Of The New Idol: Nietzsche's Critique of *Leviathan*

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It is strange that scholars of political philosophy who have written on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* haven't paid much attention to the section entitled 'Of the New idol' where Zarathustra explicitly criticizes a favorite topic of political scientists, the state. It is even stranger given the comparison of the state to a 'cold monster,' and Nietzsche's identification of English philosophy as the origin of modern ideas, that scholars haven't drawn more explicit comparisons to Thomas Hobbes' great work of political philosophy *Leviathan* (Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 191-192 aph. 253). This essay attempts to fill this gap. I argue below that the *Leviathan,* especially a democratic *Leviathan*, represents a direct threat to Nietzsche's project, but also vice versa. The paper reveals a particularly modern version of the ancient rivalry between politics and philosophy.

Both Stanley Rosen and Laurence Lampert in their book length studies of *Zarathustra* chose not to comment extensively on 'New Idol.' Rosen, in his *Mask of Enlightenment*, explains that many sections of Zarathustra are duplicative and so he chose to focus only on what he considered the deeper treatment of a given topic (Rosen, 2004, p. xxi). Rosen judged the section was either duplicative or unimportant to Nietzsche's greater teaching. Later sections of *Zarathustra*, such as 'On the Rabble' or 'On the Tarantula,' certainly deepen themes from the 'New Idol.' Rosen argues that those two particular sections together are, among other things, denunciations of the *demos* (Rosen, 2004, p. 149). 'New Idol,' however, is not a denunciation of the *demos.* In fact it praises peoples and argues the state corrupts peoples and debases souls. As such it is the only section which directly addresses the relationship of Zarathustra's teaching to the levers of political power.

Unlike Rosen, Lampert, in *Nietzsche's Teaching,* does attempt to comment on each section of *Zarathustra*. His comments on 'New Idol' are useful even if his treatment is insufficient in three ways. First, while Lampert earlier recognised the importance of the Hobbesean state of nature for explaining the atheism of the last man, he associates the 'New Idol' with Locke and his successors, not Hobbes (Lampert, 1986, p. 24 and 55). This is not withstanding the fact that Lampert himself later asserts that Nietzsche 'protested the leviathan of the universal state' (Lampert, 1986, p. 284). Second, while Lampert's comments on peoples are interesting, his account doesn't directly tackle the practical problem of returning to an ancient concept of peoples in an age of the 'leviathan universal state.' Third, by citing Locke, and not looking to Hobbes' *Leviathan* more closely, Lampert misses the important point that Hobbes and Nietzsche, apparently contra Plato, *both* attempt to eliminate chance in their prescriptions for philosophic rule making them rivals (Lampert, 1986, pp. 55-56).

Unlike Rosen and Lampert, Fukuyama, in the *End of the History and Last Man,* dedicates a chapter to the state at the end of history and uses a line from 'New Idol' as its title, 'coldest of all cold Monsters.' Like Lampert, Fukuyama does not explicitly associate 'New Idol', with

Leviathan, but with the generic modern state as developed by Hobbes and Locke (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 214). The majority of the chapter argues that universal rational states require irrational pre-modern peoples and cultures to secure their development. He makes the Burkean or Toquevillean point that the irrational, such as religion, patriotism and ethnicity are necessary for rational states to exist. As such he argues a complete victory of the rational state is impossible (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. 220-222). While these are meant as tempering remarks they are not sufficient to address Nietzsche's point that the universal state is ultimately destructive of noble peoples and high cultures. This begets a question, which will be considered further below: can there be a regime consistent with Nietzsche's thought?

In some sense the question is moot. Commentators recognise that Nietzsche is a revolutionary and that at least part of his task is to destroy decaying western civilization in the hopes that a new civilisation will resurrect from the ashes (Rosen, 2004, p. xviii; Lampert, 1986, p. 245). The more precise question is – does Nietzsche provide a sufficient account of the *political* ground for his teaching or founding.[1] To help clarify whether there is a politics to ground his revolution a closer examination of Nietzsche's and Zarathustra's arguments against the state is instructive.

A cursory glance at Nietzsche's works reveals that he comments on and criticises the state in many writings and that some of that criticism is reflected in the 'New Idol'. It might even be tempting to reduce 'New Idol' to the analysis already present in his other works, but I argue this would miss what is novel about Zarathustra's treatment – a direct engagement with the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, specifically his *Leviathan*. This engagement is compelling because Hobbes does appear to present a coherent account of how to obtain the political basis for his philosophy – peace, while Nietzsche is unclear on this point. Before moving to Hobbes, it is useful to review the degree to which the relatively short section from Zarathustra echoes Nietzsche's other works.

The thirty-three stanzas of 'New Idol' comprise four sections. The first differentiates state and people (1-10); the second indicates how states corrupt peoples and the great souled (11-20); the ends (*telos*) of state idolators (21-26), and the last points beyond the state (27-34). I will comment on each section in turn.

Section 9 from *Human, All Too Human,* titled 'A Glance at the State,' sketches in some detail how the state as the embodiment of the people came into being and why this form of state is corrupting. This early account is reaffirmed in his later work as *criticism of modernity* (Twilight of the Idols, p. 93 aph. 39). Nietzsche's argues that the democratic form of government becomes the model for rule and thereby eliminates the distinction between higher and lower, which is a fundamental and life affirming distinction (Human, All too Human, p. 165 aph. 450). While Nietzsche criticises the state, he praises peoples, while rejecting the politicisation of peoples through crude nationalism (Human, All too Human, pp. 177-178 aph

[1] I wish to set aside the deeper question of whether Nietzsche provided a coherent philosophical ground for his positive prescription, which is an important point of disagreement between Rosen and Lampert (Rosen, 2004, p. xii).

481; Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 174-175 aph 241). In fact, Nietzsche argues there is a inverse relationship between the political ambition of a people and their cultural power (Human, All too Human, p. 169 aph 465).

Nietzsche's earlier writings are clear that politics, political events, including the founding of a state or political revolutions do not have the power to achieve the highest goals. The state is not capable of permanently transforming human beings into contented beings (Schopenhauer as Educator, pp. 147-148 aph 4). Culture (including religion) is higher than politics and the greed of the state is such that state supported culture, through Ministries of culture, government funded universities, scholarships, grants and research chairs only serve the low interests of the state, not the highest goals. In this way state sponsored culture debases the highest spiritual aspirations (Schopenhauer as Educator, p. 165 and 174 aph 6). This is consistent with the fact that Zarathustra and his newly found disciples do not set out to directly seize political power in the Pied Cow.

Though Nietzsche explicitly associates 'state idolators' with socialists (The Gay Science, p. 99 aph 24), Lampert citing Strauss argues Nietzsche's critique applies equally to all modern ideologies (Lampert, 1986, p. 55; Strauss, 1959, p. 55). Modernity seeks to destroy the possibility of rank, special right and privilege, with its creed *ni deux, ni maitre* (Beyond Good and Evil, p. 116 aph 202). Modernist despotism remains a means to accomplish the goal of modernism, to transform man into the 'perfect herd animal', or last man, in the name of freedom (Human, All too Human, pp. 173-174 aph. 473; Beyond Good and Evil, p. 118 aph. 203). In Zarathustra's language state is the means by which the last man will triumph.

In criticising the state and considering what Zarathustra might mean by 'beyond the state'and how this is reflected in Nietzsche's works it is useful to note Nietzsche doesn't reject every possible state. He argues that the older form of the state, which incorporated religion and therefore rank, as opposed to equality, was superior to the newer democratic form (Human, All too Human, pp. 170-171 aph. 472; The Gay Science, p. 313 aph. 358). He leaves open the possibility of a universal form of rule, based on the Catholic Church, not the secular state, dedicated to the true needs of humanity, the overcoming of man. Interestingly Nietzsche predicts the destruction of the modern state, arguing its logic leads to the elimination of the public/private distinction and to the privatisation of the state. He suggests that though there may be interesting potential in this disintegration, caution is necessary. He trusts in man's 'cleverness and selfishness' to repulse irresponsible attempts to replace the modern state (Human, All too Human, pp. 170-173 aph. 472).

I've outlined above what Nietzsche means by the idolisation of the state in political terms, and only hinted that it has a religious meaning. In religious terms Idolisation of the state suggests a sin against god. In the context of the death of God, in the context of *Zarathustra*, what does it mean? Nietzsche offers a definition of idols: "quite simply everything that has hitherto been called truth" (Ecce Homo, p. 86). A new idol is therefore a new truth. Zarathustra sketches this out further in the Preface to *Zarathustra* where he declares the death of God and attempts to teach the superman as the meaning of the earth. The superman is presented as the

alternative to the last man, to the herd man or animalised man.[2] The dramatic action of the Preface shows that if the people as *demos* decide this future – they will choose the last man. The new idol threatens the teaching of the superman: the state hangs a "sword and a hundred cravings" over the people's head.

Do we learning anything new by treating 'New Idol' as specifically referring Thomas Hobbes' philosophic creation – Leviathan? The *Leviathan* is surely the most famous philosophic treatise on political power named after a cold monster. Features of Hobbes' *Leviathan* align well with the state as described in 'Of the New Idol'.

The first section of 'New Idol' distinguishes between peoples and states. For Hobbes a people cannot exist prior to the establishment of a sovereign representative. If the state is a democracy, the sovereign both represents the people and is literally the people. Thus: 'I the state am the people'. The democratic leviathan consumes the people and is the *only means* by which the people can be properly said to act. The sovereign also bears the rights and responsibilities Zarathustra attributes to peoples, most importantly laying down the laws of good and evil (Hobbes, pp. 114, 2.18.10). For Hobbes, Zarathustra's teaching amounts to a private judgement about good and evil. As these judgements are one of the causes of the dissolution of commonwealths they cannot be tolerated (Hobbes, 1994, p. 212 or 2.29.6).

In the second section of 'New Idol' Zarathustra argues that the state corrupts peoples and seduces the noble. It is clear from the above how leviathan consumes and then embodies peoples. Strictly speaking people do not exist prior to the sovereign. The state of nature is a hellish state of war. Peoples only come to be when a sovereign is authorised by every individual subject to represent the person of them all (Hobbes, pp. 109-110, 2.17.13 and 2.18.1). Hobbes argues all are equal and that any inequality is authorised by the sovereign. All those who seek to distinguish themselves, who seek something higher are compelled to serve the interests of the state or the run the risk of a confrontation with the state (Hobbes, p. 117 or 2.18.19). The state co-opts all power to bestow honour and cannot allow anything which undermines its basis of power. The *Leviathan* is designed to channel the clambering for power criticized by Zarasthustra into the institutions of the commonwealth.

The third section of 'New Idol' outlines the ends to which the state is dedicated. The ends are for the 'all too many' or 'superfluous' which Zarathustra describes in the hyperbolic terms of death, sickness, filth and madness. Zarathustra incites contempt for political power, especially as its organised in the modern state. Hobbes, of course, doesn't describe the end of Leviathan in this way. The commonwealth is for the universal goal of peace and common defence. Though Hobbesean peace allows for the higher pursuit of the arts and knowledge, Nietzsche is clear that state support for them ultimately corrupts them as servants of the people (Of the Famous Wise Men). This leaves the desired life of the majority (the superfluous or the many, too many) which is the ease and sensual delight characteristic of the last man (Hobbes, pp. 58, 87-88 and 225 or 1.11.4, 1.14.31 and 2.30.14). For Nietzsche the struggle for

[2] In the terms of Beyond Good and Evil – there is a tension between the democratic enlightenment and an even higher possible future heralded by Nietzsche (Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 1-3 Preface).

the future, for the meaning of earth, is between the 'wretched contentment' which Leviathan and Baconian science make possible and the higher men and new tables of values heralded by the superman.

From the point of view of *Leviathan*, Nietzsche is a revolutionary and even worse a revolutionary without a clear political program to establish peace. What does a Nietzschean revolutionary victory look like after all? The state is poisonous and debasing – the path to the philosophers of the future, the superman, lay beyond the state. Or as Zarathustra himself says: "Where the state ends – look there, my brothers! Do you see it, the rainbow and the bridges of the superman?" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 163).

When speaking reverently of the Leviathan Hobbes chooses to call him the 'Mortal God' under the Immortal God (Hobbes, p. 109 or 1.17.13). However, if there is no immortal god, if God is dead as Zarathustra declares, leviathan is only the God. For Nietzsche this new God aims to transform humankind into the last man and extorts subjection through its doctrines. The stability offered by the mortal god is almost heavenly compared to the alternative; the hell on earth of the state of nature. Whether its fear of the state of nature, desire of ease and sensual delight, awe of the power of Leviathan or the desire to be powerful by serving the Leviathan, the trappings of the modern state are Zarathustra's nemeses.

In contrast to the mighty Leviathan, Zarathustra 'found no greater power on earth than good and evil' (Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 170). The tablet of good and evil hung above a people is its most life affirming expression of the will power. To date there have been as many goals as peoples, thousands; what is required is a single goal, a goal for humanity. This goal will be created through the will-to-power of the superman. The most powerful force on earth is the superman or philosopher of the future capable of legislating this goal for humanity.[3]

For Hobbes it is not good and evil or the power to create good and evil that is most powerful on the earth, but the power which simultaneously authorises and enforces it, the *Leviathan*. Private judgements of good and evil are mere words without the sovereign power to enforce them. The greatest of human powers are "that which is compounded of the powers of most men, united by consent in one person, natural or civil, that has the use of all their powers depending on his will, such as is the power of a commonwealth" (Hobbes, p. 50 or 1.10.3). The commonwealth is the greatest of human powers, but what are human powers compared to divine powers? Hobbes states in his introduction that the state is of "greater stature and strength" than God's creation, natural man (Hobbes, p. 3 or Into.1). The power to create a *Leviathan* is thus the greatest power.

The Sovereign establishes rules of good and evil as a rejection of the hellish chaos of the state of nature. The science of good and evil shows that private judgement of good and evil leads to that chaos, which is not acceptable, making peace the universal good (Hobbes, p. 100

[3] By what standard is the universal goal created? Zarathustra's outlines the relationship between wisdom and life in three Songs in *Zarathustra*, which culminate in a section dedicated to the will to power (Newell, 1990; Lampert, 1986, pp. 100-120; Rosen, 2004, pp. 154-160).

or 1.15.40). This valuation of peace, to use Nietzschean language, is Hobbes' creation. Not new tablets of value given by the superman, but sovereigns ensuring peace is the universal good and goal. Recalling that as Hobbes' mortal god is superior to the immortal god, so too are Hobbes' natural laws superior to god's. Thus Hobbes' natural laws, which are made effective through civil laws, are the rules of good and evil by which Hobbes legislates a universal goal for humanity. His dictates are clear: seek peace, keep your promises, be grateful, accommodate yourself to your neighbour etc. Formulated in this way Hobbes begins to sound like a Nietzschean philosopher.

Though Hobbes is clear that the peace grounded on fear of violent death is the only true basis for a universal political science, he, much later in *Leviathan* makes the case that philosophy is also best served by peace. The formula is simple: *Leisure* is the mother of *philosophy,* and the *commonwealth,* the mother of *peace and leisure* (Hobbes, p. 455 or 4.46.6). In addition, Hobbes suggests a connection between the birth of philosophy and the establishment of 'great commonwealths,' capable of establishing a degree of leisure. Is the Leviathan fully realised only possible in a 'great commonwealth?.' Be that as it may, in an often overlooked passage Hobbes compares his *Leviathan* to Plato's *Republic*, claiming that the truth of his speculative work won't be put into practice until 'till sovereigns be philosophers' (Hobbes, pp. 343-344 or 2.31.41). However, unlike Plato, Hobbes believes he has a reasonable hope that his work will be put into practice (Craig, 2010; Mathie, 2002). If philosophy is required for the *Leviathan* to be put into practice and Nietzsche is correct to fear that the modern state undermines philosophy, it may be that the modern state isn't a true *Leviathan* and there is less distance between Nietzsche and Hobbes on this point than might first appear.[4]

For Nietzsche state support of culture and universities is a great danger because that support is conditional on their usefulness to the state. For Hobbes this is precisely the point. The *Leviathan* should determine what should be taught and not taught according to its interests, including in the universities. Hobbes is clear that modern science and his political science are consistent with the state's interests and so there is no conflict. For Nietzsche the state supports culture and education to attract talented men of knowledge so it can "steal the works of the inventors and the treasures of the wise" to further enhance the power of the state. 'New Idol', from the view of philosophical politics, is the error of mistaking state supported or popular intellectual pursuits as the highest. Stated more strongly, the highest danger is that the new idol, the Leviathan, will be mistaken for a new god, winning the best disciples. Nietzsche's critique of Leviathan is not so much political as it is religious.

In a certain sense Nietzsche's politics can be reduced to this point - Leviathan competes with Zarathustra for the attention and dedication of the most gifted and Zarathustra must find a way to win that competition. Nietzsche's politics in its most moderate form appears libertarian, with the dictum – *as little state as possible* (Day Break, pp. 107-108 aph 179; Human, All too Human, p. 174 aph 473). But by this Nietzsche means that gifted spirits should avoid politics, because politics, economics and concern for public health are safety are

[4] Could their connection be Plato, whom both philosophers praise Plato so highly? – 'the most beautiful growth of antiquity' (Nietzsche) and the "the best Philosopher of the Greeks" (Hobbes).

unworthy ends for the gifted to pursue. The competition between politics and philosophy is not new; its well expressed as far back as Plato's Republic (The Republic of Plato, pp. 487a - 497a). Nietzsche's fear is that the *Leviathan*, the modern state founded on Hobbes' blue print, but modified and made more democratic by later writers, will end the competition by destroying philosophy in Nietzsche's sense of the word.

Nietzsche does not help his case in neglecting to clearly articulate a best regime, which reconciles political order with philosophy.[5] But this may be to misunderstand Nietzsche. He does not argue, like Plato or Hobbes that that superman or Zarathustra must become the sovereign to realise his goal. The whole of 'New idol' can be read as rejecting the possibility of direct philosophic rule. However, Zarathustra must become a successful prophet to achieve his intent. The path or way to the superman is the creation of a new kind of people, at least in part one of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which again emphasises why Leviathan's consumption of peoples is so problematic for Zarathustra.

Even Zarasthustra's new kind of people is not sufficiently articulated. They are chosen people, but not chosen by God. They are self-selected for the purpose of willing the superman (Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 189). It's unclear whether this even proves possible given Zarathustra himself doesn't wait for a new chosen people, but takes on the task of being the prophet of the eternal recurrence and will to power himself. As such Zarathustra is a prophet without a people, without a political basis for his teaching. While interesting hints about a Nietzschean regime are present in his earlier works Nietzsche's failure to flesh them out in his later work threatens to undermine his project. Absent this basis and absent a more careful study of Nietzsche's treatment of the state then presented here, readers of Nietzsche are perhaps left with Fukuyama's formulation of the relationship between peoples and the state. The ways of peoples are irrational but necessary for the imperfect victory of the universal state (Fukuyama, 1992). But this inverts Nietzsche's ambition – the new people are not meant to make the universal state possible, but to overcome it.

Hobbes presents a view of a political order which incorporates freedom and modern science, but purposively limits philosophical speculation about politics, justice, good and evil. Nietzsche's fundamental criticism in the 'New Idol' is that it destroys the possibility of a *new* philosophy in the highest sense; Hobbes' regime protects Hobbes' philosophy. If Hobbes believed Aristotle was an incompetent political writer, it's easy to imagine that would be mild criticism compared to how he would describe Nietzsche's writing. Its only by taking Nietzsche's clue as to the full philosophic meaning of the 'New Idol,' that it is the Leviathan, that the full practical problems of Zarathustra's revolution come to light.

[5] Both philosophers leave out the possibility of indirect political rule. Hobbes also suggests his work could be profitably studied in the university (Hobbes, p. 496 or R&C.16). Nietzsche remarks that 'institutions will need to founded in which people live and teach' as Nietzsche does and that 'perhaps even chairs for the Interpretation of my Zarathustra will be established' (Ecce Homo, p. 39; Lampert, 1986, p. 1).

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