *souls* in one *body politic* as the *diseases* ‘of the greatest and most present danger’, Hobbes goes on to describe less dangerous but still important conditions, which ‘are not unfit to be observed’.⁵⁰ Of these he notes seven: i) ‘difficulty of raising Mony’ (‘Ague caused by congested arteries obstructing the ‘passage for the Bloud’), ii) monopolies that hoard ‘the treasure of the Common-wealth’ (‘pleurisie’, i.e. intrusion of blood in the lungs), iii) ‘Popularity of a potent Subject’ that tempts him to become leader of a rebellion (‘the effects of Witchcraft’), iv) immoderate growth of towns, corporations and concomitant ‘liberty of Disputing’ (‘wormes in the entryles’), v) expansionist policies (‘Bulimia’), which in their consequence, lead to ‘Wounds (...) received from the enemy; and the *Wens*, of (...) conquests’, vi) excessive ‘Ease’ (‘Lethargy’) and vii) ‘Riot and Vain Expense’ (‘Consumption’).⁵¹ Hobbes rounds off the discussion of detrimental and destructive developments in the political *body* with a description of a defeat in war as its *dissolution*, when the sovereign, as its *soul*, loses all command of its *members* and only leaves the ‘carcase’ of the state.⁵²

To gain an overview, we can again draw up a list of matching pairs of source and target concepts, in Table 3:

Table 3. *Illnesses/diseases*

SOURCE CONCEPTS	TARGET CONCEPTS
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⁴⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 228.

⁴⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 228.

⁵⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 228.

⁵¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 228-230.

⁵² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 230.

<i>Disease, INFIRMITIES</i>	Things that weaken the Common-wealth
<i>Sickness</i>	Sedition
<i>unlawfull conflux of evill humours</i>	unlawful assemblies in common-wealth
<i>hot blouds</i>	desire of novelty
<i>Defectuous Procreation</i>	Imperfect Institution
<i>Biting of Mad Dogge, Hydrophobia</i>	Tyrannophobia
<i>Epilepsie, or Falling-sickness</i>	Belief in Ghostly Kingdome
<i>Conjoined twins</i>	mixt government
<i>Ague (obstructed Heart arteries)</i>	difficulty of raising Mony
<i>Pleurisie</i>	Monopolies
<i>Witchcraft</i>	Rebellion by charismatic army leaders
<i>wormes in entryles</i>	liberties of great towns, corporations, liberty to Dispute
<i>bulimia</i>	appetite of enlarging Dominion
<i>wens</i>	conquests
	unlawfull systemes in the Common-wealth
<i>biles</i>	unlawfull systemes in the Common-wealth
<i>apostemes</i>	unlawfull systemes in the Common-wealth
<i>lethargy</i>	Ease
<i>consumption</i>	Riot and Vain Expense
<i>dissolution</i>	Warre
<i>poison, venime</i>	sedition doctrines
<i>- contagion</i>	Greek dæmonology
<i>- antidote</i>	Reason

It is evident from the overlaps between various categories and the mix of concepts from various medical theories (humours, blood circulation, witchcraft, bulimia etc.), that, as in the case of anatomical and functional aspects, Hobbes makes no attempt to provide a systematic medical account. Writing more than a century before Hobbes, Thomas Starkey had still made systematic use of Galenic humoral principles in the distinction of eight principal diseases of the *body politic*, *consumption*, *dropsy*, *palsy*, *pestilence*, *disproportion*, *weakness*, *frenzy* and *gout*, as causing ‘temperamental’

imbalances in the state.⁵³ By contrast, Hobbes, even though he occasionally includes references to the ‘humours’, is not interested in their system or in the analysis of illness as an upset humoral equilibrium. Only diseases relating to blood circulation are coherently and, again, graphically, depicted,⁵⁴ but this aspect does not structure his general account of political *illnesses* (which, as we have seen, is organized chiefly according the relative danger of *body politic defects* at the level of the target domain).

Hobbes’s lack of commitment to a systematic medical theory has left some critics unimpressed. Hale found his account of the state’s *diseases* so ‘heterogeneous’ and unspecific that it leaves open ‘the details which make his comparisons appropriate’.⁵⁵ Harris contends that Hobbes, for lack of a ‘live humoral vocabulary’ failed to find the equivalent of the defect of ‘mixed government’, i.e. the case of a threefold division of constitutional powers (cf. above): ‘To what Disease of the Naturall Body of man I may exactly compare this irregularity of a Common-wealth, I know not’.⁵⁶ Harris omits, however, Hobbes’s following explanation, which does in fact provide an approximate source equivalent to the target issue:

⁵³ Cf. Starkey, *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, pp. 39-58.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hobbes’s discussion of the impediments to the ‘free passage’ of blood (*Ague* and *Pleurisy*) in Chapter 29 (pp. 228-229), which is prefigured in the definition of the state’s *Strength* as ‘Wealth and Riches’ in the introductory chapter, the depiction of money circulation as the ‘Sanguification of the Common-wealth’ in Chapter 24, and the reference to the ‘Nutritive faculty’ in Chapter 29.

⁵⁵ Hale, *The Body Politic*, p. 128.

⁵⁶ Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic*, p. 143; the reference is to *Leviathan*, p. 228. Harris’ remark is part of an argument that reads Hobbes’s political pathology as indicative of the ‘breakdown not only of the logic of correspondence, but also to the endogenous pathological discourses which modelled disease as an internal bodily state rather than as a determinate foreign body’ (*Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic*, p. 143). Harris himself notes the exception of epilepsy (p. 175, note 4); in fact, as Table 3 above shows, the alleged ‘exceptions’ of internal diseases in Hobbes’s account at least match, if not outnumber the exogenous diseases.

‘But I have seen a man, that had another man growing out of his side, with an head, armes, breast, and stomach, of his own. If he had had another man growing out of his other side, the comparison might then have been exact.’⁵⁷

Hobbes compares here what he saw as an unworkable political organisation, i.e. a three-way division of powers, to a condition that would be met by *conjoined triplets*: only they apparently did not exist in his experience. The next best (or, for the sufferers, worst) thing was the condition of *conjoined twins* – and this image is duly mentioned. As source concept for the comparison, it is sufficient to convey what mattered to Hobbes, i.e. the evaluation of divided sovereignty as unworkable (and ‘unlivable’) monster body. Hobbes does not lack a source concept here at all but only mentions that he has not known any case of conjoined triplets from experience. Instead of ‘failing’ to fit his target issue into the source account, Hobbes achieves his argumentative aim by flexibly fitting the source concept to the target notion even though the numbers of powers in a state and conjoined siblings do not match exactly.

The image of the state as a *monstrous body* that Hobbes invokes here should therefore not be viewed as an indication of a theoretical deficit but rather as a metaphor that serves to support an emphatic political statements. The *monstrous body politic* marks the borderline between what is considered ‘normal’ and what is ‘beyond’ the known universe of physical/political entities. Less than two decades after the publication of *Leviathan*, in 1667, Samuel von Pufendorf described the ‘Holy Roman Empire of German Nation’ in its disastrous state after the Thirty Years War as a *body* that resembled a *monster* (*irregulare aliquod corpus et monstro simile*), on account of the conflicting powers of emperor, electors and estates, which made central government impossible.⁵⁸ Like Hobbes’s supposed ‘failure’ to describe a mixed government in terms of the corporeal/medical metaphor, Pufendorf’s characterisation of the ‘irregular’ Empire was not motivated by any insufficiency of his source domain vocabulary but rather by the fact that the target referent’s condition transcended the limits of classical political theory: it was *so* ‘irregular’ that it could only be viewed as

⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 228.

⁵⁸ Pufendorf, S. v., *Die Verfassung des deutschen Reiches*. (Latin and German), ed. Horst Denzer. (Frankfurt am Main 1994), p. 198.

an abnormal phenomenon and as the opposite of rational political order. Monstrosity as a feature of the *body politic* is not a shortcoming of the ‘source input’ into the body-state metaphor but rather a ‘borderline’ concept that conveys an emphatic negative characterisation of a state that, from the perspective of the respective political theory, suffers from a fundamental pathological condition.

4. Conclusion

Hobbes’s use of physiological and medical source concepts in the political theory put forward in *Leviathan*, was, as has been noted by Hale and Harris, not systematically based on the humoral theory of medicine, nor on any other framework of medical knowledge. Nonetheless, Hobbes did provide a coherent and, in its own terms, comprehensive account of the *body politic* as regards the main target concept aspects that he wanted to clarify. He explained the unitary character of the state as a body in which every action by any member is or should be controlled by the *soul*, and he accounted for the main dangers that threatened this unity in terms of *illnesses of the body politic*. Hobbes was indeed not interested in exploring equivalences between physical and socio-political levels or links of the *Great Chain of Being*;⁶⁰ his use of the *body politic* metaphor in *Leviathan* marks a break with a conceptual tradition that had its beginning in antiquity and lasted into the age of humanism and reformation. Instead, his focus was on exploiting the established *body politic* metaphor for the purpose of elucidating the conditions and functions of political entities, with a certain bias towards exploring their problematic, pathological aspects. The commonplace ‘similitude’ between body and state was not relevant for him as an ontological

⁶⁰ For the connections between the *body politic* metaphor and the conceptual complex of the *Great Chain of Being* cf. E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (repr. Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 101-106; K. Banks, *Interpretations of the Body Politic and of Natural Bodies in Late Sixteenth Century France*. in: Musolff, A. and Zinken, J., eds., *Metaphor and Discourse*. Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 205-218 (pp. 210-216); J. Zavadil, ‘Bodies Politic and Bodies Cosmic: the Roman Stoic Theory of the ‘Two Cites’’, in: Musolff, A. and Zinken, J. (eds.), *Metaphor and Discourse* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 219-232 (pp. 221-226).

statement but served as a well-considered method to ‘open the understanding’ for the complexities of how political rule works (and ceases to work in the case of civil war). Hobbes could rely on this classical *topos* of political theory being part of the shared knowledge of his readers, especially against the background of its revival in Tudor politics over the course of the 16th century. He uses this knowledge as a ‘platform’ to highlight those aspects which he wanted to impart as *new* insights on his readers, i.e., the need to combat any dangerous political influences, especially those that undermine the sovereign’s power, immediately and without any complacency.

It is for this chief purpose of alerting the readers to the dangers of political complacency and/or naivety that he describes political *illnesses* in the most alarming and gory details. In doing so, he transcends the limits of the commonplace tradition of the *body-state* metaphor as a conservative-harmonising argument in favour of the status quo. He also transcends, as we have seen in detail, the limits of his own lay medical knowledge; in fact, there is no consistent physiological or pathological account of the *body politic* to be found in *Leviathan*. However, medical or physiological consistency was irrelevant for this political argument, and Hobbes’s supposedly ‘failed’ definition of a chaotic state in terms of *conjoined siblings* was, like Pufendorf’s view of the post-Thirty Years War German Empire as a *monstrosity*, a desperate warning of political *diseases* for which there was no *cure*. Unlike traditional political thinkers, both Hobbes and Pufendorf dared to speak about a fundamentally *ill* state, not just as a ‘worst-case but still repairable’ scenario but as the nightmarish possibility of an irrationally organised, hence doomed state. The implied moral appeal was still linked to that of the commonplace implication of the metaphor – i.e., that the members of the *body politic* must strive to avoid such a condition of political chaos and disintegration – but the concept of the state developing into a *monster body* appears to have taken on a new realistic appearance for them. In ‘failing’ to apply the traditionally salutary *body politic* metaphor to their respective target concepts (the state in general and the German Empire, respectively), Hobbes, and later Pufendorf, became pioneers of analysing its pathology.

Appendix:



Source; Hobbes (1651). *Leviathan. Or The Matter, Forme and Power of A Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*. Title Page. (Picture is in the Public Domain)