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**Mimesis in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651): the theater of the modern
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PREVIEW

ABSTRACT

Mimesis in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651): the theatre of the modern commonwealth

Laura Suzanne Reagan

How can citizens construct the political authority under which they will live? I argue that Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) answers this question concerning the constitutive power of political and norm-generating agency by employing four dimensions of mimesis from the Greek and Roman traditions. I argue that Hobbes revalues theatrical mimesis, drawing on *theatrum mundi*, or "all the world's a stage," in characterizing the social covenant. Mimesis reveals the continuity between the state of nature and the civil state because each stage of Hobbes's account of the construction of political authority implies the conceit of *theatrum mundi*.

Hobbes also revalues poetic mimesis through his stylistic decisions, including the invitation to the reader to read himself in the portrait of the general man depicted in the text. Hobbes aims for *Leviathan* to change the ethical dispositions of its readers, turning them from bad to good men as they witness the general man undergoing this ethical transformation in the transition from the state of nature to the civil state. Hobbes emphasizes the anthropological dimension of mimesis to explain political disorder since he argues that men assess the honor others attribute them by observing signs and gestures in others' behavior. Hobbes employs the linguistic dimension of mimesis to describe how men acting as agents can build a normative consensus out of the state of nature. I argue that mimesis accounts for the know-how the general man draws upon in constructing the commonwealth.

A focus on mimesis in *Leviathan* leads to the conclusion that the laws of nature or ethical dictates of reason ought to be understood as self-conscious performances. Mimesis also

illuminates the ways in which the subject-citizen's ongoing use of constitutive power can lead to their engagement in the interpretation of norms and laws through spectatorship and self-conscious political action. The roles of mimesis in *Leviathan's* lead to a revision of its authoritarian legacy, because the imitative arts in solving the problem of the knowledge/power the future subject-citizens employ in creating the commonwealth also means that *Leviathan* has a more robust account of citizenship than previously imagined.

PREVIEW

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The shortcomings of this dissertation are my own.

List of Abbreviations**Works by Plato**

R *Republic*

G *Gorgias*

C *Cratylus*

Works by Aristotle

P *Poetics*

PL *Politics*

NE *Nicomachean Ethics*

Works by Polybius

HP *Histories of Polybius*

Works by Petrarch

I *On my own ignorance and that of many others*

Works by Thomas Hobbes

L *Leviathan*

EL *Elements of Law*

OC *On the Citizen*

T *The History of the Grecian war* written by Thucydides, tr. by T. Hobbes

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PREVIEW

Introduction

William Harvey's (1628) account of the mechanics of the human body inspired Thomas Hobbes to embark on a three-part project, *De Corpore*, (Of Bodies), *De Homine* (Of Man) and *De Cive* (On the Citizen).¹ This dissertation is about *Leviathan*, the text he wrote instead of strictly following his original three-part plan.² *Leviathan* is a member of a trilogy of its own, with the *Elements of Law* and *On the Citizen* widely considered to be its rough drafts.³ *Leviathan* is one of the most important texts in the history of political thought because it is an early case for the formation of a polity through a social covenant. Hobbes's argument for equality under the law gives the text a proto-liberal tone, but the truly modern character of *Leviathan*, in my view, arises from Hobbes's transformation of the aristocratic prejudice prevalent in classical political thought. In giving an account of the state of nature, Hobbes draws attention to the instability of natural hierarchies, noting men are equal due to the equal ability to kill one another (L 108). When he outlines the covenanting moment, he does not create citizenship requirements relating to economic or social status rather personhood depends on the effectiveness of theatrical performance. Hobbes's *Leviathan* is unprecedented in its focus on the constitutive power of the people, and the idea that the future subject-citizens are also the founders of the commonwealth.

¹ Sacksteder, W. (1992). "Three Diverse Sciences in Hobbes: First Philosophy, Geometry, and Physics." The Review of Metaphysics 45(4): 739-772.

² Aubrey, J. and R. W. Barber (2004). Brief lives. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK ; Rochester, NY, Boydell Press. Martinich, A. (1999). Hobbes a biography. Cambridge, UK ; New York, Cambridge University Press.

³ Skinner, Q. (1966). "The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought." The Historical Journal 9(3): 286-317. Skinner argues that Hobbes's 'nasty, brutish, and short' passage in the *Leviathan* most clearly illustrated his departure from Aristotelian political thought, thereby arousing more interest than his previous texts.

Hobbes's departure from the aristocratic prejudice of classical political thought

Polybius's *Histories* clearly presents the rationale for the dominance of the aristocratic prejudice from which Hobbes departs. Polybius's cycle of constitutions justifies the aristocratic prejudice on the basis of an account of political change over time (HP 302-3). This cycle begins with a despot, a strong man who arises out of the state of nature, or a just king whose authority is naturally respected on account of his extraordinary wisdom and justice (HP 304). Kingship descends into tyranny, which is overthrown by good men who inaugurate aristocratic rule (HP 308). Aristocratic rule degenerates into oligarchy, overthrown by good men creating democratic rule (HP 309). The problem is that democratic rule degenerates into anarchy, and this is the end of the constitution (HP 309). In Polybius's model, aristocracy can be thought of as safer than democracy because it is farther away in time from the descent into anarchy. The cycle of constitution moves from order to disorder.

Hobbes's *Leviathan* reverses this historical trajectory, accounting for a transition from anarchic disorder to political order. Hobbes does not rely on either a man who becomes king on account of his wisdom and justice, or a despot who becomes a ruler simply because he is the strongest, in order to explain the transition out of the state of nature (HP 304). Hobbes's *Leviathan* departs from extant accounts of founding because he describes the constitutive power of the multitude to make itself into a people out of a natural condition of anarchical disorder. Hobbes departs from classical political thinking because he does not argue political knowledge and power are relevant only for a king or aristocratic class, rather he accounts for the power and knowledge required for constitution as belonging to every future subject-citizen.

Leviathan's constitutive power

Hobbes announces that the multitude exerts constitutive power in the opening pages of *Leviathan*, leaving the reader eager to discover 'how'? Plato's *Republic* does not answer the question of how the multitude can construct a polity rather the text raises the question of founding without conclusion by casting doubt on the idea that philosophers could successfully harness power and knowledge. Aristotle, by contrast, carves out a relationship between political knowledge and power in his concepts of prudence and praxis with prudence as the kind of knowledge corresponding to his view of political action, or praxis (NE 1140-45, 47a). Hobbes did not adopt the Aristotle's ideas of prudence and praxis in order to explain the political knowledge and power the multitude exerts in constituting itself, choosing instead to adopt views of power and knowledge from the new mechanical sciences for his account of constitution.⁴ The new mechanical sciences were a burgeoning field of knowledge concerning mechanical power.⁵ The methods of the new sciences presented alternatives to the scholastic approach to philosophy, which Hobbes criticized for their practice of beginning syllogisms through reference to a commonplace, or a passage from an Aristotelian text (L 29, 34). In addition to his disapproval of scholastic Aristotelian methods, Hobbes also may have understood the collapse of the Aristotelian cosmos resulting from Galileo's geometrization of space.⁶ Hobbes also adopted nominalism, rejecting Aristotle's views of reality and language.⁷

⁴ Spragens, T. A. (1973). The politics of motion; the world of Thomas Hobbes. [Lexington], University Press of Kentucky. Watkins, J. W. N. (1989). Hobbes's system of ideas. Aldershot, Hants, England ; Brookfield, Vt., USA, Gower. Shapin, S., S. Schaffer, et al. (1985). Leviathan and the air-pump : Hobbes, Boyle, and the experimental life. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

⁵ Rossi, P. and B. Nelson (1970). Philosophy, technology, and the arts in the early modern era. New York,, Harper & Row.

⁶ Koyré, A. (1957). From the closed world to the infinite universe. Baltimore,, Johns Hopkins Press. Sacksteder, W. (1981). "Hobbes: Geometrical Objects." Philosophy of Science 48(4): 573-590.

⁷ Malcolm, N. (1982). Thomas Hobbes and Voluntarist Theology. Gonville and Caius College. Cambridge, Cambridge. PhD.

In order to account for the multitude's ability to construct the polity out of an anarchic state of nature, Hobbes needed a new account of political know-how, and turned away from the terms dominating at the time, prudence and praxis.

This dissertation argues that the central question of *Leviathan* is the know-how future-subject citizens employ to construct the political authority under which they live. Hobbes opens the *Leviathan* by likening man's creation of the commonwealth to God's creation of nature. He writes: "Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governs 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" (L9).⁸ This opening line lauds the creative powers of mankind by comparing political activity to the awesome generative powers of God. Hobbes argues the state is artificial, a construction of the subject-citizens who are to obey the political authority they create.

Despite the prevalence of metaphors Hobbes draws from the new mechanical sciences, I argue that Hobbes relies on mimesis to solve the problem of know-how because it illuminates how citizens construct the commonwealth. In other words, mimesis expresses the power and knowledge through which future subject-citizens are responsible for the creation of the specifically political world, or commonwealth. Mimesis, or 'imitation' in Latin, is a term discussed in Plato's *Timeaus*, *Republic*, *Laws*, and *Sophist*, and its meaning touches on themes found in many other dialogues as well.⁹ Aristotle employs mimesis in the *Poetics* (P 47a13-b28,

⁸By "artificial animal" Hobbes means a sovereign, the *sine qua non* of the commonwealth. This line is also an allusion to Plato's *Timeaus*. Plato and R. D. Archer-Hind (1973). *The Timeaus of Plato*. New York,, Arno Press.

⁹ Plato (2003). *The Republic*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Plato (1993). *Sophist*. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co. . Plato and D. J. Zeyl (1987). *Gorgias*. Indianapolis, Hackett Pub. Co. Plato (2000). *Laws*. Amherst, NY, Prometheus Books.

51b28) Quintilian and Cicero address mimesis in their rhetorical guidebooks.¹⁰ Mimesis is a multi-faceted idea Hobbes adapts from classical texts, to put to use for a completely modern account of how a polity can be constituted.

Theatrical mimesis and the social covenant

Hobbes promises to answer the question, “how can a multitude transition from the state of nature to the civil state? I will argue Hobbes uses the power/knowledge expressed in the several dimensions of mimesis to solve this problem. The social covenant is usually conceived of as the means Hobbes uses to explain the transition from the state of nature to the civil state. By focusing on mimesis I recontextualize the *Leviathan* from its usual interpretation in terms of the English civil war, to show the importance of the context of Renaissance theatricality. I will show that there is an irreducibly performative dimension to the disorders of the state of nature, and that the emphasis on men’s performative character continues to contextualize both the covenanting moment and citizenship. The case for the context of Renaissance theatricality is due to the fact that theatrical mimesis is at the center of Hobbes’s vocabulary choice of ‘personation’ or mask wearing to describe the way covenantors appear to one another. In chapter sixteen, Hobbes accounts for the covenanting moment by defining the meanings of personation. In so doing, he explicitly compares covenantors to actors.

The word Person is latine: instead whereof the Greeks have *prosopon*, which signifies the Face, as *Persona* in latine 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, as a Mask or Visard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to any Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters (L 112).

¹⁰ Cicero, M. T., H. M. Hubbell, et al. (1968). *De inventione. De inventione. De optimo genere oratorum. Topica*. London, Cambridge, Heinemann; Harvard University Press: xxii, 466. Quintilian and H. E. Butler (1961). *The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

I argue that Hobbes turns to theatrical mimesis to depict the covenanting moment because he is discussing men's change in roles, from rivals or enemies in the state of nature, to fellow subject-citizens in the covenanting moment. Men have to wear very different masks vis-à-vis one another in these two different situations. These two masks express different ethics or approaches to interpersonal relationships from the desire to dominate expressed in the adage of the man pursuing natural right, *recipe finem*, to participation in reciprocal relations characteristic of the natural law follower (L 21, 111).

The theatricality of covenanting implies that the covenant takes place as though on a stage, inaugurating the historical 'stage' of the commonwealth. This depiction of covenantors as mask-wearers invokes the philosophical and literary conceit of *theatrum mundi*, or "all the world's a stage."¹¹ In the context of Renaissance England, and in the history of Western philosophy, *theatrum mundi* or "all the world's a stage," expresses the sense in which men think of themselves as role players, and the world they inhabit, a stage.¹² Hobbes especially invokes this conceit when he implies that being natural or artificial amounts to being seen as representing oneself or another (L 112). The ascription of natural or artificial personhood is in the eye of the beholder.¹³ Theatrical mimesis crucial for the execution of the covenant because the covenant requires a mutual "being seen as" in order to make sense as the performance that founds obligations. According to my reading, future subject-citizens must appear to one another as capable of taking on the political obligations comprising citizenship during the

¹¹ Shakespeare, W. (1997). *As You Like It*. Norton Shakespeare. S. Greenblatt, W. Cohen, J. E. Howard, K. E. Maus and A. Gurr. New York, W.W. Norton: xvi, 3420.

¹² West, W. N. (2008). Knowledge and Performance in the Early Modern *Theatrum Mundi*. Dimensions of the Early Modern Theatrum Metaphor: Order and Representation of Knowledge. O. B. Flemming Shock, and Ariane Koller. Hannover, Wehrhahn. Kokolakis, M. M. (1960). The Dramatic Similie of Life. Athens, Greece.

¹³ Pitkin, H. (1964). "Hobbes's Concept of Representation--I." The American Political Science Review 58(2): 328-340. Skinner, Q. (2002). Visions of politics. Cambridge ; New York, Cambridge University Press. Neither Pitkin nor Skinner comes to the conclusion I do, because they do not center *theatrum mundi* as a guide to reading the covenanting moment.

covenanting moment. Hobbes emphasizes that the constitution of a new commonwealth takes place in the appearing world, and the mutual appearance of covenantors is its condition. Hobbes radically revalues mimesis against Plato's critique of mimesis in the *Republic*.

Plato's critique of mimesis in the *Republic* and Hobbes's revaluation of mimesis

In *Republic*, Book ten, Socrates presents the simile of the divided line, which establishes Plato's ontological hierarchy and the idea that the appearing or sensorial world partakes less in reality than the real or intellected world (R 509). For many classical thinkers adopting this ontological hierarchy, *theatrum mundi* was a lament about the distance between the appearing and real worlds.¹⁴ The distinction between natural and artificial mapped onto the classical ontological hierarchy between real and appearing worlds. This hierarchy is often accompanied by a critique of theatricality understood through the history of valuing the natural over the artificial. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait introduce the terms theatricality and *theatrum mundi* in the discipline of theatre studies. "Theatricality has been identified with both the Greek idea of mimesis and the Latin idea of *theatrum mundi*."¹⁵ Davis and Postlewait explain how a reading of Plato's ontological hierarchy has informed many value comparisons, with terms associated with theatricality typically devalued.

The familiar distinction between nature and artifice has a long history in aesthetics, and it continues to guide various people who write about both the history of theatre and the theory of theatricality. Almost invariably, the polarity between the natural (or the real) and the theatrical (or the artificial) carries a moral as well as an aesthetic judgment, with the idea of the natural serving, of course, as the positive pole in the equation. The natural is also the realm of the sincere and the true, especially with the emergence of romanticism. In philosophical terms, this opposition illustrates the dichotomy between appearance

¹⁴ West, W. N. (2008). Knowledge and Performance in the Early Modern *Theatrum Mundi*. *Dimensions of the Early Modern Theatrum Metaphor: Order and Representation of Knowledge*. O. B. Flemming Shock, and Ariane Koller. Hannover, Wehrhahn. Kokolakis, M. M. (1960). *The Dramatic Similie of Life*. Athens, Greece.

¹⁵ Davis, T. C. and T. Postlewait (2003). Introduction. *Theatricality*. Cambridge ; New York, Cambridge University Press: xi, 243.

and reality. Thus, a series of related antinomies are in operation here: real versus false, genuine versus fake, intrinsic versus extrinsic, original versus imitative, true versus counterfeit, honest versus dishonest, sincere versus devious, accurate versus distorted, revealed versus disguised, face versus mask, serious versus playful, and essential versus artificial. All things theatrical are on the negative end of the polarity.¹⁶

Since Hobbes invokes *theatrum mundi* as the solution to the problem of founding, it is clear that Hobbes revalues this conceit. Plato eschews the idea that identity is role-play because it pluralizes character, and for Plato men ought to have the kind of character that is a single whole (R397d-e). Hobbes's revaluation of mimesis is not surprising considering Galileo's geometrization of space had made space measurable in a way that suggested it was infinite and without ontological hierarchy.¹⁷ As the classical worldviews became less tenable, so did the Platonic view of the soul. The Hobbesian man has a malleable character, evident in the way *Leviathan* traces a change in his ethical orientation, from an aristocratic warrior in the state of nature to a character who abides by the laws of nature and acts capable of assuming political obligations in the covenanting moment (Ch. X, p.112). The malleability of character which forms the basis of Hobbes's project of encouraging an ethical transformation in the reader, suggests that the aristocratic warrior in the state of nature is a mask, one that can be replaced with a different outward appearance, that of natural law follower after the general man recognizes right reason. In showing the extensiveness of Hobbes's reliance on performativity, I am not arguing that Hobbes is attempting to find the 'real man' behind the mask. Instead, I'm showing how he suggests that men can change their self-presentation towards others. Hobbes's decision to show ethical becoming belies a view of ethics that approaches the question of the polity and citizenship in a different way than Plato does.

¹⁶ Ibid. 5.

¹⁷ Koyré, A. (1957). From the closed world to the infinite universe. Baltimore,, Johns Hopkins Press. Blumenberg, H. (1987). The genesis of the Copernican world. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

Hobbes follows other Renaissance thinkers such as Baldesaar Castiglione in revaluing the malleability of character as important rather than detrimental to virtue. Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* teaches its readers how to act or role-play in a way that will be well received by others, or count as virtue in court.¹⁸ According to William West, *theatrum mundi* was widely revalued during the Renaissance. While West does not engage specifically in a reading of *Leviathan*, his work on *theatrum mundi* illuminates Hobbes's wider cultural context.

Our usual understanding of the theater as necessarily divided between a true substance and a false seeming does not necessarily apply to early modern uses of the theater metaphor as a characterization of the process of knowing. Rather, the theater metaphor suggests that knowledge is neither a mere reflection of what is known nor a complete fabrication, but a kind of performance or enactment. The understanding of knowledge as performance allows us to distinguish a theory of knowing that is peculiar to the early modern period, and perhaps that can serve to characterize that period against what comes before it.¹⁹

West articulates the new valorization of theatricality that accompanied a new insight that performance requires and reflects a certain kind of knowing, and that theater facilitates knowledge. Hobbes turns his readers into spectators, showing the reader the performances of the general man. I will argue that the knowledge involved in constitutive power of the future subject-citizens in creating the authority under which they live, is exactly the kind of knowledge required for, and expressed in the performance that founds the commonwealth. In order to show how thorough-going Hobbes's reversal of mimesis against Plato is, I will present the anthropological and poetic dimensions of mimesis which form the basis of the traditional reading of the *Republic's* critique of mimesis in Book III, and show how revalues mimetic dynamics.

¹⁸ Castiglione, B., T. Hoby, et al. (1928). *The book of the courtier*. London, New York,, J.M. Dent & sons; E.P. Dutton & co.

¹⁹ West, W. N. (2008). Knowledge and Performance in the Early Modern *Theatrum Mundi*. *Dimensions of the Early Modern Theatrum Metaphor: Order and Representation of Knowledge*. O. B. Flemming Shock, and Ariane Koller. Hannover, Wehrhahn.

Plato's critique of mimesis in Book X of the *Republic* is preceded by a discussion of the anthropological and poetic dimensions of mimesis in Book III. Interlocutors are primarily concerned with identifying the ideal education of youth (R 376d-92d). Socrates and Adeimantus pursue the anthropological dimension of mimesis, or the human tendency to imitate others in a natural learning process. The interlocutors agree that "making yourself resemble someone else—either in the way you speak or the way you look" is "imitating the person you make yourself resemble" (R 393c). Socrates and Adeimantus observe that in a natural condition, youth will imitate one another or characters they hear about in auditing epics. The anthropological dimension of mimesis refers to imitation as part of the natural learning process through imitation. For Plato, the anthropological mimetic tendency is often harnessed by poetry in other words, the reader or auditor of a story is apt to imitate the characters portrayed in a story.

The poetic dimension of mimesis refers to the dramatic form of a myth, epic, or tragedy. Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics* both define the poetic dimension of mimesis as plot, story, or drama as they examine dynamics between author or speaker and reader or auditor (R 394c; P 1447a10-15).²⁰ The poetic dimension of mimesis is evident in *Leviathan*, as Hobbes made countless rhetorical decisions, which cumulatively characterize his style.²¹ Just as Plato and Aristotle recognize a dynamic between author and auditor or reader, Hobbes opens *Leviathan* by directly characterizing this relationship as one of teacher and student. He argues his text will have an effect on the reader, it will show him everything he needs to know to

²⁰Halliwell, S. (2002). *The aesthetics of mimesis : ancient texts and modern problems*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press. Sörbom, G. (1966). *Mimesis and Art* Uppsala, Sweden, Appelbergs Boktryckeri.

²¹ Martel, J. R. (2007). *Subverting the Leviathan : reading Thomas Hobbes as a radical democrat*. New York, Columbia University Press. Prokhovnik, R. (1991). *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Hobbes's Leviathan* New York Garland Skinner, Q. (1996). *Reason and rhetoric in the philosophy of Hobbes*. Cambridge ; New York, Cambridge University Press.

govern (L 11). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes introduces his text by reference to the poetic dimension of mimesis and its ability to evoke natural imitation as he asks the reader, *nosce teipsum*, read thyself.

But there is another saying not of late understood, by which they might learn truly to read one another, if they would take the pains; and that is, *Nosce teipsum*, Read thy self: to teach us, that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, feare, &c, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions (L 10).

Hobbes employs the poetic dimension of mimesis to describe the didactic value of his text. The promise of reading the text is to see oneself and by extension, understand others. Through the achievement of self-knowledge, the reader becomes fit to govern because in knowing about himself, he also knows about others.

He that is to govern a whole Nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-kind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any Language, or Science; yet, when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himself (L 11):

Hobbes makes two related claims about how poetic mimesis, or the style of the text will affect its readers. It is not the idea that the text will have the same effect on everyone, but the idea that the text can move the knowledge, self-knowledge, and ethical orientation of its reader. The effect cannot be the same, because Hobbes does not claim that men are mirror images of one another, but that the workings of the passions in one man is similar to the workings of passions in another. According to the mechanico-materialist view of the human body Hobbes adapted from Harvey, sense experience provokes “interiour motions,” for example the blood can move quickly or slowly, depending on if it is hot or cold (L 37). Hobbes implies that everyone’s blood moves mechanically through his body according to the same principles, even as he

acknowledges that men's bodies can be sensitive to external stimuli in radically different ways (L 31, 38, 39). *Leviathan* promises to show the reader the grounds of the passions of mankind or how the passions move in principle, even while he recognizes the singularity of individual responses to empirical stimuli. Nevertheless, I argue that there is another important sense of motion that Hobbes relies on in creating the logic of *Leviathan*, and this is the ethical movement from the self-presentation as aristocratic warrior, to the covenantor, and ultimately to the citizen. I will show that theatrical, anthropological, poetic, and linguistic mimesis account for the political and ethical movement that occurs in *Leviathan*. While Hobbes's mechanico-materialist explanation of the body explains why men are always moving forwards towards the satisfaction of desires, this is not the only explanation of how men respond to what they see with movement. In terms of theatrical and anthropological mimesis, men present one another with performances, which in turn are spectated and responded to. Poetry, in terms of plot, and linguistic mimesis are also ways of presenting men with images they see and respond to. Seeing and responding to what is seen relies on a view of the presentation of images and perception but in a way that is irreducible to the mechanico-materialist explanation of the body and psychology. Reading *Leviathan* through the lens of the senses of mimesis at play does not negate, but rather complements the mechanico-materialist understanding of the body and psychology that Hobbes initially posits. The mimetic reading does not require denying the mechanico-materialism in any way. I argue, however, that in order to understand Hobbes's presentation of men as responsible agents engaged in political and ethical activities, the mechanico-materialist reading needs to be complemented with this interpretation of the roles of mimesis in the formation of norms and a polity.

While Hobbes's invitation to the reader, *nosce teipsum*, argues that reading oneself in another constitutes a learning process that results in political knowledge, Plato's critique of

mimesis in Book III of the *Republic*, is based on a very similar argument. Poetry presents vivid portraits of characters that incite youth to imitate them in the course of a natural learning process. Adeimantus and Socrates agree that children imitate models, which can be actual persons or characters in texts, and that the practice of imitation has an effect on their ethical disposition (R 388b, 90d, 93c). Poetry represents a threat to the education of the guardian due to the variety of character models in whose portraits the youthful auditors may see themselves and attempt to imitate (R 393d-95). The variety of characters to which a reader or auditor is exposed, leads to an instability in his ability to maintain a unified and stable character or role in the polis.

The question, ‘what are the appropriate models for the future guardians to imitate, given that imitation is a natural feature of behavior?’ is answered, “if they do imitate anything, then from their earliest childhood they should choose appropriate models to imitate—people who are brave, self-disciplined, god-fearing, free, that sort of thing. ...Have you ever noticed how imitation, if long continued from an early age, becomes part of a person’s nature, turns into habits of body, speech and mind?” (R395c-d). The only poetic style suitable for the *Republic* is the “pure imitator of the good man,” because “our men do not have a dual or manifold nature, since each of them performs only one task” (R 393d-e). *Leviathan* begins on the opposite note, inviting its readers to imitate the general man depicted in the text.

There are two different critiques of mimesis in the *Republic*, in Book III and in Book X.²² In Book X, the critique of mimesis is based on the ontological hierarchy Plato establishes with the simile of the divided line. Since the theatricality of man’s role- playing takes place in the appearing world, it partakes in a lesser degree of reality than the form of the good.

²² Plato (2003). *The Republic*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Sörbom, G. (1966). *Mimesis and Art* Uppsala, Sweden, Appelbergs Boktryckeri, Halliwell, S. (2002). *The aesthetics of mimesis : ancient texts and modern problems*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press. Tate, J. (1928). "'Imitation' in Plato's Republic." *The Classical Quarterly* 22(1): 16-23.

Theatricality is not a means to achieve the ethical good for Plato due to this ontological hierarchy. The problematic character role-playing has for the soul has a basis in Book X and is also explicitly outlined in Book III's critique of mimesis. In Book III, the critique of mimesis is based on the instability of the soul created by natural imitation provoked by poetry (R 393-95). Halliwell explains that the ethical consequences of mimesis derive from a psychological self-likening to the characters imitated. The actor or reader engaged in fictional role-play invites a powerful psychological effect on his soul. Taking on the persona of a character results in a "self-likening" or psychological assimilation," which "shapes the disposition of the agent."²³ Plato draws attention to the power of the external poetic performance to be internalized, in what Halliwell terms a "psychological-cum-ethical attraction and assimilation".²⁴ Reversing Plato's critique of mimesis in the invitation to the reader, *nosce teipsum*, Hobbes invites the reader to follow the destabilization of the psychological unity of the general man in the state of nature. The general man's psychological destabilization is a positive turn of events for him, because it corresponds to his ethical betterment in following the laws of nature. Following the general man's ethical betterment, despite the psychological destabilization it requires is also a positive turn of events for the reader, because Hobbes promises him that following the general man's ethical trajectory in reading will lead to the reader's own ethical improvement through self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, in *Leviathan*, means a consciousness of the limitations of one's own power and knowledge, that leads the general man to abide by the laws of nature rather than continue with the pursuit of natural right. This is not a self-knowledge that creates an ethically perfect person. Rather, it refers to the general man and reader's reflexiveness, in

²³ Halliwell, S. (2002). The aesthetics of mimesis : ancient texts and modern problems. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

²⁴ Ibid. The passages Halliwell is examining are: Plato (2003). The Republic. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

terms of imagining a life that is nasty, brutish, and short; seeing how the un-checked pursuit of natural right leads to conflict and ultimately solitude, and that abiding by natural law is a reasonable way to exit the situation. For Plato, the question of education is paramount, because it replaces the natural learning process with education towards goodness, and this education must be attentive to the characters in epics so that they do not counter-act the objective of education in general, to cultivate stable, whole souls.

There is a striking difference between Plato's critique of mimesis, and Hobbes's valorization and deployment of it. When Hobbes characterizes the coming into being of the political world occurring as though on a stage, he revalues *theatrum mundi* for the purpose of a modern account of constitution against Plato's critique of the appearing world in Book X. When Hobbes opens the introduction to *Leviathan* with *nosce tiepsum*, or read thyself, he revalues Book III's critique of poetry and its relationship to learning. Hobbes's revaluation of mimesis against Plato's critique of it is a lens that illuminates Hobbes's approach to ethics. While Plato insists that education must form stable, whole souls, Hobbes by contrast implies with his invitation to the reader, that any reader can ethically better himself by looking into his similarity with an ethically bad person, in this case the general man in the state of nature.

Platonic souls, Hobbesian materialism

A fundamental distinction between Plato and Hobbes's approach to the question of the ethical citizen, is in the difference between Plato's approach to the question of the just soul, and Hobbes's materialism. Plato figured all movement of the soul as instability and corruptive force. A stable, non-corrupt soul would have a ruling part controlling its passionate part (R 402d, 10c, 45a-b). In contrast to a search for the ideal organization of the soul, Hobbes bases his view of men's actions on the passions, and even characterizes them as the guiding force of reason. "The whole summe of Desires, Aversions, Hopes, and Fears, continued till the thing be either

done, or thought impossible, is what we call deliberation” (L 44). Since the mechanical sciences concerned the study of movement, Hobbes is centrally interested in the movement of the passions, rather than imagining that a rational part of the soul ought to dominate them. While the Platonic soul ought to strive to resist change, once the dominance of reason is established through philosophical practice, Hobbes does not think that stability or rest can ever be the kind of relationship between passions and reason. Our passions are in constant motion towards the satisfaction of desires, and reason assists this continual movement become more effective through knowledge of causes. The intelligent Hobbesian man is not marked by a lack of movement. The insistence on the pursuit of felicity as continual movement A mark of Hobbes’s departure from a Platonic ethics, is that he depicts men becoming ethical, which requires an account of learning and becoming good over the course of a general history while the *Republic* remains focused on the character of the ideal soul or transcendental ethical standards (R 500)²⁵ Hobbes needs to account for men becoming ethical, because normative conformity to some extent is a precondition of the rule of law.²⁶ Hobbesian ethics is not characterized by a drive toward ethical perfectionism, instead, Hobbes is famous for beginning with the ‘pessimistic’ view of man, due to his partiality to self and desire to dominate rather than live reciprocally with others.²⁷ *Leviathan* seeks to show how men can become ethically good enough to engage in a social covenant, rising out of the ethical disorder of the state of

²⁵ Strauss, L. (1953). Natural right and history. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

²⁶ Oakeshott, M. (1975). On human conduct. Oxford [Eng.], Clarendon Press.

²⁷ Strauss, L. (1963). The Political philosophy of Hobbes : its basis and its genesis. [Chicago], University of Chicago Press.